

The Statesman

Incorporating and directly descended from  
the Friends of India -founded 1818

Centenary Spotlight

Ahmedabad's confirmation as host of the 2030 Commonwealth Games marks a turning point not just for the event itself, but for India's broader narrative of national capability. The Commonwealth Games have spent the better part of a decade wrestling with existential uncertainty. High withdrawal rates, inflated budgets, and shifting sporting priorities had cast doubt on whether the institution could survive into its next century. That the centenary edition will now be staged in India ~ unanimously approved and welcomed with remarkable enthusiasm ~ suggests that the Games have rediscovered a compelling purpose, and that Ahmedabad has emerged at the right moment with the right proposition.

What distinguishes India's approach is not merely scale but integration. The city's bid leans heavily on existing facilities and urban infrastructure, signalling a shift away from the grand, financially heavy model that has plagued recent hosts. Ahmedabad's confidence stems from assets already in place: modern stadia, a transport network capable of absorbing large crowds, and the marquee Narendra Modi Stadium, which has become a symbol of India's sporting ambition. The decision to schedule the event in October, calibrated to local climate realities, also reflects a pragmatic mindset absent in many global sporting bids.

But the larger significance lies in how these Games are being framed. Within the government's long-term vision for transforming India into a developed nation by 2047, the Commonwealth Games are seen not as an isolated event but a step in a sequenced journey ~ one in which India positions itself as a dependable, innovative, and global sporting host. The aspirations toward the 2036 Olympics sit atop the same trajectory. For a nation where sport has often been defined by cricketing hegemony, the opportunity to deliver a multi-sport event with global reach provides a chance to expand athletic ecosystems, build deeper public engagement, and showcase administrative competence.

Equally important is Ahmedabad's promise of a "future-ready" Games. The focus on sustainability, compact layout, athlete-centric design, and technological integration reflects a growing awareness that mega-events must now justify their existence beyond spectacle. Free public transport for ticket holders, a 30-45-minute radius for all venues, and the inclusion of both established and emerging sports signal an intent to make accessibility and experience central pillars rather than afterthoughts.

Yet, expectations will be high. The Commonwealth Games have embraced a slimmer, more financially stable template, but the centenary edition cannot simply replicate the Glasgow model - it must elevate it. India has the scale, talent, and ambition to meet that challenge, but it will require disciplined execution, transparency, and genuine attention to legacy. If Ahmedabad delivers, the event could define the next century of the Commonwealth sporting movement and cement India's place as a global host capable of marrying efficiency with cultural vibrancy. The Games, in essence, arrive at a moment when both India and the Commonwealth are searching for renewed purpose. In 2030, Ahmedabad will have the chance to offer exactly that.

Naming Femicide

Italy's unanimous vote to make femicide a distinct crime is a rare moment of national consensus ~ and a striking acknowledgment that violence against women is systemic, not incidental. For decades, murders of women were framed as "crimes of passion," hiding a deeper reality: these killings are rooted in male entitlement, control, and social hierarchy. By naming the crime, Italy refuses to let culture obscure the pattern.

The murder of Giulia Cecchettin, a young woman killed by her ex-boyfriend, was a catalyst. Her father's response ~ turning grief into education ~ shows that law alone cannot end violence. Social change must accompany legal change. Documenting femicide, understanding its motives, and confronting entrenched patriarchal norms are as crucial as any statute.

The law's symbolic power is clear: femicides will be classified, studied, and punished. A life sentence for perpetrators underscores society's seriousness. Yet legal critics caution that proving gender as motive can be difficult, and that punishment, however severe, cannot prevent future crimes. True prevention demands early education on respect, consent, and emotional intelligence ~ measures that have met resistance in Italy despite widespread need. Beyond punishment, prevention must be the focus. Schools and families are the first line of defence, shaping young minds before entitlement and aggression take root. Emotional and sexual education, early awareness of consent, and role models who challenge gender stereotypes are critical. Communities must recognise warning signs and provide support, while social campaigns normalise respect and equality. Without this proactive work, laws risk being reactive tools that intervene only after tragedy has struck. Prevention, not punishment alone, will save lives.

This legislation also signals a cultural shift. By refusing to cloak violence in the language of love or jealousy, Italy forces a national conversation about gendered power dynamics. Romanticised narratives that excuse aggression or possessiveness lose legitimacy. The law challenges society to see that these murders are not personal aberrations ~ they are the predictable consequences of inequality, misogyny, and a culture that tolerates male dominance.

But naming femicide is only a first step. Italy ranks low on gender equality indices in Europe, and women's social and economic vulnerabilities persist. Without broader societal reforms such as mandatory education, equal employment opportunities, and cultural initiatives to dismantle patriarchal norms, the law risks being a statement rather than a safeguard.

The true test of this legislation will be whether it changes behaviour as well as record-keeping. Can it shift young men away from entitlement? Can it equip communities to recognise and prevent violence? The promise of the law lies in its potential to start that transformation. Naming femicide is vital, but the fight will be won or lost in schools, homes, and workplaces where inequality still dictates behaviour.

Italy has taken a decisive, historic step. Its success will depend not on the unanimity of a parliamentary vote, but on society's willingness to confront its own complicity, and to act before another life is lost.

Udta Hindustan

India, which was earlier a transit point for drug shipments to the US and Europe, is increasingly becoming a significant consumer and producer of illicit drugs. Drug syndicates now eye India's robust chemical and pharmaceutical sector for manufacturing synthetic drugs, and as a source of precursor chemicals. Busting of an illicit methamphetamine manufacturing facility in Greater Noida, belonging to the dreaded Jalisco Cartel of Mexico, points to the involvement of international drug cartels in the drug trade in India

Few in authority want to acknowledge the problem of drug abuse in India. *Udta Punjab*, a 2016 Bollywood film portraying drug abuse in Punjab, was initially not cleared for exhibition by the Censor Board, reportedly on instructions of the Central Government. However, once exhibited, the film succeeded in making drug peddling the central issue in the 2017 Punjab Assembly Elections. It is quite another matter, that instead of decreasing, use of illegal drugs has increased over the years in Punjab, and has rapidly spread to other States also, especially Kerala.

Controlling illicit drug supply has become even more difficult, with synthetic drugs like fentanyl (a synthetic opioid) and methamphetamine (a synthetic stimulant), and now nitazenes, replacing traditional plant-based drugs like cocaine and heroin. This is because synthetic drugs can be made anywhere, at any time, requiring only chemicals, lab equipment, and basic know-how.

It does not help that India lies on the Golden Triangle (Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand) and the Golden Crescent (Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan), two of the world's largest heroin-producing regions. Technology is being misused on a large scale for trading in drugs, orders are taken on social media and last year, the BSF intercepted 294 drones in Punjab that were carrying drugs from Pakistan. Drug traffickers are known to deploy narco-submarines to cross oceans, with their abominable cargo.

India, which was earlier a transit point for drug shipments to the US and Europe, is increasingly becoming a significant consumer and producer of illicit drugs. Drug syndicates now eye India's robust chemical and pharmaceutical sector for manufacturing synthetic drugs, and as a source of precursor chemicals. Busting of an illicit methamphetamine



manufacturing facility in Greater Noida, belonging to the dreaded Jalisco Cartel of Mexico, points to the involvement of international drug cartels in the drug trade in India.

The methamphetamine manufacturing unit was indistinguishable from nearby chemical factories, and even workers did not know what they were manufacturing. Production of such dangerous drugs in India would mean easier access, lower prices for such drugs, and add to the number of Indian drug addicts. The presence of international cartels could pour more money and muscle into the drug trade, and encourage other criminal activity.

The increasing amount of drug seizures by Indian law enforcement agencies reflects the increasing use of drugs in India: drugs worth Rs.25,330 crore were seized in 2024, an increase of over 55 per cent over 2023. The following statistics relating to drug seizures, in 2024, indicate the enormity of the problem:

- \* A gigantic consignment of 3,132 kg of drugs valued at over Rs.2,000 crore was seized in international waters, off the coast of Gujarat.

- \* Security agencies seized over 700 kg of contraband methamphetamine in Gujarat from an international drug trafficking cartel.

- \* A drug consignment worth approximately Rs.900 crore was seized from a courier centre in Delhi.

- \* Agencies under MHA destroyed 1,17,284 kg of narcotics.

Drug abuse silently harms individuals, breaks families, weakens communities and encourages crime; from New York to London to New Delhi, misguided youth seek solace in drugs. According to the World Drug Report, close to 58,000 drug-related deaths were reported in India in 2019 ~ approximately 17 per cent of the global total. Drug trafficking flourishes because it generates windfall profits ~ drugs are sold at a hundred to one thousand times of their cost. Drug merchants are no more like yesteryear's drug-lords but more like modern businessmen, with sophisticated supply and distribution chains. They communicate on the dark web, and

accept payments in crypto currency.

The trade in illicit drugs is remarkably well organised. According to US agencies, Chinese corporations supply chemical components of dangerous drugs like fentanyl to criminal gangs in Canada and Mexico, who manufacture fentanyl, and smuggle it into the US. Concerningly, according to National Drug Threat Assessment 2024, published by the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), India was also fast emerging as a major source country for chemicals used to manufacture fentanyl.

The power of drug lords can be understood from the fact that despite the publicly stated

resolve of US President Donald Trump to end drug trafficking, Mexican criminal gangs, known as the Sinaloa Cartel, and CJNG or the Jalisco Cartel, have penetrated deep into the US, supplying drugs even to isolated communities. To support drug trafficking, these cartels indulge in a host of other criminal activities like arms trafficking, money laundering, migrant smuggling, sex trafficking, bribery, extortion etc.

Deployment of US warships off the coast of Venezuela, after the US Hellfire missiles

did not deter Venezuelan drug traffickers, shows the enormity of the drug problem. Directly or indirectly, many Governments support the drug trade: Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, whom Trump calls a 'narco-terrorist', appears to be linked with drug traffickers.

Traditionally, use of drugs like charas and ganja was legal in India. In the 1960s and 1970s, young persons from the West came to India to achieve enlightenment - through drugs. However, to fulfil its international obligations under the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, Convention on Psychotropic Substances, and United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, Parliament passed the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act in 1985 that prohibited the



DEVENDRA SAKSENA  
*The writer is a retired Principal Chief Commissioner of Income-Tax*



‘Ever Night’: Standing between light and darkness

History teaches us valuable lessons. When we watch historical movies and dramas, we can look back upon the past, realize what went wrong at that time, and learn not to repeat the same mistakes our ancestors made. In that sense, history reflects the present and illuminates the right path to the future.

The 2018 Chinese television series "Ever Night" enables us to perceive the nature of problems we are now facing by reference to historical events. Set in the Tang Dynasty, this award-winning drama powerfully indicts contemporary society by portraying a world where everything is divided by light and darkness, right and wrong, or strict opposites of true and false. In such a society, self-righteousness is prevalent, vengeance is rampant, and the elimination of those who are different is a matter of daily occurrence.

In the drama, people believe that they are orthodox and civilized, and others are heretics, barbarians or demons. In

ancient times, the Chinese people thought of their country as the center of the world, and their neighboring countries as peripherals. Indeed, they called mainland China "Central Plain" and other countries "Barbarian Sectors."

Many people in the show hail "Guangming (bright light)" and condemn "darkness." Those who think they belong to "light" believe a dubious prophecy that the son of Hades will come into the world, and if so, eternal night will follow, turning the world to complete darkness.

Therefore, Wei Guangming, the grand priest of light from the Xiling Immortal Shrines, masterminds the massacre in the Tang Dynasty led by General Xia Hou under the excuse of eliminating the son of Hades, the reincarnation of darkness or eternal night. Ironically, General Xia Hou himself is a member of the demon sect who secretly disguises his identity.

Ning Que, the protagonist of "Ever

Night," is the only child who has escaped the massacre. While running away, he finds a baby girl in the cradle among slaughtered corpses, names her Sang Sang and raises her. People are suspicious that Ning Que might be the son of Hades because he is the only person who has survived the massacre.

Meanwhile, Wei Guangming, the grand priest of light, appoints Sang Sang as his official heir just before he passes away. Thus, she is now revered as the grand priest of light. Later, however, people suddenly begin to accuse her of being the daughter of Hades and try to kill her to prevent eternal night. At the end of the drama, Sang Sang is called both a heavenly woman and a demonic woman, depending on whether the person sympathises with her supporters or opponents.

The predicament of Sang Sang is a wonderful reminder that the world is made of both good and evil, or light and darkness, and so are humans. Without

evil, there is no goodness. Likewise, if there is no darkness, there will be no light. In that sense, light and darkness coexist in the universe, interacting reciprocally. Sang Sang is an embodiment of it. Referring to Sang Sang, Mo Shanshan defends her, saying, "Disasters and darkness are caused by unleashed power, avarice, manslaughters and disputes. Sang Sang is not the one who will bring such disasters or darkness to the world. Those who have evil in their minds are." They hide their wickedness and darkness under the flag of bright light." Fuzi, the Academy's founder and headmaster, too, tells his 13th disciple, Ning Que: "Absolute light is the same as absolute darkness." In other words, "If we think we are absolute truth, we are in fact absolutely false."

In other words, if you push your belief to the extreme, it will turn into a dogma. Indeed, we know that the far left and the far right are ultimately the same dogmatic ideology that has annihilated human civilization.

sporting events.

The Ahmedabad spectacle can surely help raise India's stature as a sporting hub, and, hopefully, a sporting power.

But after the Haryana tragedies where due to basketball frame falling, we lost two promising players who could have been part of our 2030 CWG squad, we must ask ~ are we merely prepping to be glittering venues for big games, or going in with the determination to win big? If the latter, we must prove it to our players and athletes with actions, not words. There's a lot that needs doing ~ fixing broken sports infra is only one part.

How we select players, train and treat them matters even more.

Yours, etc., Sanjay Chopra,  
Mohali, 28 November.





# A gift that addresses global challenges

RAJDEEP PATHAK

On 26 November, India celebrated Constitution Day, a day to commemorate the adoption of its foundational legal document in 1949. This Constitution is a remarkable blend of borrowed features and indigenous wisdom, a living document that accommodates diversity and promotes inclusivity. At its core lies an inherent spirit of mediation and peaceful coexistence, deeply influenced by the ethical framework of Mahatma Gandhi and India's ancient civilizational ethos of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is one family). Understanding this spirit is crucial, as it offers a potent, indigenous model for addressing some of the most pressing global challenges of the 21st century.

The Indian Constitution is philosophically grounded in the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi, whose ethical framework provides a moral compass for its mediatory spirit. This is evident through three core values such as 'Satyagraha (Truth Force)', which promotes a search for substantive justice through mutual adjustment and acknowledgment of the opponent's view; 'Ahimsa' (Non-Violence), which translates into the necessity for parties to communicate with mutual respect and empathy, avoiding intellectual or verbal aggression; and 'Sarvodaya' (Welfare of All), the ultimate goal of a resolution that benefits all involved, mirroring the definition of a successful, sustainable, win-win mediated settlement. Though not legally enforceable, and derived from Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy, they serve as a moral compass for Indian governance, enshrined primarily within the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP). Specifically, Article 40 mandates the organization of Panchayats, reflecting Gandhi's ideal of 'Gram Swaraj' (village self-governance). His emphasis on Swadeshi and a decentralized economy is captured in Article 43, which promotes cottage industries. Furthermore, Article 47 reflects his stance on prohibition of intoxicating substances

for public health. Finally, Article 51 urges the promotion of international peace and security, thereby aligning with his vision of a just world order.

The foundational spirit of mediation and conciliation is deeply embedded in the Constitutional philosophy of India, even without explicit mention of the term 'mediation.' The Preamble, which is the guiding light of the Constitution, articulates commitments to Justice (Social, Economic, and Political), Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, all of which collectively mandate a socio-legal order that minimizes conflict and promotes harmonious coexistence and shared prosperity. This constitutional vision inherently advocates for dispute resolution mechanisms that transcend the adversarial model, seeking to restore relationships and assure the dignity of the individual. Thus, it lays the ideological groundwork for peaceful and amicable settlement practices.

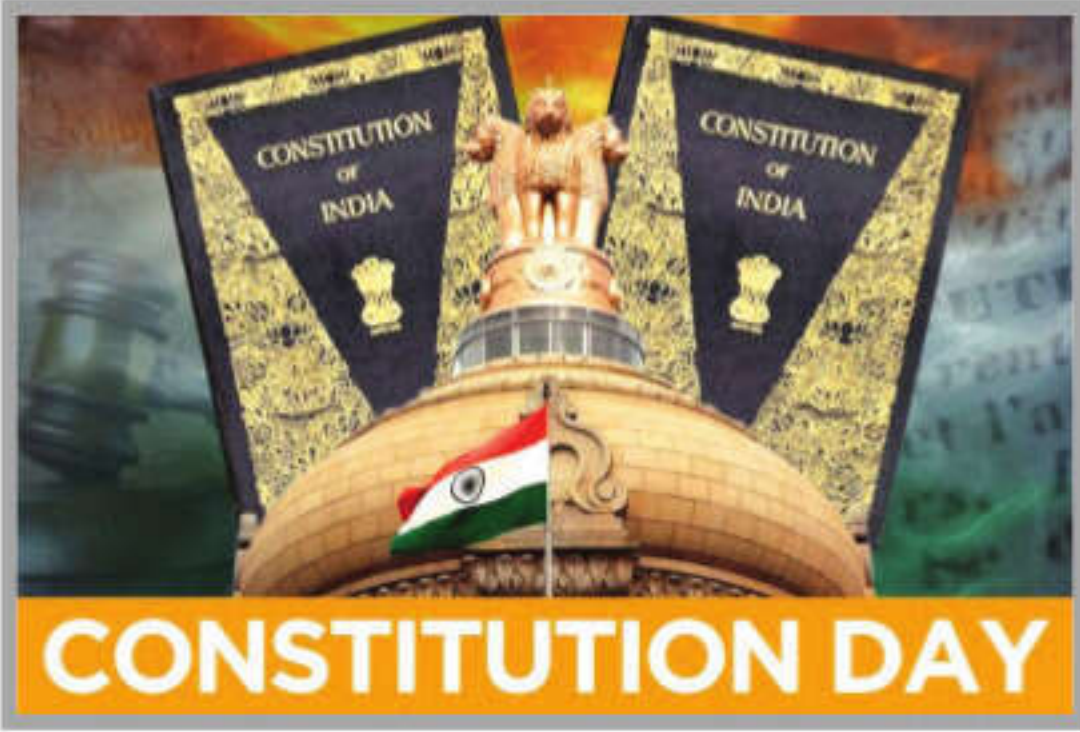
The formal recognition of mediation and other non-adversarial methods is prominently established through the Judiciary's active endorsement of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). A pivotal development was the 2002 amendment to the Code of Civil Procedure (CPC), which introduced Section 89, legally empowering civil courts to refer suitable pending cases to ADR processes such as Arbitration, Conciliation, Judicial Settlement, Lok Adalat, and Mediation. This legislative step signifies a profound shift in judicial policy, acknowledging the limitations of the conventional adversarial system in providing holistic justice. The uniquely Indian innovation of the Lok Adalat further exemplifies this commitment, successfully facilitating mass-scale settlements based on Gandhian ideals of compromise and conciliation. Moreover, a major milestone in this evolution is the Mediation Act, 2023, which provides a comprehensive statutory framework for institutionalizing mediation in India. The Act promotes pre-litigation mediation, ensures the enforceability of mediated settlement agreements as court decrees, and establishes the

Mediation Council of India to regulate and standardize the practice. Its focus on confidentiality, party autonomy, and voluntary participation strongly echoes the Gandhian philosophy of resolving conflicts through dialogue, mutual understanding, and transformation of hearts, rather than through imposed judgments.

It is undeniable that the formal legal adoption of mediation is, in essence, a modern institutionalization of an ancient, indigenous social practice. Conciliation has always been an intrinsic feature of India's social and cultural fabric, traditionally practiced through informal community structures like Panchayats. Such bodies historically resolved disputes through common sense, local norms, and a primary focus on the restoration of social harmony. Therefore, the contemporary legal framework for mediation does not introduce a foreign concept, but rather legitimizes and integrates a time-honoured, organic practice of dispute resolution into the formal justice delivery system, ensuring its continuity and effectiveness in a rapidly evolving socio-legal landscape. The Sanskrit phrase 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', derived from ancient texts like the 'Maha Upanishad', meaning 'the entire world is one family', is also inscribed in the entrance hall of the Parliament of India and serves as a cornerstone of India's philosophical and diplomatic discourse, particularly as a guiding principle in international relations. This also happened to be India's core theme during India's presidency of G20.

This ethos does not impose uniformity but accepts and celebrates diversity, fostering a culture of mutual respect and cooperation. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of all humanity and the shared responsibility for the well-being of the planet and its inhabitants. This philosophical foundation advocates for an inclusive, collective approach to human existence.

The Indian Constitution, by embracing this ethos implicitly and explicitly through its various principles of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity,



seeks to build a society where individual and group interests coexist in harmony with the larger national and global good. In an era marked by climate emergencies, pandemics, widening economic disparities, and rising geopolitical tensions, the combined spirit of Gandhian values and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam offers a deeply relevant and unifying global paradigm. Gandhi's principles of simplicity, non-possession, and mindful consumption resonate strongly with contemporary ecological ethics, reinforcing the urgency of sustainable development. The ethos of shared responsibility embedded in Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam further strengthens the call for global cooperation in protecting the planet, ensuring equitable resource distribution, and crafting policies that place environmental justice at their core.

Equally vital is the role of these values in shaping international cooperation and peace-building, and India has taken a lead, from 'Operation Dost' to 'Vaccine Maitri' and its adherence to principles of peaceful coexistence under Article 51, which further exemplifies how the idea of the world as one family can bridge the gap between idealism and practical diplomacy.

At a time when global polarization is deepening, Gandhian techniques of dialogue, empathy, and non-violence provide a compelling blueprint for

conflict resolution. Together, the Indian constitutional and civilizational ethos – with fundamental duties as an essential part of citizens' responsibilities – offers a powerful alternative to aggression, fostering a culture of peace, mutual respect, and collective progress. As the world grapples with fragmentation, populism, and existential threats, India's constitutional dedication to this spirit (of mediation, empathy, mutual respect and conciliation) serves as a timeless reminder that true strength lies not in the ability to fight, but in the wisdom and moral courage to reconcile, thus honouring the deep-seated wisdom of its civilization and fulfilling its constitutional promise to promote international peace and security. As we celebrate 'Constitution Day', it becomes evident that the true strength of its constitutional vision lies not merely in its legal architecture, but in its deeper ethical foundations shaped by Gandhian philosophy and the civilizational ideal of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. The Constitution stands as a living testament to the enduring belief that justice, unity, and peace can be achieved not through force alone, but through dialogue, compassion, and the courage to seek reconciliation over conflict.

For ages, India has been known for this.

(The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti.)

## 100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 01 December 1925

## OCCASIONAL NOTE

Anyone could have predicted a severe winter in England this year, and several people did. The event, as it happens, has justified the prophets, and although it might just as easily have stultified them — because the only certain thing about the weather in England is its uncertainty — they are entitled to plume themselves upon their achievement. The night following the Queen Mother's funeral is said to have been the coldest known since 1890, but it does not follow, as the elated meteorologists go on to predict, that the cold snap is going to continue. To go no further back than five years ago, there was a sudden irruption of Arctic conditions in the early winter of 1920, and England was then told to get its skates ready because the frost was going to last for weeks. It broke within three days, and Christmas Day in England that year was actually warmer than the average Christmas in the Gangetic plain.

## News Items

### POLICY DETERMINED

## TURKS PREPARED FOR CONTINGENCIES

(*"Times" Special Service.*)

London, Nov. The Times Constantinople correspondent states that Kemal Pasha presided at a special meeting of the Cabinet at which the Turkish Mosul policy was determined. The Turkish Press continues to express annoyance at the Anglo-French "understanding," and is attempting to persuade France that such a policy is fatal to her interests. Despite their obvious anxiety, however, the Turks profess to declare themselves ready for all contingencies.

### FOURTH CABINET IN A YEAR

## COMPOSITION OF NEW FRENCH MINISTRY

Paris, Nov.

The final composition of the Cabinet announced confirms the portfolios previously cabled. There is a coalition of the Left and Centre parties, excluding the Socialists. The Radicals have the lion's share of the portfolios. M. Painleve's innovations of dividing the Ministry of Finance between the Minister of the Treasury and the Minister of the Budget has been discarded. M. Louchet, who is a Radical, will be the sole Minister of Finance.—Reuter.

### KING'S MESSAGE

## PROOFS OF EMPIRE'S ALLEGIANCE

London, Nov.

His Majesty the King has issued the following message: "To my People in my great sorrow: I am helped by the flood of sincere and generous sympathy reaching me from every quarter of the British Empire, and indeed from all parts of the world. While deeply grateful for these expressions of goodwill, I also rejoice that my beloved Mother enjoyed the constant and warm affection of my People. It is the proofs of such allegiance to my Throne and Family that have given me confidence and strength on the many anxious days I have had to face during the past fifteen years.—Reuter.

### WIRELESS STRIKE

## MARCONI'S DISMISS THEIR EMPLOYEES

London, Nov.

Three hundred wireless operators have hitherto refused to sign on in response to strike instructions. Marconi's have dismissed the strikers in their employment. The Board of Trade has hitherto permitted a dozen ships to sail without qualified operators.—Reuter.

## IT CAME TO MIND | MANISH NANDY

# Kernel of real hope

Life, like history, repeats itself. Like everybody else, I make mistakes. The annoying thing is that I seem to make the same mistakes more than once. I am not foolish or perverse, but I keep repeating the same error. I keep misplacing my keys or my glasses and search them for hours. I look at the city traffic and tell myself, "It is silly to drive fast in this chaos," and then, an hour later, find myself driving pell-mell. I resolve to stay cool and not be bothered by trifles and get hot under the collar when my daughter does not call the morning of my birthday. I get irritated when a ham-handed waiter drops a dripping slice of lasagna in my lap precisely the night I am having dinner with someone special who said Yes after twenty No's.

Why do the bad things have to recur with such regularity instead of the good things? I won the raffle for a swanky dinner-for-four at Waldorf Astoria one year. Only once. No raffle since then has got me even a whistle. I had an idyllic week in a beachside cottage six years ago and went back two years later, only to encounter torrential rain and a plumbing disaster.

All this is, however, superficial. The real issue is the repetition of

things in our life that really matter. If I went into a shoe store and bought the first pair on which I laid my eyes, without a glance at the dozens of other pairs laid out for my delectation, you would label me indiscriminating and superficial at the best and rash and foolish at worst. You would think it silly that I did not examine a few other shoes to choose what could best serve my need, whether to walk or run or just wear at home and show off to my visitors.

The chances are that you are a better buyer and take pains to look at several pairs before you make up your mind and place your money on the counter. Now consider the process you undertake for taking decisions that are far more consequential.

You don't have to be an actively religious person to realize how your religion affects your life. The values you imbibed as a child in your family and as an adult in your community deeply influence your daily life and weekly work. Yet, how did you choose your religion? After reading its texts and their interpretation? After comparing them with those of other religions? Was there any conscious and comparative evaluation?

The next most important thing that determines your social beliefs

is your politics. How did you choose your creed and your party? Did you study the doctrines and explore the platforms before you decided to support a group or vote for a party? Have you ever explored the different political ideologies before you swore your allegiance to one?

The careful judgment you use before you buy a pair of shoes, let alone a car or refrigerator, you let go before you enthusiastically embraced a religion or a party, just because your father – or his father, an adored uncle, an admired professor, a special friend – did. The amazing part is the fervour with which you adhere to your ill-founded loyalties, defend them with fury and demolish contrary views with contempt, when a moment's thought might have illuminated the shifting sands whereon you stand.

Surely, there are exceptions: people who thoughtfully make their choices, judiciously change them when necessary and are prepared to listen to dissenting voices. But the vast majority of us seem to make quick and almost involuntary choices and cling to their choices with ferocious tenacity. The tenuous basis of their choice perhaps induces them to be even more pugnacious in their loyalty, for they have an instinctive sense of the flimsiness of their fidelity.



This probably is a clue to the acrimony of our social discourse. Many of us are inherently uncertain of the core beliefs that sustain our worldview. Yet we can't undo our grasp of what we have held close to our breast for so long for fear that the superstructure of ideas that has long sustained us will collapse. We must therefore fight for our cause, however misty its goal and misguided its logic, because otherwise our whole past becomes meaningless.

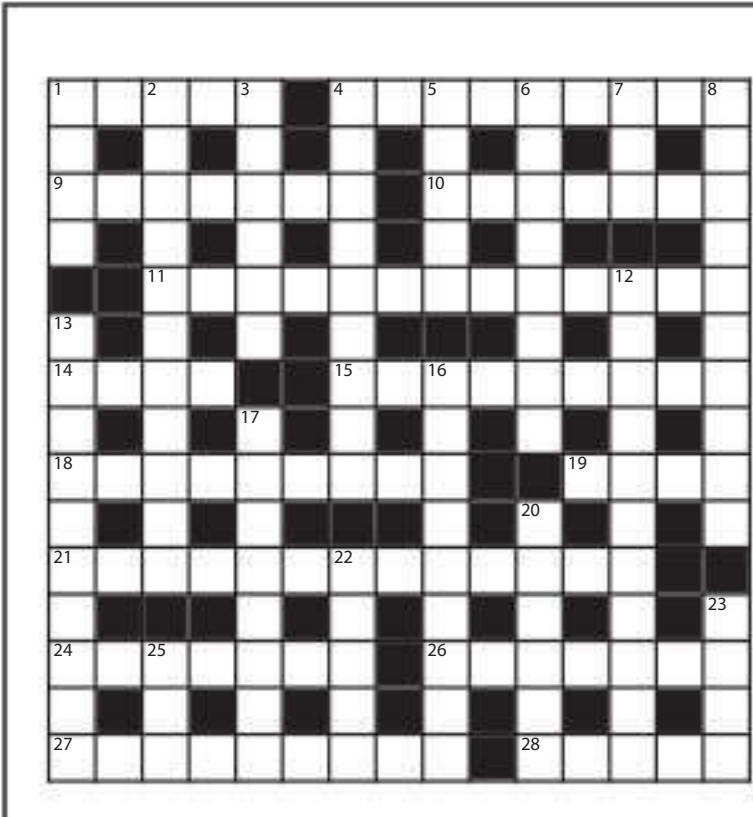
We continue in our dubious faith with indubitable finality. I must admit, however, to have known friends who made a sharp turnaround when their heart dictated it. Joseph, son of a Baptist preacher, met a Jewish girl, took lessons in Judaism to impress her, found himself deeply

moved and changed his faith to the chagrin of his family. Chester, who worked with me in the foreign service and whose father and grandfather were Republican luminaries from a distinguished midwestern family, was so troubled by his Iraq experience that he changed his entire political orientation.

Do we all need a titanic personal or political experience to change our perspective? I know well that in both of these cases that it wasn't just an external challenge that altered their views. They had grown internally – and they had grown because they were ready to struggle and grow. That essential kernel is our real hope.

(The writer is a US-based international development advisor and had worked with the World Bank. He can be reached at mnandy@gmail.com)

## Crossword | No. 293308



### Last Saturday's Solution

LAMBADA EVASIVE  
LAETITIA  
OPUS SCHOENBERG  
HITCENND  
JOANNAMANDOLIN  
RUBENC  
ENRAPTUREAMATI  
CIB  
STOCKPYGMALION  
RQUWOC  
LIBRETTIOTBAD  
BDMDEUR  
MUSTICLOGYTRIO  
NOSWETIN  
KEYNOTEADMIRAL

### ACROSS

- Don't be such a baby – not with team (5)
- Film tempts their irritation announcing president's return (3,6,7,4)
- Some in government ran checks on funding instalment (7)
- Compile scores, ending in arrogant colleague winning (5,2)
- Puzzling advert against cultural innovator (5-8)

- Personalities say nothing succeeded (4)
- Nothing in unfashionable poets' motors (9)
- Poem about food beginning to show model quality (9)
- Hide second family (4)
- How cameraman prepares apparatus for big explosion (5,2,6)
- Royalty charges include November (7)
- Give reasons for experimental

- network covering Italy (7)
- Pet saying involved Africans (9)
- Bombs northern country explodes externally (5)
- Entrance German goddess (4)
- City's focus as guard to dungeon US regularly used (11)
- Astronaut losing head then heart to computer game (3-3)

- Colour left unknown in card game (6-3)
- Exeter dropping a couple of points before getting one more (5)
- Alchemi needs large cinema organ (8)
- Reserved some bicycles (3)
- Old urgent saying (10)
- See 4 Across
- Fellow leaves donkey wilted, without energy – that's sweet! (3,4,3)

- Offensive 22 sets off (9)
- Household pet needs a couple of whips (5-3)
- Daughter quietly interrupts pulse with hospital equipment (6)
- Apparently commission the French scientific unit (5)
- Where lawyers gather among Poles (4)
- Industry's foremost visionary cleared out plant (3)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)





Editor's

TAKE

## IFFI: *Picture abhi baaki hai mere dost!*

As IFFI this year celebrated both legacy and innovation, it offered a timely moment to reflect on how far the Indian film industry has travelled

Jean-Luc Godard, the French film director and screenwriter, once said, “cinema is the most beautiful fraud in the world.” It is true, and we Indians are drawn to it like no other nation, making and watching films with unmatched passion. Over the decades, this love for cinema has only intensified. Indian cinema has journeyed from the era of silent films to black-and-white frames, onwards to colour, and now to the digital age. Cinema is a love affair that Indians remain wholeheartedly committed to. Alongside this growth, the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) has been its companion since 1952.

IFFI 2025, held recently in Goa, once again reminded us why cinema remains one of the country's strongest cultural forces. What began in 1952 as a modest attempt to introduce global cinema to an emerging nation has expanded into a festival that aspires to stand alongside the world's leading film platforms. This year's edition, with its blend of restored classics, bold new voices and global collaborations, offered a striking audiovisual kaleidoscope. Despite chaos, confusion, last-minute changes and organisational lapses that disappointed delegates and participants, IFFI continues to be one of the country's most significant film festivals.

The story of IFFI is inseparable from the story of Indian cinema itself. The festival's early decades coincided with the post-independence moment when Satyajit Ray, Guru Dutt and Bimal Roy were defining Indian filmmaking and earning global respect. In those formative years, IFFI introduced Indian creators to international masters such as Kurosawa, De Sica and Bergman. It helped build confidence that India could produce cinema capable of crossing borders. By the late 20th century, as Bollywood expanded commercially and regional cinema flourished – from Malayalam's new wave to Tamil and Telugu cinema's growing technical prowess – IFFI became a stage where India showcased both artistic and popular strength. Over the years, IFFI has developed into an ecosystem where filmmakers, distributors, students and global buyers converge, creating a rare space for conversation in an industry dominated by box-office pressure. New storytellers from smaller towns are reshaping narrative styles, challenging the dominance of traditional studios. Regional cinema continues to outshine mainstream Hindi cinema in innovation and audience loyalty, and this year's selection reflected that shift with strong representation from Tamil, Malayalam, Marathi and Assamese filmmakers, alongside a tribute to Rajinikanth for completing fifty years in cinema. Yet the Indian film industry still has a long road ahead. Dependence on star-driven formulas, uneven screen distribution, underinvestment in script development and a lack of formal film-education infrastructure prevent the industry from growing globally.

Over-regulation, unpredictable censorship and political pressures continue to limit creative confidence. Indian films still struggle to secure major international releases and widespread global acclaim. The industry has come a long way, yet *picture abhi baaki hai, mere dost*.

# The Forgotten Heroes of Rezang La

The Battle of Rezang La stands among the greatest last stands in military history, yet the identity of its true heroes — the 117 Ahir soldiers of Charlie Company — has been systematically diluted for over sixty years



TC  
RAO

The Battle of Rezang La, fought on 18 November 1962 during the India-China War, remains one of the most extraordinary last stands in global military history. At 18,000 feet, in temperatures dropping to -40°C, with limited winter clothing, scarce ammunition, and absolutely no artillery or air support, 120 soldiers of the 13 Kumaon Regiment's Charlie Company stood firm against a massive Chinese offensive. Of these 120 soldiers, 117 belonged to the Ahir or Yaduvanshi community. Their heroic resistance resulted in an estimated 1,310 Chinese casualties — an achievement unparalleled in modern warfare. If ever there was a story that deserved to be celebrated across India, it was this one. Yet, a series of sustained efforts since 1964 have repeatedly attempted to dilute, distort, or erase the role of the Ahir soldiers who fought and died at Rezang La.

The first and most glaring injustice was the drastic reduction in the gallantry awards recommended for the company. Soon after the war, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru remarked that India should not excessively glorify the conflict, as it had ended in defeat. This statement was widely misinterpreted by sections of the military leadership, who took it as a signal to scale down recognition for the soldiers.

As a result, the originally recommended awards — nine Param Vir Chakras, nineteen Maha Vir Chakras, forty-four Vir Chakras, seventeen Sena Medals, and eleven Mentions in Dispatches — were reduced to a single Param Vir Chakra, eight Vir Chakras, four Sena Medals, and one Mention.

In 1963, the patriotic song Ae Mere Watan Ke Logon was commissioned by Prime Minister Nehru to honour the martyrs of the 1962 war. Written by Pradeep and sung by Lata Mangeshkar, it moved the nation to tears. However, although created conceptually as a tribute to Rezang La, the song made no mention of the Ahir soldiers. Instead, it referenced communities not involved in the battle. What should have been a lyrical homage to the Ahirs' collective heroism became yet another instance of their erasure from national memory.

A similar distortion occurred in 1964 with the release of the film Haqeeqat. Although the film was based on the Rezang La battle, it portrayed soldiers from other regiments and used inaccurate uniforms, insignia, and identities. This creative liberty permanently altered public perception of the battle. Cinema shapes collective memory, and by presenting an inaccurate version of events, Haqeeqat effectively sidelined the true protagonists — the Ahir soldiers who fought to the last man.

Nearly six decades later, in 2021, when the



Rezang La Memorial was renovated under the supervision of the Ministry of Defence, another troubling incident emerged. The iconic plaque bearing the inscription “Ahir Dham — 0 Kilometre” was removed and discarded at the side of the site. The plaque held historic and emotional significance, symbolising the Ahir community's deep connection with the battleground. Only after the intervention of Dr TC Rao, Convener of the Martyrs' Family Welfare Foundation, along with senior military officials, was the plaque retrieved.

The attempts to soften or remove the Ahir narrative did not stop there. At the memorial site, a sand-model installation and accompanying audio commentary were added for visitors. Shockingly, the commentary avoided using the words “Ahir” or “Yadav”, despite the overwhelming fact that 117 of the 120 soldiers belonged to this community.

The official honourific title awarded to 13 Kumaon — “Veer Ahir, Surveeron Mein Ati Surveer” — was omitted from these audio-visual presentations. Instead, the narrative shifted to a selective portrayal centred solely on Major Shaitan Singh, PVC, while the collective nature of the Ahir soldiers' sacrifice was pushed into the background.

The commemorative theatre film at the memorial similarly attempted to shape a new narrative. It opens by suggesting that Major Shaitan Singh grew up listening to stories of Maharana Pratap, linking his bravery to a specific community rather than acknowledging the Ahir soldiers who formed the backbone of the unit. The voiceover by Amitabh Bachchan added emotional depth but reinforced an incomplete and skewed representation. Such distortions at a war memorial undermine its purpose — to preserve truth, not rewrite it.

The most recent and widely debated attempt at narrative manipulation came in 2025 with the film 120 Bahadur, directed by Rajnish Ghai and produced by Farhan Akhtar. Although ostensibly based on the Rezang La battle, the film again

avoided highlighting the Ahir identity of the soldiers. A fictional surname, “Bhati”, was appended to Major Shaitan Singh, and nearly 90 per cent of the scenes were reported to be fictionalised dramatisations. Even more troubling was the film's title: “Bahadur”, a term culturally associated with Gurkha soldiers, rather than “Veer Ahir”, which would have accurately reflected the composition of the company. None of the eight Vir Chakra or four Sena Medal awardees were portrayed with their real names or identities.

This deliberate sidelining sparked widespread protests across the country beginning on 5 August 2025. The Ahir community organised peaceful demonstrations, submitted legal notices, held mahapanchayats, and appealed to government authorities, but their concerns have so far been ignored.

Viewed collectively, these events reveal a disturbing pattern that has persisted for over six decades: a consistent attempt, whether through institutions, cultural mediums, or public memorials, to dilute the role of the Ahir soldiers of Rezang La.

War history is not merely the story of a battlefield — it is a matter of national honour. When history is selectively altered, an entire generation grows up believing an incomplete truth. India, must consider stronger safeguards to protect historical accuracy. The Ahir soldiers of Rezang La represent the very essence of Indian courage — ordinary villagers with extraordinary resolve. Their sacrifice was not for their community alone; it was for India. To erase or distort their identity is to do injustice not only to them, but to the nation they died defending.

The truth of Rezang La is permanent, and no matter how many times it is pushed aside, it stands tall — like the mountains of Ladakh that witnessed their last stand. It is time for India to restore this truth, honour these heroes without dilution, and ensure that future generations know exactly who stood, fought, and fell at Rezang La.

The Pioneer

SINCE 1865

WAR HISTORY IS NOT MERELY THE STORY OF A BATTLEFIELD — IT IS A MATTER OF NATIONAL HONOUR. WHEN HISTORY IS SELECTIVELY ALTERED, AN ENTIRE GENERATION GROWS UP BELIEVING AN INCOMPLETE TRUTH

The writer is a military historian

dailypioneer

@dtrcrao

The Pioneer

# Choosing Divine Shelter: Trap of Self-Dependence



AJIT KUMAR  
BISHNOI

2ND OPINION

THE PIONEER

Lord Krishna repeatedly emphasises in the Bhagavad Gita that we must take His shelter, yet most of us prefer to take our own shelter. What I mean is simple: we mostly depend on ourselves and limit our lives to what our own minds can think of. We trust our own ideas of work, enjoyment, and success. In short, we trust our own judgement above everything else. But the mind is ruled mainly by lust, greed, and anger—the very emotions Lord Krishna says lead to hell (16.12).

Our intelligence is also flawed and limited. We make our own rules based on our inflated ego, which never allows us to see our own faults. Faith in God remains occasional, almost like a weak reminder. Our consciousness stays

material, and life becomes a struggle to survive and enjoy in our own way.

The more materially successful one becomes, the more one depends on oneself, like a frog who thinks the well is the whole world. The consequences are always harsh. Life becomes a continuous struggle—whether in studies, work, fighting age, or dying helplessly. Failures come again and again, exactly as Lord Krishna warns: “One who follows his desires after ignoring the scriptures achieves neither perfection, nor happiness, nor the supreme destination.” (16.23) Being driven by lust, anger, or greed only pushes a person toward ruin.

Krishna clearly says these three are the doors to hell and must be given up. (16.21) And those who are envious, cruel, or harmful take birth again and again in lower species. (16.19) Such a person believes he is in control, but it is actually material nature working. Krishna explains, “All acts are performed by the modes of nature; the deluded soul thinks, ‘I am the doer.’” (3.27) Only in rare cases of true devotees does God Himself take the role of doer, just as He did for Arjuna (11.33). Otherwise, we only receive what our past karmaphalas allow. We enjoy some things and suffer others, but the illusion of control eventually breaks. Still, very few learn.

Life continues swinging like a pendulum. By middle age

we realise we missed the bus, and when old age comes, sorrow becomes overwhelming.

What should have been done instead? We should have realised we are parts of God. (15.7) With billions of humans on earth, we are extremely small and quite helpless without divine guidance. We don't know what is right for us. We need God's shelter to understand what to do. Some people ask God through slips before a murti, but God communicates much more deeply. He gives intuitions, sends messages through people, speaks in dreams, or wakes us early with clarity.

I personally receive God's guidance all the time. Lord Krishna promises: “With My consciousness, you will cross all obstacles by My grace.” (18.58) Those who take God's shelter are guided and protected. God even cancels the effects of past mistakes and finally liberates the soul from the painful cycle of birth and death. Others start again in a new body according to karmaphala, carrying their mind, senses, and nature. But wise people choose differently. They want to know where they are going. I am one of them—moving, under God's protection, toward Vaikuntha, our real eternal home.

The writer is a spiritual teacher

The Pioneer

SINCE 1865

## DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION THROUGH PAID VOTING LEAVE

Maharashtra's decision to grant paid leave to workers on 2 December, enabling them to vote in the civic body elections, marks a significant stride in strengthening democracy at the grassroots.

In a society where professional obligations frequently overshadow personal rights, this government resolution sets an important precedent by recognising voting as a civic responsibility that merits institutional support.

By allowing every eligible voter, irrespective of workplace location, to take time off, the government has addressed long-standing concerns wherein many citizens were previously unable to vote due to employer unwillingness. The additional provision of special leave for those working in essential

services further reflects a thoughtful and inclusive approach.

This measure not only has the potential to enhance voter turnout but also reinforces the principle that democracy must be accessible to all. Voting is not a privilege reserved for a select few; it is a collective duty that should be encouraged and enabled across all sections of society.

Maharashtra's initiative serves as a reminder that when institutions support democratic engagement, the nation as a whole stands to gain.

This initiative reaffirms that democracy thrives when every citizen is empowered to participate. Maharashtra's step sets a model for the rest of the country to follow.

VIJAYKUMAR HKJ RAICHUR

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

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Dharmendra – A friendship etched in cinema

People still do not tire of Sholay, nor does it ever feel monotonous. The fact that Amitabh Bachchan and Dharmendra portrayed Jai and Veeru — two “jailbirds” — remains one of the film's most fascinating elements. Bachchan's moving portrayal of Jai's dying scene, and Dharmendra's furious anguish on seeing his bosom friend fatally wounded in his arms, lend the film remarkable emotional realism.

It is widely noted that the British filmmaker David Lean, director of epics such as Lawrence of Arabia and Doctor Zhivago, was deeply affected after watching Bachchan's death scene. So impressed was he by Bachchan's performance that he reportedly advised that the film's ending should never be altered.

In the film, Veeru loses his inseparable and sworn companion. In real life too, Dharmendra and Amitabh Bachchan shared an extraordinary bond. Their friendship, often described as brotherhood, extended far beyond their professional association and remains one of the most iconic relationships in Hindi cinema.

Big B has now lost his dearest friend. It is a profound personal blow, and it is difficult to grasp the enormity of losing the debonair, charismatic, and versatile veteran actor Dharmendra.

ZUBAIR KHAN | HYDERABAD

### Modernisation essential for India's defence

Admiral Tripathi's remarks describing technology as the “future asset” of India's defence deserve thoughtful reflection. At a time when conflicts are shaped by data breaches, drone swarms, cyber intrusions, and AI-enabled targeting, can India still afford slow procurement cycles and outdated command structures? Our armed forces display exceptional commitment, yet innovation often remains trapped in files instead of being translated into operational capability. Why must essential upgrades wait for procedural comfort? And why does indigenous research continue to struggle for timely funding and firm adoption despite its potential?

Defence modernisation is not a luxury; it is a national obligation. A technologically agile, future-ready military — freed from layers of bureaucratic inertia — is crucial for safeguarding national security. The pace of global warfare is accelerating, and emerging threats seldom wait for administrative approvals. If red tape continues to outrank readiness, will we be adequately prepared when tomorrow's challenges arrive faster than our ability to respond?

India's strategic strength will increasingly depend on how decisively it embraces cutting-edge research, rapid innovation, and efficient implementation.

HASNAIN PATNA | RAICHUR

### Honouring the legacy of MS Umesh

Veteran Kannada actor MS Umesh's passing at the age of 80 has left the Kannada film fraternity and the wider public deeply saddened. The multifaceted artist, renowned for his distinctive comic timing and soulful character portrayals, leaves behind a remarkable cinematic legacy spanning more than six decades and over 400 films.

Beyond his on-screen excellence, Umesh was admired for his exceptional human values. His simplicity in interacting with people, his willingness to help anyone without hesitation, and his genuine humility made him truly unique. His contributions to society were always offered quietly, without pride, publicity, or expectation. He firmly believed that one's work is one's true identity, and he lived by that principle throughout his life. In an age when compassion is increasingly rare, Umesh possessed the extraordinary ability to treat another person's problem as his own. Many found courage, assurance, and comfort simply by speaking with him. Though it is deeply saddening that he is no longer with us, the path he has left behind reminds us that the true measure of a person lies not in status but in the good they do for others. May the memory of MS Umesh continue to live on in the hearts of the people.

DARSHAN | KARNATAKA



# From potential to prosperity: Bihar’s unfinished revolution

Bihar’s redemption lies in building strong institutions and investing in its true assets — its soil, its youth, and its indomitable resilience. The soil of Bihar has always been fertile — for crops, for ideas, and for dreams. The land of revolutions now awaits its long-overdue economic one — its tryst with destiny



SAAGAR SRIVASTAVA

There is something irresistibly powerful about the soil of Bihar — its social fabric, value systems, and milieu. Bihar has long been a land of revolutions — ideological, political, and social — that have shaped not only its destiny but also that of India. Yet, as the state emerges from one of its most defining assembly elections in decades, the paradox could not be starker: a land blessed with fertile soil, abundant water, a youthful population, and a legacy of scholarship remains trapped in economic morass. The saga of a state infinitely rich in potential yet persistently poor in economic outcomes continues to confound economists and policymakers. Over the past two decades, another conundrum has emerged: Bihar has recorded among the fastest GDP growth rates in the country, yet remains at the bottom of all human development rankings. Swaminathan Aiyar in 2010 inexplicably dubbed Bihar “India’s miracle state”, but its lived reality still tells a story of deprivation and missed opportunities.

## The Economic Morass

With a population of 130 million, Bihar would rank as the world’s tenth-largest country. It has 9 per cent of India’s population, but only 3 per cent of its land mass, and contributes barely 3 per cent to national GDP. With an FY 2024–25 GSDP of ₹9.9 lakh crore and a budget expenditure of ₹3.17 lakh crore, the state remains overwhelmingly dependent on central transfers (74 per cent of its revenue), while its own tax revenue is a meagre ₹59,000 crore.

Nearly a third of Biharis live in poverty, and the state’s per capita income — ₹67,000 — is just a third of the national average. In the country’s youngest state, with a median age of under 20 in 2011, agriculture contributes around 20–25 per cent to GSDP and employs 80 per cent of the workforce, while industry’s share languishes at 18 per cent. Urbanisation, at 13 per cent, stands where the national average was in 1901.

## The Mirage of Growth

Between 2005 and 2015, Bihar’s GSDP grew at over 10 per cent annually — second only to



BIHAR MUST RECLAIM BOTH ITS DIGNITY AND ITS DESTINY, AND ITS TRANSFORMATION DEMANDS THE “FIERCE URGENCY OF NOW” ON THE PART OF ITS NEWLY ELECTED GOVERNMENT.

The writer is an Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officer. He studied Economics at the LSE, and worked previously as an investment banker in London

in/saagarsrivastava  
@ssrivastava2011  
in/saagarsrivastava/

Gujarat. Even in recent years, its growth rates have exceeded national averages, touching 13.5 per cent in FY 2024–25. This is particularly salient, as a high growth rate is paramount for expanding the economic pie. Yet, as Arvind Panagariya cautioned, such revival from a low base is merely a reversal to the mean, not an economic “model”. Bihar has been growing, but is it also developing? Roads are being built, but jobs remain scarce; schools have multiplied, yet learning outcomes lag; millions continue to migrate in search of work while local industries stagnate.

This schism between economic expansion and human development defines Bihar’s crisis. It ranks lowest across NITI Aayog’s SDG metrics and has the highest poverty rates. Despite higher spending on health and education, outcomes remain muted. Gross enrolment ratios in schools have improved, but dropout rates in higher education exceed 50 per cent. Health infrastructure is grossly inadequate — only one district hospital was built between 2012 and 2019; the number of referral hospitals remained stagnant at 70 in 2019; and per capita health spending is the lowest among major states.

Industry’s contribution to GSDP remains around 18–20 per cent, versus 31 per cent nationally, and the state contributes just 0.5 per cent to India’s industrial output. Jobless growth threatens to turn Bihar’s demographic dividend into a demographic disaster: over 7 per cent of its population has migrated. If the trend persists, the state risks social unrest, à la the “tunnel effect”, as warned by Albert Hirschman, where

growing expectations collide with stagnant opportunities.

## The Burden of History

Bihar’s backwardness stems from both historical legacies and contemporary failings. Even a century ago, Bihar (then part of the Bengal Presidency) had among the lowest per capita government expenditures of tax revenue (Mukherji & Mukherji, NIPFP), penalised for its active participation in the national movement. The British-era Zamindari system, coupled with the Permanent Settlement, disincentivised productivity and entrenched inequality. Post-independence, while Zamindari was abolished, the failure to implement land reforms — unlike in West Bengal — remains one of the state’s great unfulfilled missions.

The Freight Equalisation Policy of 1952 further crippled Bihar’s industrial prospects. By ensuring that coal, steel, and cement cost the same nationwide, it nullified undivided Bihar’s locational advantage and favoured coastal states. The state thus suffered from Sachs and Warner’s classic “resource curse”: a strong correlation between abundant natural

resources and poor economic growth.

Being a state that has often defied the dominant national political trend, state and central governments have frequently been at ideological odds, resulting in lower per capita central spending — barely half the national average. Even development institutions like NABARD lend more to economically advanced states, owing to commercial viability, deepening Bihar’s capital deficit. Agriculture suffers from low Total

Factor Productivity (TFP) and poor labour mobility. Though the sector contributes only a quarter of GSDP, it employs four-fifths of the workforce, making per capita agricultural GDP barely one-tenth of Punjab’s. Bihar’s credit-deposit ratio of 34, against 75 for India as a whole, reflects chronic under-lending to local enterprises. Capital raised in Bihar finances growth in better-off states, perpetuating a vicious cycle. Small industries, accounting for 90 per cent of Bihar’s manufacturing, remain trapped in a low-equilibrium of inefficiency and small scale — fearing loss of incentives and subsidies if they expand, and thus missing out on economies of scale.

Weak entrepreneurial culture and dependence on the mai-baap sarkar further stifle innovation. Migration has become socially normalised, and caste remains an enduring fault line. While visible improvements — roads, electricity, law and order — are evident, “invisible” institutional reforms, industrialisation, and job creation remain elusive.

## Bihar’s Economic Revolution

### Unlocking agriculture’s latent potential:

Bihar’s transitional climatic zone supports a diverse cropping pattern of wet and dry crops. Fertile soil, water availability, and hardworking labour should have made it a basket case of agricultural success. Yet, with an average landholding of only 0.4 hectares, per capita agricultural income stands at a mere ₹7,000. Microfinance access for the 91 per cent of small and marginal farmers remains weak, and public expenditure on agricultural research — critical for yield improvement and scientific cropping — has declined. Still, Bihar’s agricultural growth rate — 4.5–5 per cent annually over the past decade — outpaces the national average, and production of major crops such as maize, rice, and wheat has increased. This has been achieved largely through better roads and power supply, not through focused efforts specific to revitalising the sector. With concerted policy action, Bihar could replicate Madhya Pradesh’s mission-mode success: near-saturation levels of irrigation, ensuring certified seeds and fertilisers, strengthening market linkages, providing assured power supply, and capacity-building for farmers.

**Reviving industry:** Bihar has only 3,500 factories — of which 2,900 are operational — employing an average of 40 workers per unit, far below the national average of 77. Average annual wages are ₹1.2 lakh, less than half the national mean. Unsurprisingly,

industrial development here is often seen as a bridge too far. Yet opportunities exist. Bihar enjoys proximity to eastern and northern markets, access to mineral-rich neighbours and eastern ports (Kolkata and Haldia), and a large pool of low-cost labour. Pockets of industrial activity such as Dalmianagar (cement and paper), Barauni (petrochemicals), and Patna (light manufacturing) endure even today. Despite the creation of Jharkhand, mineral-specific plans are required for proper exploitation of the mica reserves of Munger, Gaya, and Nawada to turn them into another Giridih, or Rohtas’ dolomite belt, or the bauxite and salt production potential of Munger. Cottage industries — sericulture, vermiculture, glasswork, pottery, and Bihar’s famed Madhubani paintings — can absorb surplus rural labour.

While the sugar mills of South Bihar closed down, the remaining eleven, mostly in West Champaran and Gopalganj, contribute 3.5 per cent of India’s production. Their revival under the *Ganna Vikas Yojana* through incentives and subsidies for high-yielding seeds, and the mills’ diversification into ethanol, bio-fertilisers, and electricity, show early promise.

**The promise of agro-based industries:** With a comparative advantage of low-cost labour and abundant production, agro-industries in Bihar have grown 16.4 per cent annually over the last decade — five times the national rate. Bihar ranks fourth in vegetable and eighth in fruit production, is a top-five mushroom producer, and egg and fisheries output have also increased. Besides the famous makhana and litchi, the mangoes and bananas of Muzaffarpur and Darbhanga also have export potential. Chillies and tobacco are important cash crops on the banks of the Ganges. The state’s dairy cooperative COMFED has turned ‘Sudha’ into one of East India’s most recognised brands — through efficient collection networks, chilling centres, diversified products, quality branding, and capacity-building with NDDB and IIM-A. Bihar, the fourth-largest producer of jute, can capitalise on the global shift away from plastics. Bamboo cultivation, aided by its reclassification as grass and Bihar’s suitable climate, can increase green cover and double farmer incomes.

Agro-processing clusters with cold chains, logistics, and farm-to-market linkages can transform Bihar from India’s granary into its “green factory”, adding value and creating jobs.

Please read the complete article online at <https://www.dailypioneer.com>

# From labour reform to EoDB 2.0: The structural shift India needs for growth



RAJIV KUMAR



SAMRIDHI PRAKASH

India’s decision to implement the long-pending labour codes deserves appreciation. For decades, the country’s entrepreneurs have operated under a maze of 29 overlapping and often contradictory labour laws. Consolidating them into four streamlined labour codes is more than an administrative exercise; it is a long-awaited structural reform that simplifies compliance, increases the probability of enforcement, and creates a more predictable environment for doing business. A simpler legal framework is always easier to follow and easier for the state to enforce, making this a foundational step towards improving India’s ease of doing business.

## Falling Private Investments in India

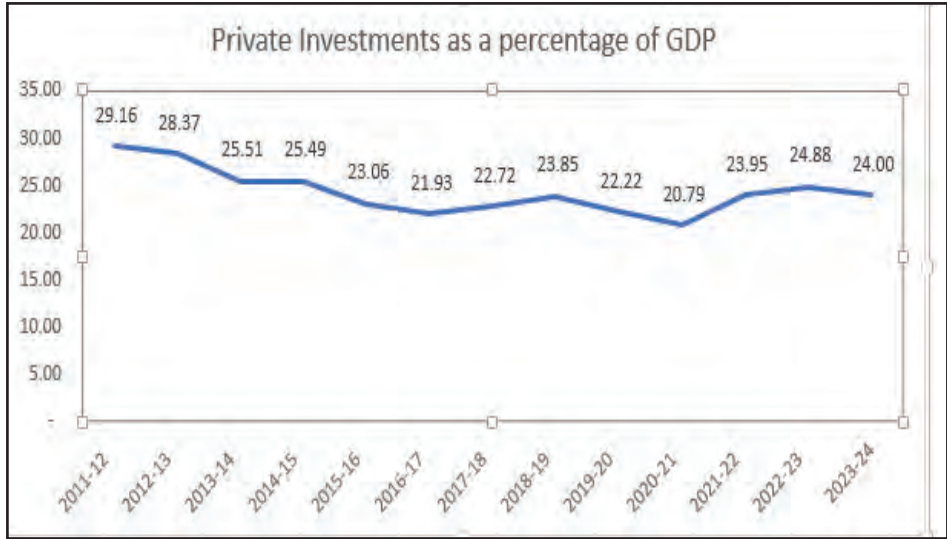
This reform also comes at a critical time. Private consumption today accounts for almost 60 per cent of India’s GDP, but investment — particularly private investment — remains much lower and has not recovered to the levels needed to drive a sustained growth cycle. Private investment as a share of GDP has declined over the past decade.

## Investments Flowing Abroad

The picture becomes even clearer when one looks at foreign investment flows. Net FDI (FDI inflows minus outflows) has been falling, driven by both decreasing inflows and rising outflows. This trend implies that even Indian firms are increasingly choosing to invest abroad rather than expand domestically. Why is that so? Domestic regulatory conditions appear to be the most important determinant of these investment decisions.

## Why Macroeconomic Policy Has Failed

Importantly, this decline in investment cannot be attributed to weaknesses in macroeconomic policy. Fiscal policy has been supportive: corporate tax rates were reduced, GST rates have been rationalised, and taxpayers earning up to ₹12 lakh annually have received relief. This has led corporate profits to reach all-time highs in recent years. Monetary policy has been accommodative



for years, ensuring liquidity and low borrowing costs. But these tools have mainly boosted consumption, not private investment. Investment responds more to regulatory clarity, reduction in compliance burdens, and predictability in doing business. This is why the labour codes represent a step in the right direction but only the first step. If India wants to revive private investment and unlock the next cycle of high growth, it must go further.

## What is Needed

Deregulation, decriminalisation of minor business offences, and a decisive reduction in regulatory complexity are essential. Entrepreneurs should be spending their energy building businesses, creating jobs, innovating, and scaling — not navigating compliance paperwork.

Simplifying the regulatory architecture and focusing on strong enforcement of a smaller number of well-designed laws will not only increase compliance but also stimulate entrepreneurial drive. It will encourage firms to expand operations, take risks, and invest in capacity without fearing excessive compliance burdens. These reforms directly contribute to competitiveness and, more importantly, to investor confidence.

## EoDB 2.0

Crucially, the next wave of reforms must come from the states. The Economic Survey 2024–25 explicitly argues that the next phase of ease of doing business (“EoDB 2.0”) must be led by state governments. A significant portion

of the compliance burden — including inspections, approvals, certifications, and procedural requirements — originates at the state level.

The Survey also recommends a three-step process for states to systematically review regulations for their cost-effectiveness.

The steps include:

1. Identifying areas for deregulation,
2. Thoughtfully comparing regulations with those of other states and countries, and
3. Estimating the cost of each regulation on individual enterprises.

If India is to truly raise its investment rate, states must adopt a philosophy of regulatory pruning by retaining only those laws that support industrial growth and removing those that hinder it. Such pruning would require wide stakeholder discussions, but the benefits would far outweigh the costs.

These are precisely the types of changes repeatedly described as structural reforms — reforms that change the rules of the game, not just the fiscal or monetary signals within the existing system. Structural reforms reshape incentives, reduce friction, and create a business ecosystem where both domestic and foreign investors feel confident about making long-term commitments. *Viksit Bharat 2047* will require private players to lead the way while the government acts as an enabler and facilitator.

Rajiv Kumar, former NITI Aayog Vice-Chairman and Chairman of the Pahlé India Foundation, is a prominent economist focused on economic reforms. Samridhi Prakash is a Research Associate at the Pahlé India Foundation

dailypioneer  
@RajivKumar1  
in/rajiv-kumar-b5a56275/?origina  
lSubdomain=in

# When the desert falls silent: saving rajasthan’s folk music



SOURYABRATA MOHAPATRA



BHASWATI SARMA

The Thar Desert is often captured in photographs — endless dunes, blazing sun, and silhouettes of camels. But the deeper soul of this landscape lives elsewhere: in the voices of the Manganiyars, Langas, Bhopas, Mirasis, and Jogis who have sung its history for centuries. Their music, carried across sand and generations, is not just art — it is Rajasthan’s memory system, emotional vocabulary, and cultural shield. Yet today, these custodians of history stand at a heartbreaking crossroads.

Rajasthani folk music is a living archive. The Manganiyars’ resonant voices, the Langas’ sindhi sarangi and algoza, and the Bhopa-Bhopi’s storytelling with the sacred phad make the Thar a musical civilisation. Their songs preserve romance, war, devotion, migration, and everyday survival. But what happens when the singers themselves are pushed into silence?

## A Tradition That Walks, Works, and Waits

One moment at a recent workshop at IIT Jodhpur captured the crisis with unsettling clarity. Three Bhopa artists — Bablu, his brother Sitaram, and their mother Bhawari Devi — performed with deep devotion, turning the auditorium into a travelling temple. Their phad came alive with stories of Pabuji, as if the scroll itself breathed.

After the performance, we casually asked, “Have you visited IIT Jodhpur before?”

Their reply stunned the room: they had been here before — not as artists, but as construction labourers. How can custodians of a centuries-old sacred art be forced into such work? Why does admiration not translate into livelihood? The truth is stark.

Extreme heat, landlessness, and unstable incomes push families like Subhash’s from Churu to migrate — often with their children — to Uttar Pradesh for manual labour, not performances. Their instruments gather dust, their songs fall silent, and their children drift from the traditions that shaped them. Climate change deepens this erosion: fewer fairs, erratic seasons, and shrinking temple gatherings have reduced performance opportunities. Folk music, once woven into the rhythm of rural life, now struggles for bare survival. The *Manganiyars* and *Langas* are internationally cel-

ebrated; many have performed across Europe, collaborated on global fusion albums, and appeared in documentaries. Yet their daily lives back home often remain unchanged. Why does applause abroad not protect them from poverty at home?

The reasons are familiar:

1. Intermediaries absorb most profits, leaving artists with only a small share.
2. International tours are irregular, creating unstable incomes.
3. Artists lack contract awareness, making them vulnerable to unfair terms.
4. There is no social security or pension, even for legendary performers.
5. Caste identity continues to restrict mobility despite artistic brilliance.
6. Royalties rarely reach the musicians, even after successful recordings.

Is it fair that an artist who fills concert halls abroad returns to a village life marked by uncertainty? Can a musical tradition survive when the people who carry it cannot secure a dignified livelihood?

Despite climate stress, economic hardship, and social barriers, the music of the Thar refuses to die. A Manganiyar’s kaafi can still silence a gathering, a Langa’s soulful jogiya can still move listeners to tears, and a Bhopa’s night-long recital before the phad can still transform a commons into a sacred space. These artists sing not for income, but because it is their inheritance and responsibility; they are desert archivists — storytellers, priests, historians, and moral guides — reminding us that heritage survives through people, not institutions.

Yet even the strongest traditions need support. If India truly values its intangible heritage, admiration alone is insufficient. These musicians need sustained, structural backing: more performance platforms; fair, transparent payments; pensions and insurance; digital and financial literacy; stronger documentation; and integration of folk music into education. Without this, the songs of the Thar may fade — not from irrelevance, but from our neglect. Rajasthan’s folk music carries history and dignity; it has endured droughts, caste barriers, poverty, and now climate change, but it cannot endure indifference. The question remains: will the desert’s music become a museum artefact, or will we help it thrive as a living tradition? The future of the Thar’s music depends on the choices we make now, and preserving it is not merely cultural duty — it is a moral one.

Bhaswati Sarma is a Professor of Practice in Performing Arts, IIT Jodhpur and Souryabrata Mohapatra is an Assistant Professor of Economics, IIT Jodhpur

dailypioneer  
@dailypioneer  
in/dailypioneer



THE ASIAN AGE

1 DECEMBER 2025

To serve democracy better, Parliament needs to work

The Winter Session of Parliament, to be held over 15 sessions from today to December 20, will present another opportunity for the Opposition to hold the government to account while ensuring that legislation is passed only after a thorough discussion on the Bills presented. If they stick to form and begin boycotting the proceedings, they would not only be spurning that opportunity but also playing into the government's hand.

The pattern of Parliament sessions has been the same for a while now. After a promising pre-session all-party meeting at which homilies will be served up on the need for smooth conduct and open discussion on everything, the Opposition would begin withdrawing from the Houses soon as the first sticking point arises and come back again only towards the end to show that the session was fruitful and fulfilling.

Sticking points may arise again with the Opposition demand for an exhaustive discussion on the Election Commission's SIR likely to run into the government's stand that it is the work of a constitutional body and that the matter is in the highest court even as elections to Bihar have ended after the revision of the rolls.

If the government is sincere about its willingness to discuss anything that is of national interest, it should allow a debate even if the revision exercise goes on nationally as it has with the court interceding now and then on some of the modalities. There is no denying that the integrity of the poll rolls is integral to a level playing field of democracy.

Besides 13 Bills that are to be introduced during the session, there are issues like national security in the wake of the blast near the Red Fort in Delhi, the farmers' plight in the wake of heavier than normal monsoon rains, the pollution gripping the national capital region and foreign policy in the background of the resetting of India-US ties that should be discussed by the people's representatives.

In pre-deciding what should be debated instead of keeping an open mind on the need for legislators to speak out and failing to agree to even short duration discussions, the government may be stonewalling. Unless there is a major change of heart and procedures on giving the Opposition sufficient time to make their point, it is the spirit of democracy that will be denied. And where else but in Parliament can the Opposition make its points on the state of the nation?

Due to the amount of time that Parliament was held up in the Monsoon Session by frequent disruptions, it rated as one of the lowest by way of productivity, with the Lok Sabha functioning only for 29 per cent of the time allotted and the Rajya Sabha 34 per cent. The Question Hour, considered one of the highlights of parliament, fared worse with 23 per cent and six per cent, respectively, in the two Houses of the time allotted being utilised meaningfully.

The issues holding up the last session were Operation Sindoor and SIR, which means that if the EC's functioning comes in the way once again of a discussion on other important subjects, it would still be a waste of parliamentary time. In acting true to form with a stubborn government denying the time for free and frank debates and an equally unrelenting Opposition standing on formalities to disrupt the proceedings, there is a real danger that India will descend to being just an electoral democracy, if it isn't already that.

K'taka: Cong HQ must step in

The Congress has of late developed a curious pattern of gaining and losing power in states. The local leadership with grassroots connects unseats the main rival, mostly from the BJP, and in rare instances a regional power. The national leadership extends its might, political as well as financial, in helping it over the finishing line ahead of the rival. However, once in power, the very same local leaders fight among themselves even while the high command watches from a distance. A leadership change may or may not happen but the party inevitably goes on to lose the next election.

The Congress government in Karnataka is going through the same motions now. Chief minister Siddaramaiah and deputy CM and Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee president D.K. Shivakumar led the party to a historic victory in the southern state fighting and defeating the BJP which tried every trick in the election book and deployed the crassest version of communalism in the 2023 elections. But the Congress stood firm on its secular plank unmindful of the consequences and emerged victorious.

But a war broke out as soon as the results were announced, followed by an uneasy truce. Two-and-a-half years on, a controversy is now raging through the ranks about an unauthentic peace formula which talked of Mr Siddaramaiah handing over the top job to Mr Shivakumar.

The high command is, as usual, procrastinating on its role to intervene and allowing the situation to drift. It must sit both leaders down and insist on a solution even if it may draft the services of leaders with grassroots connections who can articulate the party position on the question of leadership. Only immediate and definitive action could save the party and the government in the state. It would be suicidal for the party to allow its government to go down in the disastrous pattern it has followed now for quite some time.

THE ASIAN AGE

KAUSHIK MITTER

Editor

K. SUDHAKAR

Printer & Publisher

THE ASIAN AGE office is located at: New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: (011) 23211124.

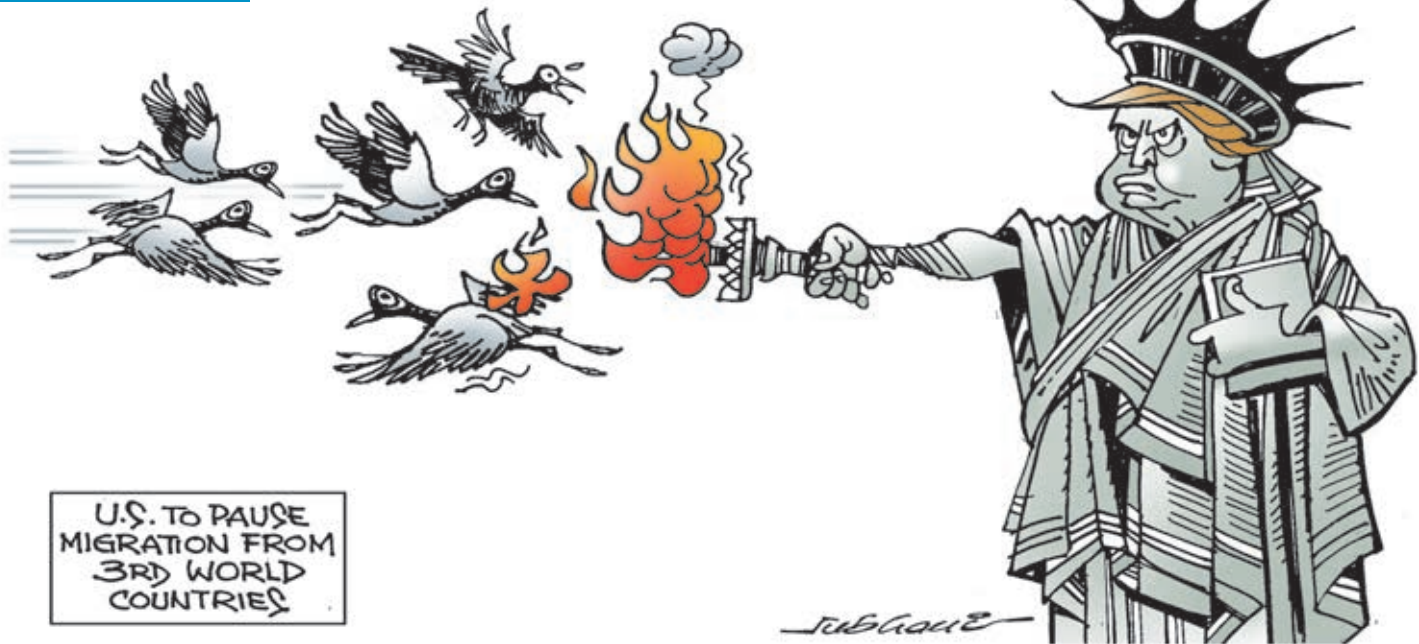
Published and Printed on behalf of and for

Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002 at BFL Infotech Ltd., C-9, Sector-III, Noida -201301.

London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ.

RNI Registration number: 57290/94

Subhani



K'taka tug of war: Who holds the real power?



Bharat Bhushan

In Karnataka, deputy chief minister D.K. Shivakumar is seeking to oust the state's Congress chief minister Siddaramaiah because he was apparently promised a turn at the top job when the party formed the state government in 2023. However, the Congress Party does not seem to be in a position to implement that change.

It may seem strange that the party should be in the throes of a crisis while it holds a comfortable majority in the Legislative Assembly—137 seats out of 224. The crisis is of its own making and the survival of the Congress government is not at stake, although its leadership is.

Mr Shivakumar is the most efficient resource-gatherer of the Congress and his fund-raising abilities ensure that it can fight resource-intensive elections against the BJP across the country. Few others in the Congress can match his network in business and politics that gives him financial heft and logistics support.

Mr Shivakumar has come to the rescue for the Congress in several high-stakes situations, such as "herding" MLAs to his resort or "safe" hotels to prevent defections in crucial elections. In February 2024, he played the shepherd during the Karnataka Rajya Sabha election; in 2017 he moved 44 MLAs from Gujarat to his resort near Bengaluru to ensure Ahmad Patel's victory in the Rajya Sabha elections, and in the 2019 Karnataka trust vote crisis, he camped outside a Mumbai hotel to prevent MLAs from defecting to the BJP.

Why would the Congress high command not respect a commitment to one of its most loyal soldiers? The answer is complex.

While Mr Shivakumar

controls the purse, it is Mr Siddaramaiah who commands the numbers. For survival and stability, the Congress needs to balance Mr Shivakumar's organisational and resource strength with Mr Siddaramaiah's mass politics.

Mr Siddaramaiah claims that he has the people's mandate to serve a full five-year term. What emboldens him is not only the fact that he seems to enjoy the trust of the Congress high command but also the strong support he enjoys among social groups which form the backbone of Congress support in Karnataka.

His AHINDA (Kannada acronym for *Alpasankhyataru*, or minorities, *Hindulidavaru*, or backward classes, and *Dalitaru*, or Dalits) strategy of consolidating the votes of the marginalised resonates not only on the ground but also with the Congress' central leadership.

Mr Siddaramaiah had briefly flirted with the idea of floating an AHINDA party, to consolidate these groups into a durable political force when he was expelled from the Janata Dal (Secular) in 2005. However, instead, he decided to join Congress in 2006 bringing his AHINDA base along, strengthening the party's social coalition. This popular base and the ready-made organisational structure of the Congress eventually propelled him to chief ministership in 2013.

Mr Shivakumar's base, on the other hand, is among the Vokkaligas, the dominant agrarian community, concentrated especially in the Old Mysuru region of southern Karnataka. The Vokkaligas form a decisive bloc in state politics. The Congress needs both Mr Shivakumar's Vokkaliga support base, especially against the entrenched JD(S) Vokkaliga

The 77-year-old Siddaramaiah's AHINDA strategy of consolidating the votes of the marginalised resonates not only on the ground but also with the Congress' central leadership

base in Old Mysuru, along with the AHINDA coalition of Mr Siddaramaiah, to stay in power.

If the Congress stays with Mr Siddaramaiah as chief minister, the options before Mr Shivakumar are limited. He will gain little by splitting the party. In any case, he has made it clear that he is "not in a hurry" and that he will abide by the decision of the party high command (as has Mr Siddaramaiah).

He cannot benefit from joining the BJP and may be prevented by JD(S)'s main Vokkaliga face, H.D. Kumaraswamy, who although currently an alliance partner of the BJP, may not be beyond merging his party with the BJP to hamper Mr Shivakumar's ambitions. Besides, the BJP already has a few Vokkaliga faces in its state leadership such as C.N. Ashwath Narayan and R. Ashoka (both former deputy CMs), and C.N. Manjunath (recent entrant and H.D. Deve Gowda's son-in-law who crossed over to the BJP).

Mr Shivakumar's strength lies in his Congress identity. Breaking away will isolate him and weaken his bargaining power. In any case, his support in the Legislative Assembly is estimated to be limited to 40-45 MLAs compared to Mr Siddaramaiah's 60-65 MLAs.

Mr Shivakumar's strategy, therefore, seems to be to engage in high-stakes negotiations even as Mr Siddaramaiah insists on completing his five-year term. While staking his claim to chief ministership, Mr Shivakumar is also simultaneously signalling patience, keeping his loyalists MLAs close, yet also allowing them to demand

that the Congress keep its 2023 promise to him.

On the other hand, should the party sideline two-time chief minister Siddaramaiah despite his experience, it will have a far more destabilising and destructive effect. He has the potential to erode the AHINDA social alliance that has catapulted the Congress to power in the state. If ousted, Mr Siddaramaiah's loyalists could make Mr Shivakumar's majority fragile. Mr Siddaramaiah could also create moral pressure on the Congress claiming that he was betrayed, even though he had implemented all the welfare promises made by the Congress. This could weaken the Congress' grip on governance even if the party does not break or face defections.

However, his age goes against Mr Siddaramaiah. He is 77 years old and this feeds into the narrative that he should make way for a younger leader. Mr Shivakumar is 63 years old and is seen as more energetic, with a longer political future before him. Traditionally, the Congress had rotated older leaders with younger mid-career figures in states where succession battles loomed. Where it has not done so, as in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, the internal power tussles have damaged the party.

Mr Shivakumar's relative youth strengthens the claim that he represents the next generation of the Congress in Karnataka and that he could lead the party in the 2028 Assembly election and well beyond. Age may not diminish Mr Siddaramaiah's popularity, but it will be an important consideration in deciding on succession and stability in the party.

Given the fact that the Congress Party rules only three states in India, it will have to choose its options very carefully to ensure its government remains stable in the richest state where it has more than a comfortable majority.

The writer is a senior journalist based in New Delhi

LETTERS

PAK RETREAT

The relocation of nearly 72 Pakistani terror launch pads to deeper areas — 12 behind Sialkot and Zaffarwal and about 60 elsewhere — signals a significant retreat triggered by the combined impact of Operation Sindoor and recent floods. These launch pads were earlier used to push infiltrators into India. Even JeM and LeT, once running separate camps, have merged into composite units under pressure. Pakistan's increasing reliance on drone-based narco-terrorism, aided by collaborators on the Indian side, has further exposed its desperation. In response, India has intensified round-the-clock vigilance through specialised anti-drone teams.

R.S. Narula  
Patiala

WHITHER JUSTICE?

M.P. NATHANAEI'S column on the decline of the CPI (Maoist) captures leadership losses but not the conditions that sustained the movement. Jal, Jangal, Jameen still face encroachment, and communities with no chappal on their feet were once convinced that only a gun in their arms could protect dignity. Even as the State hails the victory of the ballot over the bullet, videographed surrenders and glorified encounters dominate the script. Recently, Hidma sympathisers hijacked an AQI protest in Delhi, shouting: "Kitne Hidma maaroge, har ghar mein Hidma paida hoga." As Prakash Jha's Chakravyyuh (2012) showed, the conflict's roots lie deeper than armed cadres. Ending the insurgency needs more than force; it needs justice.

Harsh Pawaria  
Rohtak

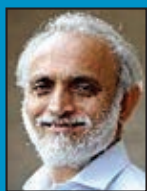
TOXIC NEWSPAPERS

FSSAI'S NEW WARNING highlights a hidden health risk: wrapping food in newspapers can transfer harmful inks and chemicals, causing illnesses. This guidance encourages safer alternatives — like food-grade paper, stainless steel or glass — for protecting both hygiene and public trust. Though habits and cost may slow adoption, embracing these safer practices ensures long-term health benefits and strengthens food safety culture.

Asad Damrubar  
Mumbai

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Kyamudin Ansari (Nov. 28). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr



Impressive GDP growth lifts Modi govt's spirits, but questions remain

The estimated GDP figure of 8.2 per cent for the second quarter of the 2025-26 fiscal year has lifted the spirits of the Narendra Modi government, now into its third term in office. It is 8.2 per cent compared to 5.6 per cent for the second quarter in the preceding fiscal of 2024-25. It's an impressive jump, at least on paper. It's a slightly different story when 8.2 per cent is compared to 7.8 per cent growth in Quarter 1. But governments, political leaders and parties who head the government have a right to pat their backs for the slightest improvement in figures. The first half of fiscal 2025-26 now stands at 8.0 per cent, with chief economic adviser V. Anantha Nageswaran looking to an annual growth rate of more than 7.0 per cent. It is evident, however, that the growth rate figures from quarter to quarter and year to year are still moving at a snail's pace. The fault is not entirely with the government. The global economic outlook is not too bright.

A close look at growth factors reveals details that are less robust than they are made out to be. The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) for September 2025 stands at a reasonably good four per cent year on year, with the manufacturing sector expanding by 4.8 per cent. For July 2025, the figures stand at 3.5 per cent and 5.4 per cent, and in August 2025, the figures are 4.0 per cent and 3.8 per cent respectively. Similarly, the breakdown of exports in merchandise reveals an interesting pattern.

Cumulative exports (merchandise plus services)

grew by 4.84 per cent in the April-October 2025 period to \$491.80 billion. Of this, exports in merchandise showed that marine products contributed 16.18 per cent, meat, dairy and poultry 23.9 per cent, other cereals 25.52 per cent, cashew nuts 28.32 per cent, and electronic goods 37. 82 per cent.

Agriculture, dairy and meat industries are huge contributors, and they are not seen as the star performers they are. It is more than likely that agriculture, dairy and meat will remain key sectors in India's exports. Ways and means must be found to strengthen and support them.

If the government is doing anything for them on support and investment, it must speak loudly about it instead of focusing only on services, electronic goods and Brahmos missiles. The money transfers to farmers, which the government is so proud of, doesn't seem to reflect the performance of exports of other cereals and cashew nuts, dairy, meat and poultry. The government seems to fight shy of admitting that there are valuable earnings from the sale of milk and milk products, of meat, including beef, fish, chicken and eggs. BJP leaders in the government may feel this will have a negative impact on their image of vegetarian Hindutva.

There is also a desperate attempt by the government to link the Q2 growth rate to the success of the programmes and schemes of the Modi government in the last 11 years. Finance minister

Nirmala Sitharaman says that "public investment" is sustaining growth, which is not a great sign. Private investment continues to be a laggard. It will be argued this is linked to interest rates. It suggests that there is a need for the Reserve Bank to reduce the repo rate and stimulate a credit spurt, in order to revive private participation. Captains of industry expect the RBI to take a calculated risk by letting down the guard to help them out, though they are unwilling to take any risks themselves.

The government boasts that the country is sustaining growth. Of course, they refrain from calling the eight per cent quarterly growth rate and seven per cent annual rate as high growth, as growth with low inflation lacks economic credibility. Conventional wisdom has it that a reasonable rate of inflation is inevitable to sustain a robust economic growth rate. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman are wary of inflation, and that may have helped in a stable economy despite its vulnerabilities. So, India's economy seems stuck in shallow waters. Talk about AI, about space and nuclear power remains rhetorical as these sectors are not yet at a take-off stage. Their contribution to the economy as of now remains nascent.

While it is the right policy to pursue frontier science areas, the *roti-dal* bases of the economy are elsewhere — in agriculture, in intermediary goods and the domestic services sector. Most of the

time the service sector is seen only in the context of high-end computer-enabled services. More time, thought and funds must be spent on the domestic services sector. Tourism and hospitality are the most conspicuous parts of the domestic services sector. But there are others. Private individuals, more than private enterprises, are tapping into this through social media. Its potential has not yet been fully gauged.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has raised the issue of the reliability of the accuracy of economic data in India. There is enough wiggle room for the government to play around with numbers, without too much distortion. The temptation can be curbed if economic statistics, or statistics of any kind, whether of electoral rolls or population, is made free of government interference. It is a big issue and a political question at that. There is every reason to suspect that the Narendra Modi government is exerting undue influence in the interpretation of numbers, whether with regards to the economy, to electoral rolls or the Census. It is necessary for the Modi government to demonstrate that its hands are off these exercises. It needs to understand the strategic importance of data, but it shows all signs of an authoritarian government which wants to control it.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	85706.67	-0.02
Nifty 50	26202.95	-0.05
S&P 500*	6,849.09	+0.54
Dollar (₹)	89.47	+0.18
Pound Sterling (₹)	118.15	+0.13
Euro (₹)	103.54	+0.14
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	126,920▲1,284	+1.13
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	62.32	-0.10
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.515	+0.011
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.017	-0.002

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

Govt appoints Vivek Chaturvedi as CBIC chairman

The government has appointed IRS officer Vivek Chaturvedi as the chairman of the central board of indirect taxes and customs (CBIC). He succeeds Sanjay Kumar Agarwal, who superannuated on November 28. "Appointments committee of the cabinet has approved the appointment of Vivek Chaturvedi, to post of chairman, CBIC," the department of personnel and training (DoPT) order said.

GRSE gets notices from BSE, NSE for non-compliance

Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers Ltd (GRSE) said it has received notices from both stock exchanges NSE and BSE for non-compliance with several corporate governance provisions under SEBI listing obligations during Q2 FY26. The exchanges have flagged violations of regulations relating to presence of independent directors and constitution of audit committee and nomination and remuneration committee.



CII seeks special funding body for green economy

Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) on Sunday urged the government to set up a dedicated finance institution and tech expo fund to promote the green economy. The industry body also has suggested establishing a green finance institution to mobilise large-scale, low-cost capital for India's green transition across renewable energy, clean mobility, green buildings, and industrial decarbonisation.

Wakefit IPO to be announced on December 8

Home and furnishings company Wakefit Innovations Ltd is gearing up to launch its initial public offering (IPO) on December 8 and closes on December 10 to raise around ₹1,400 crore. The company's maiden public offering is a combination of a fresh issue of equity shares aggregating up to ₹377.1 crore and an offer-for-sale of 4.67 crore shares by the selling shareholders, according to red herring prospectus.

Printed & Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at BFL Infotech Ltd, C-9 Sector 3, Noida-201301. Published at 219, N D Tiwari Bhawan, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Editor: Kaushik Mitter, RNI Registration number 30074/09, Air surcharge Re 1. © All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of The Editor, Financial Chronicle ® is prohibited.

Good GDP show raises hopes of fresh rate cut

Growth to face external pressure in second half of this fiscal

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, NOV. 30

With the second quarter economic growth print exceeding all projections, some economists expect the RBI to cut the benchmark repo rate this week to support growth, which would face more external pressure in the second half this fiscal due to the impact of higher US tariffs and normalisation of government capital expenditure.

Some feel expectations of a shallow rate cut of 25 basis points in the December policy appear to have faded.

The central bank is also likely to announce open market operations (OMO) to help provide liquidity during December when the advance tax payments flow out of the system. There may also be a revision in inflation and growth forecast by 0.1-0.2 per cent for FY26.

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the RBI will meet for the 5th time during the current fiscal year between Dec.3 and 5 to review the policy interest rate.

During its last two meetings in August and October, it went for pause after three successive rate cuts, totaling 100 basis points.

"The MPC faces a challenging act at the Dec. rate review, with the mix of a strong growth print and record low inflation. We expect an emphasis on forward looking growth guidance and high real rate buffer due to weak inflation, to justify a move to lower rates further," said Radhika Rao, executive

INVESTMENTS BY PEs, VCs TOUCH \$5.3 BILLION

New Delhi, Nov. 30: Private equity and venture capital (PE/VC) investments in India touched \$5.3 billion across 102 deals in October 2025, marking a 9 per cent rise year-on-year, according to the EY-IVCA monthly roundup.

"The number of deals decreased to 102 in October 2025, a 9 per cent year-on-year (112 deals in October 2024) and 30 per cent decline month-on-month (145 deals in September 2025)," said Vivek Soni, Partner and National Leader, Private Equity Service, EY.

Pure-play PE/VC investments hit a 13-month high of \$5 billion - an 81 per cent increase over October 2024 - while real estate and infrastructure investments fell sharply by 86 per cent.

Private investments in public equity (PIPE) emerged as the dominant deal category, surging nearly ten-fold to \$2.1 billion. Startup investments followed at \$2 billion, up 175 per cent year-on-year. Growth investments fell to \$810 million, while buy-outs remained flat at \$227 million.

Credit investments dropped 90 per cent to \$189 million. — PTI

WORK | MODE

Men moving into HR, beauty; women grab engg-aligned creative roles

Digital-first jobs shatter stereotypes

Mumbai, Nov. 30: The participation of women in creative and design roles have increased significantly, driven by the rapid adoption of digital-first careers like graphic design, content creation, and visual communication, says a report.

According to a report by blue and grey-collar recruitment platform WorkIndia, Indian women are now entering high-skill, male-dominated professions at a pace never seen before.

WorkIndia's data showed that women's participation

POSITIVE SENTIMENT

RBI'S MPC will meet for 5th time in FY26 between Dec. 3 and 5 to review policy interest rate. RBI LIKELY to provide liquidity during Dec. when advance tax payments flow out of system.

The credit policy comes at a time when inflation is at an all time low and growth on a high trajectory path. Therefore, it would be a close call on the repo rate. — MADAN SABNAVIS, Chief economist at BOB

director and senior economist at DBS Bank.

"The credit policy comes at a time when inflation is at an all time low and growth on a high trajectory path. It would be a close call on the repo rate.

Given that monetary policy is forward looking and inflation in Q4-FY26 and FY27 is likely to be in the 4 per cent plus region, we do not think that there should be any change in the policy rate," said Madan Sabnavis, chief economist, Bank of Baroda.

India's real GDP has grown at 8.2 per cent in Q2 of FY 2025-26 as against a growth rate of 5.6 per cent during Q2 of FY 2024-2025 and 7.8 per cent in Q1 2025-2026. The six-quarter high real GDP growth is expected to push up the full year number to above 7 per cent, with India retaining its tag of being the fastest growing major economy in the world.

Growth, GST, auto sales data to guide markets

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, NOV. 30

The market will react positively to better than expected growth in India's second-quarter GDP data as it brings hope of India's economy doing well despite steep hike in US tariff on India's exports.

GDP growth is likely to slow a bit in the second half of the financial year, according to analysts.

Rating agency Crisil expects growth in the second half to moderate to 6.1 per cent on US tariffs, softer global growth manifest alongside some waning in support from lower inflation.

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, NOV. 30

As market access has expanded through technology, new vulnerabilities have emerged. Online scams, deepfake impersonations, fraudulent trading applications, guaranteed return schemes, unregistered advisory groups and manipulative messaging platforms increasingly target unsuspecting individuals,



Corp. credit demand is reviving, says SBI

New Delhi, Nov. 30: With the pick-up in economic activity, State Bank of India (SBI) is seeing a clear revival in corporate credit demand and expects the segment to hit double-digit growth over the remaining two quarters of the current financial year, the bank's Chairman C S Setty said.

"We have about ₹7 lakh crore loan sanctions, a mix of unutilised working capital limits and term loans that are currently under disbursement," he said.

Besides, several project loans are presently under discussion, he said.

"Corporate credit, which was lagging for quite some time, witnessed a

turnaround with 7.1 per cent growth in Q2. Our guidance on the corporate credit would be the lower double digit in the two quarters with the available pipeline," he said.

Improving economic activity is pushing up working capital utilisation, the chairman said.

With regards to term loans, he said, the ones which are already approved and under disbursement are getting drawn, and the third category, where the projects are under discussion, will create that replacement pipeline.

The SBI chairman said that bank may not need equity capital to drive credit growth. — PTI



tion. "Tax relief measures are expected to support growth by stoking private consumption," Crisil said.

Auto sales data will also be released on Monday impacting auto stocks as analysts expect higher auto sales in November on GST cut. November GST collections data to be released on Dec.1 would

viduals, said Sebi chairman Tuhin Kanta Pandey. "Even the strongest systems cannot replace awareness, which remains the core foundation of investor protection. Around 50,000 investor awareness programmes have been held across nearly 90 per cent of districts in 36 States and Union Territories during



2024-25, Sebi chief said during a regional seminar organised by NSE at Puducherry on Saturday.

"We will take up several multi-media, multi-lingual theme-based campaigns in collaboration with the Sebi ecosystem. Based on learnings from Sebi's Investor Perception Survey, we will design the outreach strate-

gy for investor awareness in different languages for maximum impact. Sebi's new state-level offices will aid in the implementation of this strategy," he said.

Financial literacy is the foundation to save, invest and protect their hard-earned money, he said.

The challenge today is to increase participation and ensure that individuals enter the market with clarity rather than imitation, Pandey said.



"India is entering a new era where careers are no longer dictated by gender, but by ambition and skill."

"The rise of women in engineering-aligned creative roles and law, alongside men moving confi-

dently into HR and beauty, shows that young Indians are rewriting long-held stereotypes. This shift is not temporary, it marks a permanent transformation in how the country views talent and opportu-

Goods exports to US fall 28.5% in 5 months

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, NOV. 30

India's merchandise exports to the US fell 28.5 per cent in the past five months. While the tariff-hit labour intensive sectors saw a decline of 31 per cent, exports facing uniform sectoral tariffs and those with no tariffs also saw drop in shipments, indicating a slowing US economy.

Between May and October 2025 when US tariffs rose from 10 per cent to 50 per cent, shipments fell 28.5 per cent, plunging from \$8.83 billion to \$6.31 billion.

The steepest decline occurred in labour intensive products where India alone faced 50 per cent tariffs. These goods, which represented 52.1 per cent of October exports, collapsed 31.2 per cent, falling from \$4.78 billion to \$3.29 billion, down by \$1.5 billion, finds GTRI.

Gems and jewellery exports fell 27.3 per cent from \$500.2 million to

TOUGH PHASE

BETWEEN May and Oct. 2025 when US tariffs rose from 10% to 50%, shipments fell from \$8.83 bn to \$6.31 bn.

LABOUR INTENSIVE goods, which represents 52.1% of October exports, collapses 31.2%, falling from \$4.78 bn to \$3.29 bn.

TEXTILES and garment exports down by 31.9% from \$944 mn to \$643 mn, of which garments plunged 40.6%.



\$363.8 million. Solar panel shipments tumbled 75.7 per cent from \$202.6 million to \$49.2 million. Textiles and garment exports fell 31.9 per cent from \$944 million to \$643 million, of which garments plunged 40.6 per cent. Chemical exports tumbled 38 per cent, declining from \$537 million to \$333 million.

Seafood exports sank 38.7 per cent as US shrimp buyers shifted from India to Ecuador and Vietnam, draining jobs from India's

coastal processing hubs. Agricultural exports plunged 45.4 per cent, with dairy exports crashing 72 per cent and cocoa exports witnessing nil shipments.

However, products facing uniform sectoral tariffs like iron, steel, aluminum, and auto parts, which formed just 7.6 per cent of shipments in October, also witnessed decline in shipments. Exports in this fell by 23.8 per cent, sliding from \$629 million in May to \$480 million in October.

Oil panel suggests mkt-driven pricing

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, NOV. 30

A high-level expert panel set up by the oil regulator Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) has called for structural reforms to create a free, competitive natural gas market in India, arguing that market-driven pricing and open access are essential for the country's clean energy transition.

The government aims to raise the share of natural gas in the country's energy basket to 15 per cent by 2030, up from the current 6.2 per cent.

In its report, titled as 'Vision 2040 - Natural Gas Infrastructure in India', the panel led by former PNGRB chairperson D K Sarraf said a liberalised gas market would enhance transparency, spur investment, improve resource allocation and deepen liquidity. "A competitive system would remove current market distortions and attract new players across exploration, pipelines, LNG terminals and city gas distribution," the report said.

Natural gas, extracted from underground and offshore reservoirs, is used to generate power, produce fertiliser, turned

into CNG to power vehicles, piped to household kitchens for cooking and serve as feedstock across several industries. Seen as a key transition fuel as India shifts from fossil fuels to renewables, its role in the energy mix is set to expand.

India's present pricing framework — an assortment of government-regulated gas, market-linked domestic production and LNG imports — creates inefficiencies, the committee noted. It flagged resale restrictions in

regasified LNG (RLNG) contracts, lack of an independent system operator (ISO), limited open access to infrastructure, and the absence of contract-path transmission tariffs and location-based taxation as major hurdles.

Although India is among the world's fastest-growing gas markets, it still lacks a liquid trading hub for price discovery. "A robust market would bring the country closer to global hubs such as Henry Hub, NBP and TTF, enable flexible contracting and support better hedging mechanisms," the panel said.

The panel suggested creation of a neutral, not-for-profit ISO to manage pipeline capacity.



CODE ON SOCIAL SECURITY



ON NOVEMBER 21, the government of India implemented four labour codes replacing 73 years old existing 29 labour laws. One of the codes is about social security which provides job security and welfare of 40 crore workers in the country.

THE SOCIAL SECURITY code is to ensure that workers get welfare benefits and financial protection through various schemes and programmes that include retirement benefits, insurance, health care, maternity, disability.

INDIA'S SOCIAL SECURITY COVERAGE MAY REACH 80-85% IN NEXT 2 TO 3 YRS.

THE NEW CODE on social security merges nine existing Social Security Acts like EPF Act, ESI Act, Gratuity Act, Maternity benefits Act, others into one framework.

KEY PROVISIONS

GRATUITY of fixed term or contract employees reduced from 5 yrs to 1 yr. FOR THE FIRST time, social security benefits to be extended to unorganised, gig and platform workers in the country.

CREATION of a social security fund to be used to provide benefits such as life insurance, PF schemes for workers.





## *Institutionalising animal representation*



It is high time Congress leaders at the State and national levels look beyond their narrow individual interests and calculations. In fact, the party could use the tussle in Karnataka to shuffle its deck nationally. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge is also from the State. If the social dynamics of the State make it risky to make Mr. Shivakumar the Chief Minister, the Congress could consider Mr. Kharge, a Dalit who has lost out in the race for the post more than once in the past. Mr. Kharge might be acceptable to all factions and, most importantly, to the party's social base. The Congress is in desperate need of a leadership overhaul, particularly in the Hindi belt where it is struggling to match up to the Bharatiya Janata Party's overwhelming capacity. It needs a mix of people with various skills – experience of running the party and contesting elections, ideological clarity, and realpolitik – to steer it out of the current logjam. Any of these would be possible only if key leaders are willing to make some personal sacrifices for the good of the party, and Mr. Gandhi himself driving that conversation.

So, what merit does India see now? First, it is an important soft-power medium. Second, the nation's sporting aspirations have grown manifold, and though performances by its sports-persons have not kept pace, there is a genuine push toward diversifying on-field excellence and going beyond just cricket. India has world-class heroes such as double-Olympic medallist javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra to showcase, and there is hope that big ticket events, when held in one's backyard, can inspire a generation. There is the infrastructural uplift they can trigger, helping not just the athletes but also the public at large. But there are potential pitfalls too. In sporting terms, the CWG stands diminished. Glasgow 2026 will feature just 10 disciplines, and those such as badminton, hockey, shooting and cricket have been excised. There are very few sports that match up to international standards, for nations such as the United States and China are not part of the Commonwealth. India has won 61, 66, 64, 101 medals in the last four editions, but in the subsequent Olympics, it has secured just six, seven, two and six medals, respectively. India also has an escalating problem with doping, which can mar its standing if left uncontrolled. The financial outlay for the CWG should be kept in mind too, for costs can be prohibitive. Ahmedabad 2030, thus, offers opportunity and hope. It should be used to display a strong present and shape a glorious future.

## *AIDS and TB fight — Tamil Nadu shows the way again*

*The views expressed are personal*

by AI companionship, 'parasocial' captures the emotional and cultural shifts of 2025, a mirror to how people connect, consume and cope online.

**R. Sivakumar,**  
Chennai



# India needs research pipelines

India will not meet its growth ambitions on public grants alone. The countries that turned science into industry did one thing well: they matched firm outlays to campus strengths and kept that link steady for years. The policy question is clear. How do we move private research outlays from episodic Corporate Social Responsibility to a predictable pipeline that buys lab time, funds doctoral cohorts, and books pilot lines?

**Global benchmarks**  
Leading tech firms run innovation budgets at industrial scale. In 2024, Meta’s research outlay reached about \$44 billion, near a third of revenue. Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, IBM, and Microsoft also reported multibillion-dollar programmes. In the U.S., enterprises booked roughly \$692 billion of domestic research against about \$14 trillion in net sales in 2022, a ratio near 5%. Policy instruments translate that investment into campus partnerships. The National Science Foundation’s Industry-University Cooperative Research Centers pool company fees for pre-competitive university work. The Semiconductor Research Corporation funds multi-university consortia that train talent while tackling industry-relevant problems. China’s Huawei reported an R&D expenditure at 179.7 billion yuan in 2024, equal to 20.8% of revenue. More than half of Huawei’s workforce is in R&D roles. Build Your Dreams , a Chinese multinational auto company, invested 54.2 billion yuan in 2024 on R&D against roughly 777 billion yuan of revenue, an intensity of nearly 7%. These examples demonstrate one trait. Corporate research works with campuses through joint centres, shared lines, long-horizon consortia and open talent pipelines. India should scale this on Indian terms. The goal is self-reliance with open doors to global science while anchoring



**Mamidala Jagadesh Kumar,**  
Former Chairman, UGC and former Vice-Chancellor, JNU

The countries that turned science into industry did one thing well: they matched firm outlays to campus strengths and kept that link steady for years.

discovery to India’s needs. Private research outlays need size, predictability, and structured linkages with higher education institutions (HEIs). Today, India’s GERD sits near 0.65% of GDP, with enterprises funding about two-fifths. Advanced economies show a higher firm share. Yet India has bright spots. Tata Motors reported revenue of about ₹4.38 lakh crore in FY24 and R&D outlay of ₹29,398 crore, an intensity of 6.7%. Sun Pharma invested 6.7% of global revenues in R&D in FY24. Dr. Reddy’s spent ₹22.9 billion, about 8.2% of sales. Bharat Electronics dedicated 6.24% of turnover to R&D in FY24, an important signal in a strategic sector. Reliance Industries recorded over ₹4,100 crore of R&D expenditure in FY2024-25. In terms of partnerships, India already runs strong platforms. IIT Madras Research Park hosts more than 200 companies near faculty labs and student teams, creating a daily flow of ideas and talent. The Ministry of Defence promotes startup and research lab teaming through iDEX. The India Semiconductor Mission pairs industry investments with skill pipelines and academic partnerships, as seen in the Micron ATMP project at Sanand.

**Policy actions**  
These strands form a workable base. The task now is to scale them and set clear expectations for private R&D expenditure and university linkages across sectors. First, we must set three-year R&D-to-sales ratios for autos, pharma, electronics, defence, space and energy that climb year by year, balanced with export goals and cash-flow realities. We must use shared IP frameworks that reward publication and commercialisation together. Second, reward co-funded projects and shared facilities and offer matching grants where industry rupees flow through HEIs for multi-year projects with open data deliverables and

industry-relevant key performance indicators. Create a dedicated line item for university-managed pilot lines and testbeds that industry can book by the hour. Seed multi-university centres around a portfolio of problems rather than isolated projects. Third, modernise tax instruments for research. Weighted deductions can focus on measurable outputs such as patents, standards contributions, clinical milestones or field trials. Link incentives to proof of collaboration with accredited HEIs and to hiring graduate researchers into industry roles. Fourth, teach collaboration. Support campus programmes that train faculty and PhD scholars to work with industry, negotiate IP, and run translational projects. Bring more PhDs into product groups, create dual-track roles with adjunct appointments, and sponsor doctoral cohorts aligned to corporate roadmaps. Fifth, ask listed companies to report R&D investment and the share of spend that flows to Indian HEIs. Disclosure nudges boards to treat research as strategic, not incidental. Publicise results in Indian languages and in practitioner-friendly formats. That builds prestige around research careers and attracts talent. India’s university campuses sit next to some of the world’s most dynamic markets, and they carry knowledge traditions that examine technology as part of a broader human inquiry. When corporate research engages that heritage, solutions gain depth and context and match what high-performing corporate R&D needs. India has the labs, talent, and markets. The task before the industry is clear: set transparent targets, match grants that buy real lab time, and collaborate better. The task before academic institutions is straightforward: shape research for measurable value, welcome industry questions, and show evidence of success. Do that, and research becomes a national supply chain, not wishful thinking.

# The Chandigarh question

It demands a political solution, not an administrative procedure

## STATE OF PLAY

**Vikas Vasudeva**  
vikas.vasudeva@thehindu.co.in



After a political furore, the Central government has backed away from introducing a Bill to include the Union Territory (UT) of Chandigarh under the ambit of Article 240 of the Constitution. Article 240 empowers the President to make regulations for the peace, progress, and good governance of certain UTs that do not have their own legislatures. The government’s attempt to introduce the Bill raised the fundamental question about the Centre’s attempts at overreach in the country’s federal structure. In November, the Centre proposed to include Chandigarh under the ambit of Article 240. As per a bulletin of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, the government intended to bring the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2025, in the upcoming Winter Session of Parliament, beginning December 1, 2025. It wanted “to align Chandigarh with other Union Territories without legislatures – such as the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, and Puducherry – when its Legislative Assembly is dissolved or suspended.” The backlash was swift and intense from Punjab. The government then clarified that it would not introduce the Bill this session. The fact that stakeholders learned about this move through parliamentary bulletins rather than any structured dialogue raised the suspicion that the government was adopting a unilateral approach to concentrate authority in New Delhi. The claim over Chandigarh

– the joint capital of Punjab and Haryana – has been a sensitive and emotive issue since the Punjab Reorganisation Act, 1966. The Punjab governor serves as the Administrator of Chandigarh. Punjab has been asking for the handing over of Chandigarh, pointing out that the Agreement of 1970 stated that the capital project area of Chandigarh “would, as a whole, go to Punjab,” which was a clear commitment from the Central government. In 1985, the Rajiv-Longowal Accord reaffirmed that Chandigarh would be transferred to Punjab. These unfulfilled commitments continue to fuel resentment and distrust between Punjab and the Central government. Earlier, the Centre’s decision to restructure Panjab University’s Senate and Syndicate – the university’s governing bodies – was also met with stiff opposition and rescinded. Critics and political parties were quick to point out that introducing the change in Chandigarh through parliamentary bulletins revealed how little the Centre government respects the spirit of consultation, consensus, and shared governance – the nucleus of federal spirit. The Ministry of Home Affairs later clarified its position, stating that the proposal did not seek to alter Chandigarh’s governance or administrative structure. The Ministry noted

that “a suitable decision will be taken only after adequate consultations with all stakeholders, keeping in mind the interests of Chandigarh.” Punjab shares an international border with a hostile Pakistan, and it has been through a traumatic phase of militancy between the mid-1980s and early 1990s. Its geopolitical reality cannot be ignored and this is why Punjab needs to be dealt with sensitivity. Yet, it appears that the Central government’s recent decisions on Chandigarh and Panjab University have been made at administrative or bureaucratic levels, bypassing political consultation and disregarding federal principles. This is a dangerous approach, especially for a border State with such a violent history. Rather than resolving the decades-old issue of Chandigarh’s transfer, the Centre’s actions signal an intent to consolidate control instead. Against the backdrop of decisions surrounding Chandigarh being taken from New Delhi, several people in political circles, as well as others, feel that attempts are being made to negate regional politics, regional interests, and regional power. This negation and this top-down approach has resulted in reactions from several quarters in Punjab. The Chandigarh question demands a political solution, not an administrative procedure. The decisions affecting Punjab’s identity and territorial claims must involve genuine political dialogue and consensus-building, not bureaucratic notifications. For a border State with such a complex history, such moves, and the perceptions caused by them, carry serious consequences that extend beyond mere administrative efficiency.

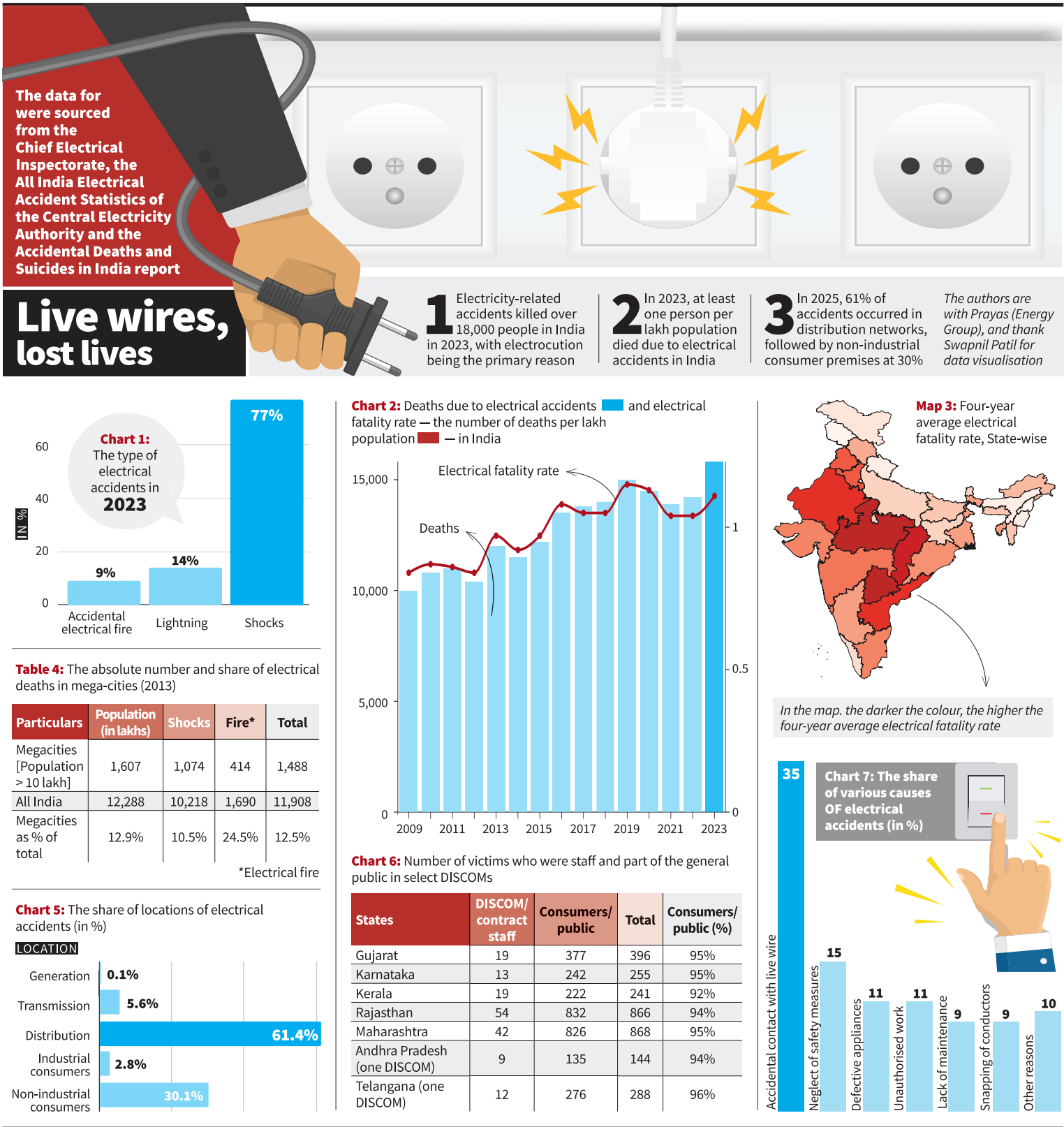
# Steady rise in electricity-related fatality rates in India

Most accidents in 2025 occurred due to accidental contact with live wires

## DATA POINT

**Cheta Sheth,**  
**Yardhan Gupta**  
**Sreekumar Nhalur**

Electricity-related accidents killed over 18,000 people in India in 2023. Electrocutation is the primary reason followed by lightning and electrical fire (Chart 1). Over the years, electrical fatality rate – the number of deaths per lakh population – has risen (Chart 2). In 2023, at least one person per lakh population died due to electrical accidents in India. In Japan, Australia, New Zealand, the U.K. and the U.S., the electrical fatality rate was between 0.01 and 0.04. Among States, the four-year average electrical fatality rate varied widely, ranging from as low as 0.2 in some States to as high as 2.6 in others (Map 3). Until 2013, the Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India report showed the break-up of electrical deaths in more than 50 megacities. In 2013, around 13% of the total electrical deaths in India occurred in megacities (Table 4). These cities also had a higher proportion of deaths due to electrical fires (~25%) and a comparatively smaller share of deaths from shocks (~11%). According to the Chief Electrical Inspectorate, in 2025, 61% of accidents occurred in distribution networks, followed by non-industrial consumer premises at 30% (Chart 5). Given that most accidents occurred at the distribution level, we examined data from select distribution companies (DISCOMs). DISCOMs reported that more than 90% of the victims were general public (Table 6). Most accidents in 2025 occurred due to accidental contact with live wire (35%) and neglect in safety measures or lack of supervision (15%). This shows poor attention to safety by the DISCOMs and low awareness among the public.



## FROM THE ARCHIVES

The **Hindu**

FIFTY YEARS AGO DECEMBER 1, 1975

## Riches down the drain

Geneva, Nov. 30: Recession and the energy squeeze are reviving such old-fashioned things as glass bottles and cars built to last, and the U.N. Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) says there are riches in the refuse that housewives throw down the garbage chute each day. ECE experts held a meeting on the subject this week and found, for example, that in France an average tonne of household refuse is worth more than \$241. It contains \$200 worth of aluminium, \$17 of steel, \$12 of glass and \$12 of paper. ECE said it had become worthwhile to sort and recover it. Sorting paper, metal, glass and other material from refuse is done by local administrations and companies in many countries, among them West Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Britain and the United States. The experts, ECE said, also discovered a new definition for so-called “non-waste products”. They must have long life, consume little energy and material and be easily recyclable. To make clear what they mean, the experts point to two “classic” examples: the milk bottle and the bicycle. Mathematically speaking, a gallon of drinks in bottles which make eight round trips represents a consumption of energy a little more than one-third of that used if it had been in non-returnable bottles, the experts found. Simpler still is the bicycle as an example of non-waste production, because it is faster than walking and offers an “incomparably better performance than a bus or a motor car,” according to the ECE waste brains.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO DECEMBER 1, 1925

## Censorship in India

London, Nov. 26: In the House of Commons, Mr. Senrr asked whether private correspondence from Europe and America was still opened and detained by the Censor in several post offices in India. Earl Winterton, replying, referred to Sec. XXVI of Indian Post Office Act, 1898, under which the Governor-General or the Local Government is empowered, on the occurrence of public emergency or in the interests of public safety and tranquility, to intercept postal matter, and added that such power was necessary for all Governments and there was no reason to suppose that it was being abused or used without good reason in India.



# Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of Indian nationals evacuated from Sri Lanka

**400** Around 150 of them were sent back to Delhi aboard flight C130 while 250 of them were sent to Trivandrum on flight IL 76 due to Cyclone Ditwah. Both the aircraft had arrived in Sri Lanka on Saturday carrying food and humanitarian aid. PTI

Number of BLOs in U.P. accused of negligence in SIR work

**28** Assistant Electoral Officer Alok Pratap Singh said that a review of the SIR work was conducted, during which it was found that 28 BLOs had completed less than 25% of the assigned revision work. Mr. Singh said such low numbers reflect “serious laxity” on the part of the officials. PTI

Number of families affected by eviction drive in Assam

**1,700** An eviction drive was underway in Assam’s Nagaon on the second consecutive day to clear encroachments from 5,962 bighas of forest land. About 426 pucca and 985 kuccha units out of 1,548 houses of 1,700 families were demolished on Saturday. PTI

Number of people killed in Hong Kong inferno

**146** The fate of 150 people is still unclear as search operations continued on the fifth day. Eight people connected with the renovation work of the buildings that caught fire on Wednesday, were arrested by Hong Kong’s anti-corruption body for allegedly using inflammable materials. PTI

Rajasthan HC’s target of women drivers on ride-hailing apps

**15** In per cent. The High Court also directed raising the target to 25% over the next two to three years. The court order also said that platforms must offer women passengers the option to choose a woman driver as their first preference. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

Follow us  facebook.com/thehindu  X.com/the\_hindu  instagram.com/the\_hindu

## How Pakistan’s judiciary is being undermined

Why has the 27th amendment created a new Federal Constitutional Court? Does it curtail the role and powers of Pakistan’s Supreme Court? What did the 26th amendment mandate? Has the judiciary and the executive faced off before? What is the way forward?

EXPLAINER

D. Suba Chandran

The story so far:

**I**n November 12-13, Pakistan’s National Assembly and the Senate passed the 27th amendment, with the President also giving his assent. While the amendment introduces new provisions in the military command structure, it has far-reaching implications for Pakistan’s judiciary. The amendment has created a new Federal Constitutional Court (FCC), and has curtailed the Supreme Court’s role as the custodian of the Constitution, thereby reducing the judiciary’s independence. Three judges from the Supreme and High Courts have already resigned in protest against the 27th amendment, while four judges from the Islamabad High Court have appealed against it.

What are the implications?

The 27th amendment will affect the judiciary’s independence in the following ways. First, the creation of a new FCC to address issues relating to the Constitution and federal-provincial relations would mean that the Supreme Court would no longer have its original jurisdiction. Thus, the Supreme Court would not hear cases relating to the interpretation of the Constitution, fundamental rights, or questions of federal-provincial relations. In recent years, the Supreme Court had used its original jurisdiction to deliberate on a few high profile political developments including the Panama Case (which resulted in the formation of a Joint Investigation Team and the disqualification of Nawaz Sharif, the then Prime Minister in 2017) and the Memogate (in which Pakistan’s Ambassador to the U.S. was investigated on whether he authored a memo that asked the U.S. to support the civilian government in 2011, then led by the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), and prevent a coup).

Second, the 27th amendment provides the executive with the power to transfer judges without their consent. Critics of the amendment argue that this provision would enable the executive to transfer judges who do not toe its line. Though the executive has to follow certain procedures, in effect, it could transfer judges to secure its choice or to penalise those who disagree with it. This would significantly undermine the judiciary’s independence at the higher level. The real reason for the creation of an FCC – though the executive is trying to justify it in terms of necessity – is to pick those judges who will be amenable, especially with respect to constitutional matters. The pace at which the FCC’s chief justice has been appointed, along with other judges, and the space it found for itself in the Islamabad High Court premises, the critics argue, is part of a plan to subvert the Supreme Court’s “over reach” on constitutional matters.

Third, is the effect the relationship between the FCC and the Supreme Court will have on the judiciary. While a section of judges and lawyers are against the amendment and the FCC, another section has accepted it and is even ready to join it. While senior and former judges have been demanding a “Full Court Meeting,” it did little when it met during the third week of November. Today, the FCC already has a Chief Justice and a few other judges; it has also started entertaining cases in the first week of its existence. The judiciary seems divided, and this will only



Point of no return: The Supreme Court of Pakistan in Islamabad, Pakistan in 2023. REUTERS

further weaken it.

Overall, the 27th amendment gives the executive and the legislature an edge over the judiciary, thereby undermining the essence of the balance of power in a constitutional democracy. It also undermines one of the crowning successes of the 18th amendment, which aimed to depoliticise the judiciary and make it independent. The 18th amendment, passed in 2010 by the PPP government, provided for a Judicial Commission of Pakistan (JCP) to recommend the names of new judges, thereby giving more space to the judiciary; the 27th amendment makes it redundant.

Why is the government trying to undermine the rule of law?

Separation of powers and an independent judiciary are essential for any constitutional democracy, especially Pakistan. Political parties of Pakistan should know this, given the challenge from the Establishment (Pakistan’s military complex) to democracy and its institutions. An independent judiciary will remain the only institution that could protect, if at all, overreach from the Establishment.

One of the reasons for introducing the amendment has been that it will reduce the caseload of the higher judiciary. However, this argument is flawed, as most delays occur in the lower courts. According to the letter drafted by Judge Mansoor Ali Shah, quoting the Law Commission of Pakistan, of the 2.26 million pending cases, 82% were at the district courts, and less than 3% were pending at the Supreme Court.

The real motivations of the Pakistan Muslim League (N) (PML-N) government are to clip the wings of the Supreme Court and reduce it to a Court of Appeals by removing its original jurisdiction.

What is the amendment’s history?

It all started with the 26th amendment,

which was passed by the PML-N government in 2024. It altered the composition of the JCP. In 2010, the 18th amendment had mandated that the JCP be comprised of judges from the Supreme Court and High Courts. The 26th amendment altered the composition by bringing in more members from the executive, thereby undermining the selection of judges for the higher courts. The JCP now has more members from the political side. The 26th amendment also granted the JCP the power to appoint constitutional benches, thereby removing the Chief Justice of Pakistan’s power to appoint benches.

The 26th and 27th amendments are not the first time that the executive in Pakistan has attempted to undermine the judiciary. The higher judiciary’s relationship with both the military and the political executive has been troubled since Pakistan’s independence. During the first four decades, the judiciary took a tough pill to defend the unconstitutional actions taken by its military dictators such as Ayub Khan, Yahya Khan and Zia-ul-Haq. The Supreme Court invoked the “Doctrine of Necessity” to look the other way as military rulers tore up the Constitution. Zia was even quoted as saying that the Constitution was a “piece of paper” that could be torn at any time.

In the 1990s, the judiciary was brought into the centre of the power struggle between the Presidents and the Prime Ministers. When the President dismissed the PM, backed by the Establishment, the Supreme Court had to intervene by either justifying the dismissal (Benazir Bhutto’s dismissals in 1990 and 1996) or by restoring the government (Nawaz Sharif’s government in 1993).

The judiciary confronted a political executive for the first time in 1996, when Nawaz Sharif tried to remove the Chief Justice. It led to PML-N party members storming the Supreme Court, thereby starting an uncomfortable relationship between the two. Later in 2017, the

Supreme Court disqualified Nawaz Sharif in the Panama Papers case – an issue that many consider an overreach by the Court.

Since the confrontation between Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry and President Pervez Musharraf in 2007, which triggered the Lawyers’ movement, the judiciary has been assertive against both the political executive and the Establishment.

The judicial assertion reached its peak under the Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa. Six judges of the Islamabad High Court wrote an open letter complaining of coercion and even intimidation by the intelligence agencies.

This might have prompted the military and the political executive to assert control over the judiciary. The 26th amendment started the process; and the 27th has taken it forward.

What next?

The FCC has already started functioning. The opposition and a section of the legal community have warned of a confrontation in the streets. There is also civil society support for maintaining the independence of the higher judiciary. But, the two major political parties, the PPP and the PML-N stand together, and are supported by the Establishment.

More importantly, the judiciary stands divided – while a few (three so far, including Supreme Court judges Mansoor Ali Shah and Athar Minallah) have resigned, others have agreed to serve on the new FCC.

Given the political and societal issues facing Pakistan, and the questions of accountability, especially in higher institutions, as the recent International Monetary Fund report highlighted, an independent judiciary is essential for Pakistan. Unfortunately, the 27th amendment undermines that.

D. Suba Chandran is Professor and Dean at the school of conflict and security studies at the National Institute of Advanced Studies.

THE GIST

▼ The creation of a new FCC to address issues relating to the Constitution and federal-provincial relations would mean that the Supreme Court would no longer have its original jurisdiction.

▼ The 27th amendment provides the executive with the power to transfer judges without their consent. Critics of the amendment argue that this provision would enable the executive to transfer judges who do not toe its line.

▼ Given the political and societal issues facing Pakistan, and the questions of accountability, especially in higher institutions, as the recent International Monetary Fund report highlighted, an independent judiciary is essential for Pakistan.



CACHE



REUTERS

# Why Microsoft’s new AI features are being criticised

What appeared to trigger many users online was the update about Windows becoming an agentic Operating System (OS), or an AI-powered system on a device capable of processing natural language commands and taking autonomous actions for its users

Sahana Venugopal

**The story so far:** On November 10, the President for Microsoft’s Windows + Devices (W+D) business, Pavan Davuluri, spotlighted new AI features in Windows and invited users to a digital session as part of Microsoft’s Ignite event. However, this company update posted on the social media platform X instead received hundreds of comments, many of them negative, and over a million views before the comment section was locked down. These vehement reactions to the Microsoft executive’s announcement revealed a sharp split between the software giant’s AI roadmap and its customers’ demands. As Microsoft introduced new AI features over the following days, the negative comments only grew.

**What AI releases did Microsoft announce?** Along with a link to a company session about Windows, Microsoft 365 Copilot, secure AI, and agent productivity, Mr. Davuluri posted, “Windows is evolving into an agentic OS, connecting devices, cloud, and AI to unlock intelligent productivity and secure work anywhere. Join us at #MSIgnite to see how frontier firms are transforming with Windows and what’s next for the platform. We can’t wait to show you!”

What appeared to trigger many users online was the comment about Windows becoming an agentic Operating System (OS), or an AI-powered system on a device capable of processing natural language commands and taking autonomous actions for its users. Since 2023, Microsoft has invested heavily in Generative AI, first by financially backing ChatGPT-maker OpenAI before developing its own AI offerings as the distance between the two companies grew. Microsoft’s AI, or “chat-based generative AI interaction” that it calls Copilot, serves a variety of use

cases, ranging from browsing online and maximising productivity to generating multimedia and summarising/correcting your content. Whether a Microsoft customer is using Windows as their OS, Edge as their browser, Outlook for their mail needs, or a Surface PC for their tasks, Copilot is already present or easy to access. Meanwhile, the Microsoft 365 Copilot offering integrates AI with commonly used programmes such as Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. Last month, Microsoft further shared that it was rolling out updates to make every Windows 11 PC an AI PC, powered by Copilot. But when Microsoft posted, “We heard you wanted @Copilot Mode at work,” on X on November 19, the social media platform added a temporary context note that contradicted this, citing unhappy users’ responses. Meanwhile, Dell COO Jeffrey Clarke noted during the November 25 earnings call that about 500 million devices capable of running Windows 11 haven’t been upgraded. On their side, multiple Windows 11 users have complained of glitches and delays.

**Why is Microsoft facing backlash?** X users complained that requests for popular non-AI features had gone unheard by Microsoft and that existing issues with Windows were not being adequately resolved. Others raised concerns about potential bloatware in their Microsoft devices and platforms, as well as reduced data privacy, a drop in performance, increased security risks, and increased bugs and advertisements due to agentic AI rollouts. Some users voiced their belief that Microsoft was focusing more on products aimed at businesses or enterprises collecting user data, rather than everyday users who wanted a cleaner, less complicated OS and device experience. Complaints about Microsoft’s AI roadmap are not new. In fact, Microsoft in 2024 was hit with backlash from users

over a tool called Recall for Copilot+ PCs, that would leverage AI to help users find content they had already seen. In order for this to happen, users had to opt in to saving snapshots, or screenshots, of their activity. Privacy experts criticised the Recall feature and highlighted severe security and privacy risks, while users also demanded ways to disable Recall. In response, Microsoft delayed Recall and only shipped it in April this year. However, customer anger online over the company’s AI only mounted in the run-up to the Ignite event.

**How has Microsoft responded?** On November 15, Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella shared a post on X where he hailed the company’s partnerships with other firms such as OpenAI and AMD. He also batted in favour of a more collaborative approach where the success of AI adoption could be gauged through societal change and positive breakthroughs rather than company valuations. “Let us move beyond zero-sum thinking and the winner-take-all hype and focus instead on building broad capabilities that harness the power of this technology to achieve local success in each firm, which then leads to broad economic growth and societal benefits,” Mr. Nadella posted. On November 19, Microsoft AI CEO Mustafa Suleyman took to X to address users’ anger and criticism more directly, but pegged negative reactions to a lack of excitement surrounding the potential of AI. “Jeez there so many cynics! It cracks me up when I hear people call AI underwhelming. I grew up playing Snake on a Nokia phone! The fact that people are unimpressed that we can have a fluent conversation with a super smart AI that can generate any image/video is

mindblowing to me,” posted Mr. Suleyman. In response, multiple users complained about AI hallucination, or the risk of their work being undermined by inaccurate information retrieved by AI from dubious or even unusable sources. Furthermore, Mr. Nadella and Mr. Suleyman’s reactions were both branded as being out of touch with customer sentiments.

**Are other firms facing similar complaints?** Yes and no. While multiple Big Tech giants are exploring agentic AI features and products, the reactions from customers have been drastically different. For example, relatively new companies such as ChatGPT-maker OpenAI and Google/Amazon-backed Anthropic face far less criticism from users when they launch new Generative AI products or announce AI integrations. This is because they are fundamentally AI companies, so customer expectations align with the company’s area of exploration. When such companies do face criticism, user complaints are likely to focus on AI product quality, the legality of the AI training processes, cybersecurity risks, or the impact of their chatbots on people’s health and behaviour. The two companies do not sell consumer-focused devices. However, when legacy giants such as Microsoft or Google – known for their solid market presence and their consumer hardware offerings – rapidly hopped on the Generative AI bandwagon, many users felt as if the highly experimental technology was being forced into every part of their personal tech ecosystem, whether they wanted it there or not. Google also fielded complaints surrounding its AI Overviews in Search, or AI-generated search summaries. Digital experts warned that revenue to media companies, smaller publishers, and Google’s own rivals could be impacted by the spike in AI-powered browsing, with accuracy taking a hit as well.

## THE DAILY QUIZ

A quiz on the occasion of World Aids Day observed annually on December 1

V.V. Ramanan

**QUESTION 1**  
What is the theme for the WAD in 2025?

**QUESTION 2**  
According to data referenced by UNAIDS and other sources for 2024, India is the third largest country with the highest number of people living with HIV. Which are the top two?

**QUESTION 3**  
Though the details of the origin of HIV remains unclear, a lentivirus that is genetically similar to HIV was initially found in which two types of

primates in Africa?  
**QUESTION 4**  
Name the French scientists who were awarded the 2008 Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine for their discovery of HIV.

**QUESTION 5**  
Globally, which mode of transmission accounts for the majority of HIV infections?

**QUESTION 6**  
What is the two-word term used for the long phase of HIV infection during which a person may have no symptoms despite ongoing viral replication?

**QUESTION 7**  
Name the first antiretroviral medication used to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS.



**Visual question:**  
Name this male Hollywood star who in 1985 became one of the first celebrities to disclose his AIDS diagnosis. THE HINDU ARCHIVES

**Questions and Answers to the November 28 edition of the daily quiz:** 1. This term denotes the idea that progress arises as a synthesis of opposing views. **Ans: Dialectic**  
2. Name the German philosopher who influenced Engels. **Ans: Hegel**  
3. The condition of the working class in this country is considered to be the first major socialist work by Engels. **Ans: England**  
4. Name the organisation in which both Engels and Marx were key members. **Ans: The Communist League**  
5: Name the unfinished work of Engels which was published in the Soviet Union in 1925. **Ans: Dialectics of Nature**  
Visual: Name the city in which this statue is located. **Ans: Manchester**  
**Early Birds:** K.B. Swaminathan| Anand S. Nair| Deepak Sudhir| Mahima Sajani Jacob| Rishvanth Reddy



## KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

*He strode into the room and shouted at her*

The entire department is delulu. They think the team is going to get a big raise by tomorrow

S. Upendran

“What did your boss say about your team’s proposal?”  
“He didn’t say a word after our presentation.”  
“That doesn’t sound good. He was probably angry.”  
“After some time, he strolled into our department and tore us all apart.”  
“That must have shocked everyone! Did he ‘stroll’ or ‘stride’ into the room?”  
“Stroll, stride? What difference does it make? In both cases, you are saying he walked into the room.”  
“You’re talking about the manner in which he walked into the room. There’s a difference between ‘stride’ and ‘stroll’”  
“Really? What’s the difference between the two?”  
“The word ‘stroll’ suggests you’re walking into the room in a relaxed manner.”  
“In other words, you walk slowly. You’re not in a hurry.”  
“Exactly! I’m sure your angry boss didn’t walk into the room slowly. The leisurely walk that people take in the mornings and evenings can be referred to as a ‘stroll’. Hema took her four-year-old son for a stroll in the park.”  
“The kids strolled along the beach hand in hand. It was a beautiful sight.”  
“What my grandfather calls a ‘brisk’ walk, I call a stroll.”  
“Anyway, tell me what ‘stride’ means.”  
“When you stride, you take long steps.”  
“And you probably walk a lot more quickly than you normally do.”  
“Exactly! The angry mother strode to the clerk’s desk and demanded to see the Principal.”  
“The client strode out of the room.”  
“When the father saw his two sons fighting, he strode across the room and separated them.”  
“Something my father had to do quite often when my brother and I were kids.”  
“Who can forget those days! How is the new novel you bought a few days ago?”  
“Its good. Contained a strange word.”  
“You remember how it is spelt?”  
“If I recall correctly, it’s spelt d...e...l...u...l...u...”  
“The ‘e’ in the first syllable is like the ‘i’ in ‘sit’, ‘pit’ and ‘bit’, and the ‘u’ in the next two, sounds like the ‘oo’ in ‘pool’, ‘fool’ and ‘cool’. The word is pronounced ‘di-LOO-loo’.”  
“What does it mean?”  
“The exact opposite. The word is considered slang. According to most standard dictionaries, it is the slang term for ‘delusional’. You know what delusional means, right?”  
“Doesn’t it mean believing things that are not necessarily true or real?”  
“Very good! It’s mostly used with individuals who are obsessed about things and people. Here’s an example. The star called the police when he found a bunch of delulus standing outside the gate.”  
upendrankye@gmail.com

## Word of the day

**Cornucopia:**  
the property of being extremely abundant

**Synonyms:** profuseness, profusion, richness

**Usage:** The festival offers a cornucopia of discounts.

**Pronunciation:** newsth.live/cornucopiapro

**International Phonetic Alphabet:** /ˌkɔːn.jəˈkʊ.pi.ə/

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to [letters@thehindu.co.in](mailto:letters@thehindu.co.in) with the subject ‘Text & Context’



# Hypoxia rewires membrane lipids, drives pancreatic cells to move: IIT-Bombay study

Pancreatic cancer thrives in low oxygen conditions; hypoxia promotes rapid cell division and modifies the lipids present in cancer cells' plasma membrane, which affects how easily they move around; the research could open pathways to preventing excessive migration of pancreatic cancer cells and mitigating metastasis of the tumour

Rohini Subrahmanyam

Pancreatic cancers are aggressive and deadly, with high rates of metastasis and poor prognosis. The tumour environment is also hypoxic: the cells rapidly divide and thrive in very low oxygen conditions.

Now, IIT-Bombay researchers have shown that the hypoxia ends up enhancing the cells' metastatic behaviour. By affecting the cells' plasma membrane lipids, hypoxic conditions can help the cells migrate more.

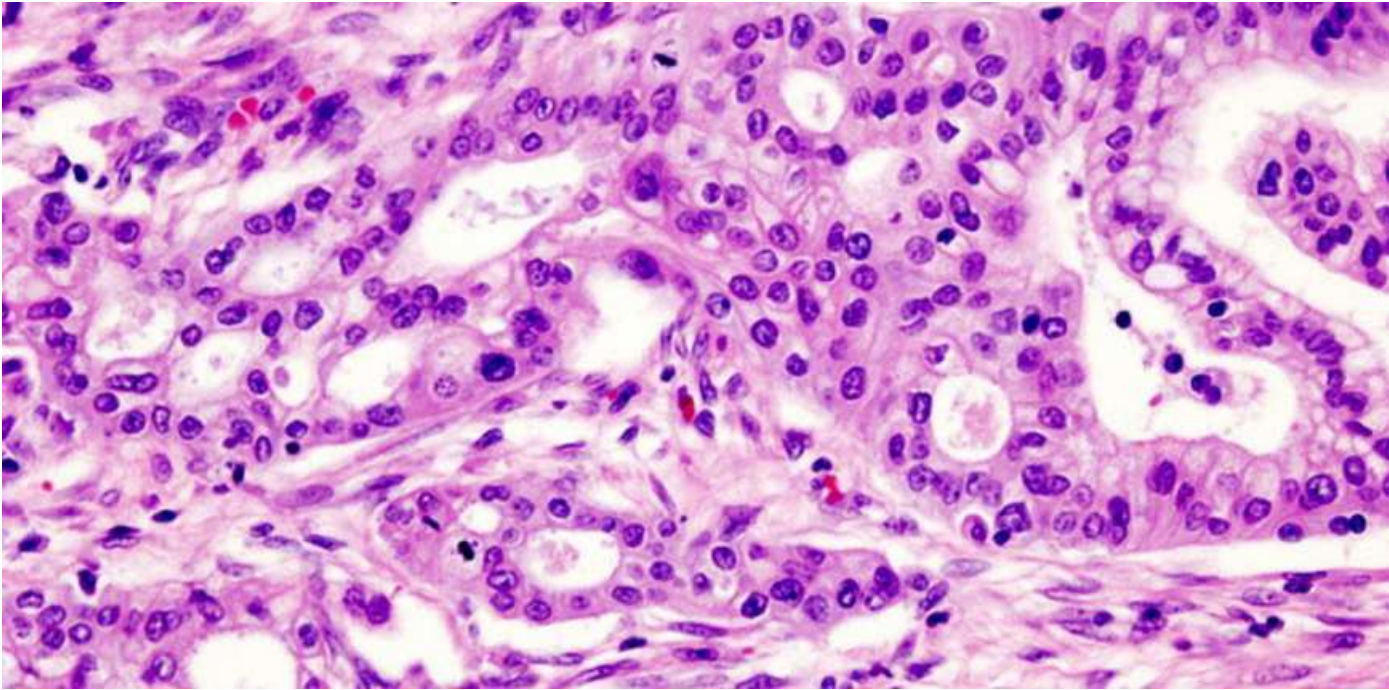
"The membrane is not just something that is covering the cell and keeping everything that should be inside, inside, and everything that should be outside, outside," said BITS Pilani biophysicist Sudipta Maiti, who wasn't involved in the work. "It is also the cell's window to the outside world."

**Stiff yet malleable**

In two studies published in 2023 and 2025, IIT-Bombay chemist Shobhna Kapoor and her colleagues showed that hypoxia can modify the kinds of lipids present in the cancer cells' plasma membrane, thus affecting how easily the cells are able to fluidise and move around. In the 2023 *Biochimica et Biophysica Acta* paper, they reported that hypoxia causes the cells of the PANC-1 pancreatic cancer cell line to migrate more. This happened because hypoxia was able to modulate the lipid ratios in the cells: lipids that promote membrane stiffening were pushed towards the cytoplasm and inner organelles. They also observed that the cells had less cortical stiffness, meaning the layer of skeleton just below the membrane allowed for more fluidity.

In the *Journal of Membrane Biology* study published in August, the researchers studied a different cell line called CAPAN-2. In contrast, researchers found that this pancreatic cancer cell line had higher cortical stiffness in response to hypoxia. But it still maintained its malleable nature by adding more membrane components to its plasma membrane. Even the lipidome modifications were different in this case, with some lipids that promote membrane stiffening making their way to the plasma membrane. But the scientists believe that this is a local stiffening effect and doesn't affect the overall membrane properties.

Even though hypoxia affected cell stiffness differently in the two pancreatic cancer cell lines they studied, the cells still modified their own membrane in a way that their migration increased when oxygen was low. Together, the studies could open new pathways that could both contribute to and prevent excessive cell



Micrograph of pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma, a common type of pancreatic cancer. KGH (CC BY-SA)

migration in pancreatic cancer cells and modulating them could potentially help mitigate the tumour from metastasising.

**In for a surprise**

When Dr. Kapoor and her student initially realised that hypoxia caused the PANC-1 cells to migrate faster, they decided to check how the membrane's biophysical properties – like how ordered, fluid or bendy the membrane was – were changing. But they were in for a surprise when they found that some broad properties of the membrane didn't change dramatically.

"Then we decided let us then not look at ensemble properties of the membrane, maybe let us look at the composition of the membrane," Dr. Kapoor said. "And then we realised that actually, the hypoxia is changing the lipidome of the cell."

They found that even though the cell seemed to be increasing its amounts of membrane-stiffening lipids, like lipids with long fatty-acid chains or saturated bonds, the lipids in the plasma membrane didn't change as much.

"There is a feedback loop that is going on which helps the membrane to maintain homeostasis so that the membrane properties remain the same," said Dr. Kapoor. "The changes that the hypoxia brings about in the lipid levels, they get compensated in internal organelles like the nucleus, mitochondria, and endoplasmic reticulum."

They also found that the PANC-1 cells had less cortical stiffness because of low actin volume. With low stiffness and any membrane-stiffening lipids being trafficked inwards, the cell could maintain



Lipid molecules are like tadpoles: it's a little head and a little tail and the whole thing is probably two nanometers long. Solid-state NMR can look at this little tail and see how dynamic it is

**DR. SUDIPTA MAITI**  
BITS PILANI

a malleable membrane that helped it migrate, the researchers speculated.

**'Like tadpoles'**

The story is slightly different for CAPAN-2. Hypoxia still helped the cells migrate more, but their cortical stiffness was higher in hypoxic conditions. But other experiments revealed that the cell was trafficking more membrane material to the plasma membrane, to counteract this stiffness and likely maintain its migratory behaviour.

The researchers also found an increase in saturated lipids in the plasma membrane, suggesting that the cell may also be trying to locally enhance the membrane stiffness.

"There seems to be some diversity from one cell type to another," said Mohammed Saleem, a biophysicist at the National Institute of Science Education and Research, Bhubaneswar. "[Some] changes are sensed by the cells, and they try to re-equilibrate so as to counter the changes."

Dr. Maiti said solid-state nuclear

magnetic resonance (NMR) – a technique that uses magnetic fields to look at the atomic level structure and dynamics of solid molecules – could probe deeper into the plasma membrane and figure out how exactly hypoxia could be changing its properties.

"Lipid molecules are like tadpoles: it's a little head and a little tail and the whole thing is probably two nanometers long. Solid-state NMR can look at this little tail and see how dynamic it is," he explained.

"It [can be] fluctuating madly or pretty stable because the lipids are packed, [which] translates into mechanical property – how stiff something is, how loose something is. It'll be nice to show quantitatively, using solid-state NMR, how hypoxia leads to change in this membrane order."

**Effects on other cancers**

Both Dr. Kapoor and Dr. Saleem said that going forward, one must also explore how hypoxia affects other cancers.

"Each of these cancerous cell types has their own niche and microenvironments," Dr. Saleem said. "It would be interesting how hypoxia and the differences in those microenvironments could come into play to drive the migration."

"A small biochemical reaction [causing hypoxia] can induce a larger physical manipulation of the cell membrane, [helping] the cells migrate faster," Dr. Saleem added. "This could also open up venues for exploring membrane targeted anti-cancer therapeutics."

(Rohini Subrahmanyam is a freelance journalist in Bengaluru. roh.subb@gmail.com)

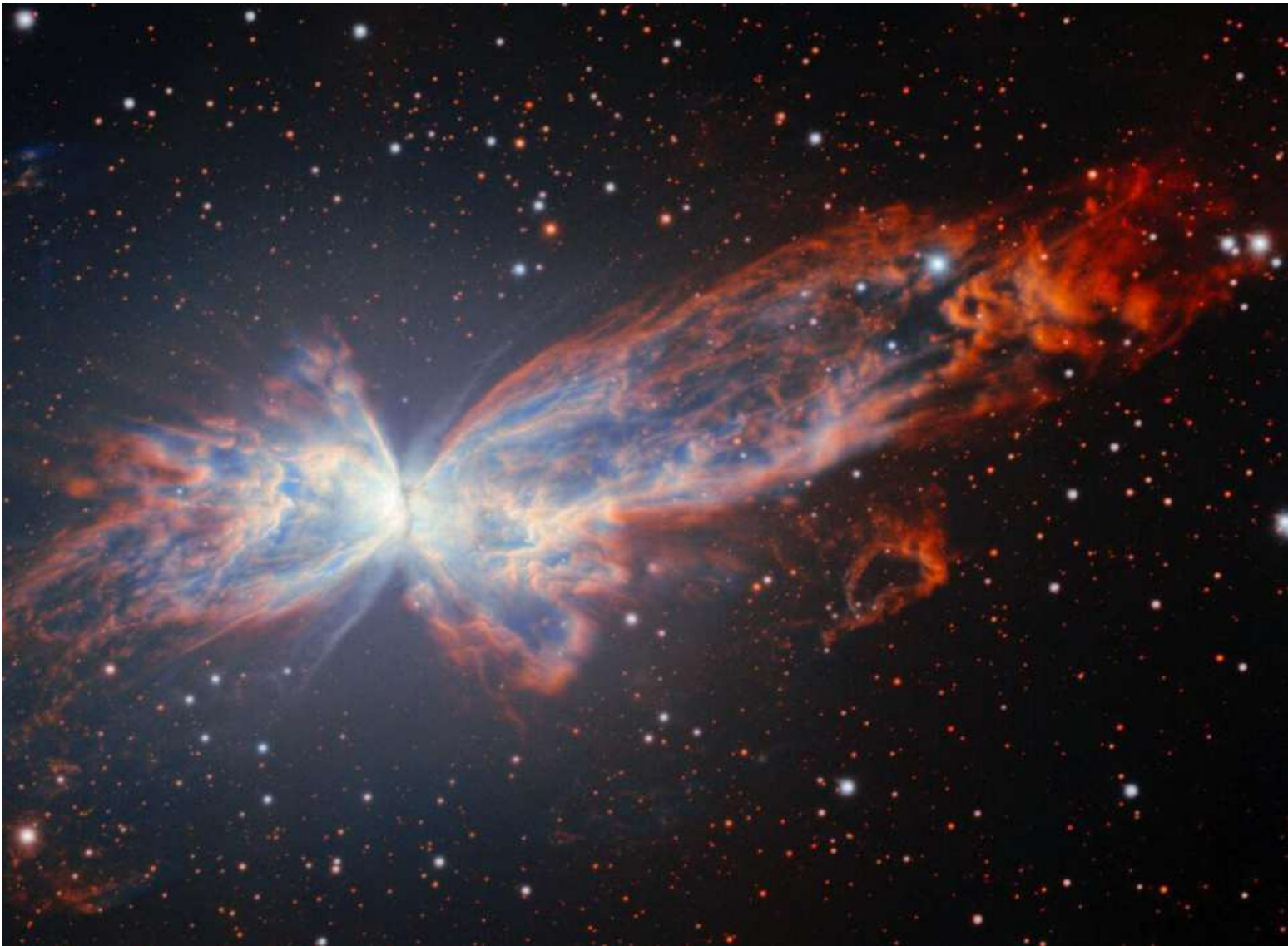
## THE GIST

Pancreatic cancers are aggressive and deadly, with high rates of metastasis and poor prognosis. The tumour environment is hypoxic. IIT-Bombay researchers have now shown that the hypoxic environment enhances metastatic behaviour in these cancer cells

Researchers found that even though the cell seemed to be increasing its amounts of membrane-stiffening lipids, the quantity in the plasma membrane didn't change as much. A feedback loop helps the membrane maintain homeostasis so its properties remain the same

The findings on the impact of hypoxia on cell membranes are crucial to the study of other cancerous cell types, which have their own microenvironments. This holds out the possibility of developing anti-cancer therapeutics that target the membrane

## BIG SHOT



Chile's Gemini South telescope has imaged the Butterfly Nebula in stunning new detail. The nebula is 2,500–3,800 light-years away, where a white dwarf's discarded, glowing gas forms butterfly-like wings. Chilean schoolchildren picked this target for the telescope's 25th anniversary. NSF NOIRLAB

## WHAT IS IT?

# Baikonur: gateway to the heavens

Vasudevan Mukunth

The Baikonur cosmodrome is a spaceport in Kazakhstan that Russia leases and operates as the site of its space launches. It was built in the 1950s first as a missile test range before becoming the centre of the Soviet space programme. The R-7 rocket launched Sputnik 1 in 1957 and Vostok 1 in 1961, which carried Yuri Gagarin on the first human spaceflight, from here. Later missions from here launched other cosmonauts, space station modules, and interplanetary probes.

The cosmodrome is located on the Kazakh steppe and contains launch complexes, assembly buildings, tracking stations, and housing. Its facilities can accommodate the Proton and Soyuz rockets and cargo ships intended for the International Space Station. It has two crewed-launch pads: Site 1 and Site 31/6, which now handles Soyuz flights. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan retained ownership of the site and agreed to lease it to Russia under agreements that run until 2050.

Baikonur has also seen accidents. In 1960, an R-16 missile exploded on the pad in an event called the Nedelin catastrophe, and many people were killed. Just last week, during the Soyuz MS-28 mission on November 27, the launch of a Soyuz-2.1a rocket damaged Site 31/6, bringing down a service platform into the flame trench



The Soyuz MS-27 spacecraft blasting off from the Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. AFP

and forcing authorities to suspend crewed operations. Engineers are currently assessing the damage and plan repairs so that later missions can continue to launch from Kazakhstan while Russia develops other launch sites on its territory.



**For feedback and suggestions** for 'Science', please write to [science@thehindu.co.in](mailto:science@thehindu.co.in) with the subject 'Daily page'



High point

Corporate revival, a feature of Q2 growth

There can be no denying that a real GDP print of 8.2 per cent for the second quarter of FY26 (7.8 per cent in Q1) comes as a surprise. The Reserve Bank of India had projected 7 per cent in October (6.8 per cent for FY26), while the Finance Ministry’s monthly economic review had forecast 7-7.5 per cent growth. Apart from the festive season effect, the Centre’s policy measures to boost consumption (tax cuts in the Budget), government capital expenditure and front-loading of exports ahead of the enforcement of the additional tariffs by the US have contributed to the spurt. The GST rate reductions can have a positive impact in the coming quarters.



A few caveats here: First, the statistical base effect may have pushed up the Q2 number, since growth in Q2 of FY25 was only 5.6 per cent due to general elections. Second, the convergence of nominal and real GDP growth (the former at 8.7 per cent), due to the sharp decline in inflation, could erode consumer sentiment and fiscal space. A large discrepancy to the tune of ₹1.6 lakh crore, between the output and expenditure estimates of GDP, could lead to a revision of figures. These factors, however, cannot detract from the turnaround story. On the expenditure side, the positive consumer sentiment is borne out by the 7.9 per cent growth in private expenditure, against 6.4 per cent last year. The Centre front-loading its capex has helped growth in gross fixed capital formation to 7.3 per cent in Q2. On the output side, strong real growth was driven by services and manufacturing, even as agriculture has maintained what seems to be its trend growth, of 3 per cent. Growth in manufacturing GVA of 9.1 per cent betters the 7.7 per cent growth in Q1 of FY26 and the bleak 2.2 per cent growth in Q2 of FY25.

The RBI’s assessment of private non-financial companies for Q2, based on the results of 3,118 entities, is suggestive of a turnaround. There has been a sharp uptick in the sales growth of non-IT services (10.6 per cent y-o-y), manufacturing (8.5 per cent) and IT services (7.8 per cent), compared to Q1 (7.5, 6 and 6.3, respectively). Credit growth has been accelerating since June this year, surpassing deposit growth since September. Construction activity was elevated with growth of 7.2 per cent due to government’s capex spends as well as home construction activity, especially in the affordable segment. Services sector which contributes around 60 per cent to the GVA recorded the highest growth at 9.2 per cent, while output in financial services, real estate and professional services grew 10.2 per cent in Q2.

The second half of FY26 is, however, likely to be a bit challenging, if the India-US deal is not clinched. The base effect will cease to influence the growth numbers. With inflation expected to increase in the fourth quarter of FY26, the GDP deflator is also expected to increase in the second half, impacting real growth. But with consumption and investment showing positive signs at time of low inflation, the RBI has a brief window of time to cut rates.

OTHER VOICES.

The Guardian

**Putin is taking Trump for another ride on the Kremlin carousel**  
As Donald Trump’s Thanksgiving Day deadline for a Ukraine peace agreement came and went this week, the Russia expert Mark Galeotti pointed to a telling indicator of how the Kremlin is treating the latest flurry of White House diplomacy. In the government paper Rossiyskaya Gazeta, a foreign policy scholar close to Vladimir Putin’s regime bluntly observed: “As long as hostilities continue, leverage remains. As soon as they cease, Russia finds itself alone (we harbour no illusions) in the face of coordinated political and diplomatic pressure.” Mr Putin has no interest in a ceasefire followed by talks where Ukraine’s rights as a sovereign nation would be defended and reasserted. He seeks the capitulation and reabsorption of Russia’s neighbour into Moscow’s orbit. LONDON, NOVEMBER 28

讀賣新聞

**China’s Criticism of Takaichi**  
China is intensifying its propaganda campaign against Japan over Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi’s remark regarding a survival-threatening situation in connection with a Taiwan contingency. Beijing’s aim appears to be spreading its assertion — not only within Japan but internationally — that the prime minister is attempting to disrupt the international order and peace established after World War II in order to isolate her and force her to retract her remark. China’s personal attacks against Takaichi are intolerable. Xinhua News Agency has posted a series of satirical images on its X account, including one showing the prime minister looking at a mirror with her reflection wearing military attire and another depicting her shaking hands with a ghost labeled “militarism.” Such posts must be seen as malicious propaganda designed to create the impression that Takaichi bears responsibility for the deteriorating Japan-China relations. TOKYO, NOVEMBER 29

The real legacy of Macaulay

Pervasive administrative power still separates the ruling elite from the rest. That elite rules the roost, English be damned

LINE& LENGTH.  
TCA SRINIVASA RAGHAVAN



The Prime Minister must be chuckling at how easy it is to rile the middle class. As he sometimes does, he has now mischievously thrown a stone into the now placid pond called Macaulay. The resulting foamy debate has focused on the English language as an instrument of that someone foolishly called linguistic apartheid. “Those who know English look down on those who don’t”, goes this argument. English for these people is the linguistic equivalent of the ‘janeu’ or sacred thread. Thus, learning English is a form of *pratilome* marriage. Such a marriage, for those who don’t know, makes it possible for a lower caste person, when she marries into an upper caste, to move up the caste hierarchy. It’s like getting upgraded to premium economy on flights. And there’s been a lot more of such nonsense which misses the real problem created by old Thomas 190 years ago. And this problem wasn’t just the creation of brown Englishmen and women, or what in Latin America were called the *compradore* class. That happened, of course. But nestling within that elite was another elite, the bunch that worked for the imperial government. The Indians who managed this feat pulled off this sort of *pratilome* marriages got the equivalent of an upgrade to first, not just business, class. So over time we acquired a new ruling elite. Pervasive administrative power separated them from the rest. That elite still rules the roost, English be damned.

**MY FAMILY AND OTHER BABUS**  
My credentials for writing all this stem from the fact that between 1948 and now, around 15 members of my close family have served in the Class 1 services. Since 1993, however, no one from our family has thought of joining the bureaucracy. It’s a complete no-no and now there’s only one left in it. She will retire soon.



STIRRING THE POT. After 190 years, Thomas Macaulay still makes news in India

Ours, it should be noted, isn’t the only such family. There are many others. The attraction of working for the government has vanished for them also. And there are millions of others who

The old colonial Macaulay attitude and arrogance remains only in the bureaucracy because it has the power to claim privileges and dispense them

simply don’t want to work for the bureaucracy. But this is not the end of the Macaulay *putras* and *putris* because the old colonial, “Us v the Natives” attitude remains totally intact. The attitude is acquired within two or three years of joining the government. It comprises an expectation and fulfilment of an ever expanding set of entitlements that cover almost everything. It demands, and gets, preferential treatment just as the old white sahibs did. And just as the white officialdom did, it is based on exclusion. The ‘civil lines’ mentality permeates everything. These

Why banks really need to move to ECL framework

The Expected Credit Loss rules will help banks evaluate and make anticipatory provisions for risks and losses

**Harsimran Sandhu**  
The Reserve Bank of India’s discussion paper on introducing an Expected Credit Loss (ECL) framework marks one of the most far-reaching prudential reforms in recent decades. For years, Indian banks have operated under a rule-based incurred-loss system in which provisions are recognised only after observable signs of stress. While this approach ensured simplicity, it is now inadequate for a financial system that is more complex, retail-driven, and interconnected than in the past. Today’s economy depends heavily on credit, and delayed recognition of problems has repeatedly contributed to instability. The proposed transition to a forward-looking ECL system—aligned with global standards such as IFRS 9—represents a decisive evolution in how banks measure, price, and manage credit risk. With rising household leverage, shifting corporate balance sheets, and growing macroeconomic volatility, the reform is both timely and necessary. Under the current system, provisions rise only when borrowers show objective deterioration, often at a stage where remediation becomes difficult. This leads to pro-cyclicality: in economic expansions, risks accumulate quietly and banks book higher profits; in

downturns losses surface abruptly, forcing sharp increases in provisioning. The 2008 global financial crisis and India’s corporate credit cycle of the 2010s exposed the limitations of delayed recognition. The ECL proposal addresses this by replacing reaction with anticipation. Instead of waiting for loans to go bad, banks will estimate future losses using Probability of Default (PD), Loss Given Default (LGD), and Exposure at Default (EAD). These parameters incorporate borrower behaviour, sector-specific risks, and broader macroeconomic conditions. It shifts the system from backward-looking measurement to an early-warning, forward-looking philosophy. A central pillar of the new framework is the requirement to use multiple macroeconomic scenarios. Banks must construct baseline, adverse, and severe scenarios and assign probability weights to each, bringing India closer to advanced jurisdictions where loss estimates vary with economic conditions. Scenario design must be grounded in credible indicators such as inflation, GDP growth, interest rate cycles, commodity prices, and regulatory developments. Where historical data is sparse, techniques like mean reversion will be necessary to prevent distortions. Equally important is the emphasis on data discipline. Banks must maintain adequate historical loss data to build



BANKS. Managing risks GETTY IMAGES

reliable PD and LGD models. The RBI insists that the data used must be complete, representative, and free from cherry-picking. A major strength of the proposal is the governance structure attached to it. The RBI requires Board-level oversight of the entire framework. Senior management, including risk and finance heads, must validate assumptions, review model outputs, and ensure consistent application across portfolios. Banks must maintain a model inventory, document modelling decisions, conduct back-testing, and periodically assess performance so that predicted losses align with realised outcomes. This ensures that ECL becomes a central mechanism in credit decision-making rather than a compliance formality. The shift to ECL is supplemented by

the adoption of the effective interest rate (EIR) method for income recognition. Under EIR, fees, charges, and transaction costs must be spread across the loan’s life instead of being recognised upfront. This yields a more accurate view of profitability and eliminates distortions from front-loaded income. Implementing EIR will require system upgrades, particularly for banks with legacy core systems, but in the long run it aligns India with global accounting practice and enhances transparency.

**CHALLENGES AHEAD**  
Implementing ECL will require better data infrastructure, stronger systems, and upgraded modelling capabilities. Many banks, especially those with legacy portfolios, lack granular historical information on defaults, recoveries, and collateral behaviour—data essential for accurate PD and LGD estimation. While large private and public sector banks have made progress, smaller institutions lag behind. Regional rural banks, cooperative banks, and some small finance banks are excluded in the initial phase precisely because they lack the required infrastructure, creating a two-track regulatory system that must eventually converge. Despite the challenges, the ECL framework represents a critical shift in India’s approach to credit risk.

The writer is Professor of Finance, IMT Ghaziabad

BELOW THE LINE

**Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal**  
Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal, at meeting organised by FICCI on Friday said a political call is needed to clinch the US-India trade deal, which is expected by the year-end. Those following the developments wondered what Agrawal meant. Is he saying the officials have done their best, and now, it is left to the government? Does he also mean that the officials

have tried to accommodate US interests as much as possible, but the Modi government needs to approve it? Or is it some sort of optics ahead of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s visit to India? A little bird says the Minister of External Affairs is going more into “geo-economics” than the Commerce Ministry. Perhaps, it is an indication that Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal is not really up there.

**Air pollution crisis**  
Former IPS officer and one-time BJP chief ministerial candidate Kiran Bedi has been consistently flagging concerns over the Capital’s deteriorating air quality. Bedi, who also served as the Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry, has used a series of posts on X to urge the government to adopt a

comprehensive approach to the crisis. She has called for a white paper on Delhi’s pollution management. In a detailed note, Bedi proposed a two-part document that would analyse the city’s chronic air quality problem, outline institutional lapses, and chart out a roadmap for immediate, short-, and long-term action— both across departments and for citizens. Earlier, she also appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to convene monthly virtual meetings with the Chief Ministers and Chief Secretaries of Delhi’s neighbouring States to review progress in controlling pollution. **Will Oil India be luckier?** Recently, Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri tweeted “Energy Maharatna @OilIndiaLimited has commenced a

landmark offshore drilling campaign in the Kerala-Konkan Basin by spudding the first well. An inspirational stride in our energy journey guided by the vision of PM Sh @narendramodiji. This frontier Category-III basin holds immense potential, and the planned 6,000-metre deep well to be drilled 20 nautical miles offshore will be among the deepest offshore wells in Indian waters. It would be historic, if OIL succeeds, but it is not easy. Both ONGC and Reliance have made attempts in the region; Reliance wanted its attempt to be seen as research and development work, given the costs involved. People in the upstream business say that it’s too early to celebrate as a lot depends on the availability of technology and

whether the find will fetch returns.

**Adani getting into nuclear**  
Past couple of days social media is once again buzzing with “Adani Group is now eyeing an entry into India’s Nuclear sector...” It is a fact that Adani preparing to join if a viable public-private model is created. It is understood to have created a crack team to study various aspects of the business. Some of them have been spotted at global nuclear energy events, say industry watchers. But the Group has not spoken publicly about it. “A lot will depend on what is in offering from business perspective,” someone close to developments said. Earlier this year Chairman Gautam Adani made a surprise visit to Tarapur atomic energy in Maharashtra to see the operations. **Our Bureaus**



# The theatre of e-commerce

Lives of actors in the digital marketplace

## BOOK REVIEW.

Chitra Narayanan

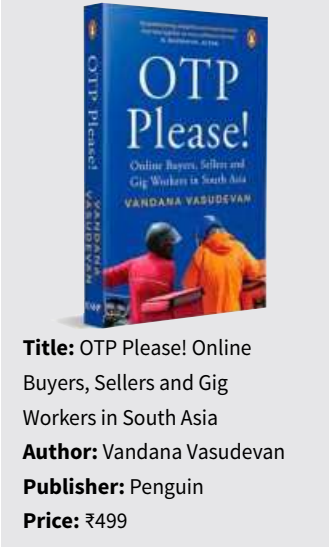
Swipe, click, book or buy has become a way of life for most of us now. But what lies behind this hassle free world of e-commerce and utility apps? Vandana Vasudevan’s book *OTP Please!* dives behind the bustling digital storefronts that have brought convenience and instant gratification for millions of us.

It’s a fascinating exploration of the world of gig workers, internet retailers, service providers and new age consumers. What makes it especially interesting is the way Vasudevan, a development sector researcher, has structured this exploration. Instead of blandly sectioning it as customers, workers and sellers, she takes the unusual tack of classifying the chapters according to the emotions that all the actors who make up the online marketplace feel. So the book is divided into sections titled ‘pleasure, guilt, gratitude, anger, freedom, oppression, anxiety, isolation and courage’.

That brilliant start sets the warm empathetic tone for the book, which is based on meticulous research. Vasudevan partnered with Janpahal, an NGO that surveyed over 5,000 gig workers, to understand their lives and issues. Beyond the survey, she has travelled extensively through India, and reached out to people in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal to find out their interactions with a bouquet of apps that governs modern life. “It is apparent that a socio-economic shift is underway in how we buy, eat, move, work and sell owing to technological advancements,” says Vasudevan.

### STORIES GALORE

The hundreds of stories that Vasudevan recounts in the book — whether of a bathroom, kitchen and chimney cleaner from Urban Company in Hyderabad, the food delivery person from Swiggy in Kanyakumari, the cab driver from Pathao in Kathmandu, a woman software engineer in Bengaluru who uses an Uber at night, a 29-year old consumer in Karachi who uses Food Panda to order chicken biryani to satisfy a craving even though there is dinner cooked at home — give glimpses of the various emotions ranging from gratitude at having a job, anger at the exploitation, anxiety about using the app and pleasure that the convenience affords. The ‘guilt’ chapter sounds all



close to home, as it looks into the mindless ordering culture, the feelings of inadequacy of a mother who feels a pang when her children keep getting food from outside, the messed up Circadian rhythms thanks to the binge watching on OTT and so on.

The ‘oppression’ chapter is not just about the exploitation of gig workers but also the tyranny of the algorithm, the frustrations of sellers who are bewildered by the workings of Amazon and the small restaurant’s complaints about the high commissions charged by the food tech platform.

The consumer and gig worker stories are interspersed with nuggets of insights and data from reports from think tanks and journals, from people like Kishore Biyani and Riyaz Amlani, from B-School professors, and from Reddit threads. There is a deluge of information in the book, but it is all woven together beautifully so that it doesn’t overwhelm. It’s not at all easy to tie together so many different stories and diverse threads but Vasudevan manages to knit it all cohesively.

Finally, the concluding chapter looks at the regulation of app-based services and the internet economy. It also looks into issues like sustainability, gender inclusivity (why is it always a delivery “boy”), technology going awry, and whether gig work is the best deployment of a young person’s ability.

It’s a book that really makes you think about many issues — among them overconsumption, health and lifestyle, work ethics, and business models. In the author bio, it says Vasudevan despite her serious pursuits is paranoid about being boring and hence strives to be entertaining. Well, the book actually manages to be that — a serious subject told very entertainingly.

# Challenges of working in a scale-up

The book is a practical educational resource for navigating the world of start-ups which are scaling up

## BOOK REVIEW.

Chandu Nair

Getting from zero to one is one challenge. Many entrepreneurs don’t realise that the bigger challenge is going from one to 10. It is often fun in creating but nurturing, building and scaling requires discipline, determination and development on the part of the entrepreneur(s) and the necessary transformation of the way the business is run and managed.

A significant number of books in this genre glamourise entrepreneurship, celebrate successful entrepreneurs or talk about a few core themes — founder’s mindset, fund-raising, start-up methodologies and frameworks, autobiographical or semi-autobiographical stories of success or failures’ life’s lessons. Scaling-up too has been covered but it usually talks about it only from the point of a start-up or founder.

This book focuses on those who want to or work in a scale-up enterprise and what human skills need to be understood and mastered in order to survive and thrive in what is often a chaotic, undisciplined and fast-changing environment.

Sometimes, when you read a book, you quickly form an impression of the book (and perhaps the author?). The first impression that this book gives is — precise, pragmatic, experience-based and a ‘let’s not waste time, let’s get on with it’ kind of approach.

The introduction to the author gives us an idea, “Vidya Murali has been working in the UK’s leading tech businesses, including Amazon, and high-growth scale-ups such as Deliveroo. Having grown up in India

before moving to the UK in 2006 and completing her MBA at the University of Cambridge, Vidya brings unique perspective as a woman of colour and an introvert navigating high-growth and fast-paced business environments.”

The cover design and the way the content is written and presented though, gives it a bit of a textbook feel (more on this later).

### LACK OF MATURITY

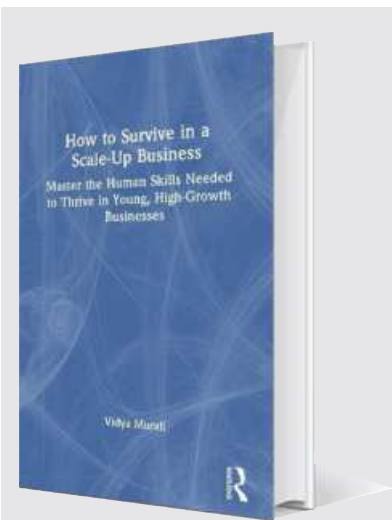
The book is neatly structured and the table of contents give the reader what to expect. The why behind the book explains the author’s motivation.

When she took the plunge to join scale-ups, she was surprised by the fun dynamism but also shocked by the lack of maturity and not finding logic in people’s behaviour! No one else in her target group (those seeking to join scale-ups, HR leaders in such companies, scale-up founders and coaches) should suffer this fate, she decided, hence this book.

She is also aware of today’s attention-challenged reader so she offers a helpful hack in Chapter 3 on how to read the book including what to focus on! (Maybe a QR code leading to an online audio summary might help attract a different set of reader-listeners).

The topics covered include the fundamental decision of whether a scale-up is right for you, what to expect and how to navigate life in a scale-up, the toxic patterns and challenges, and drawing from her own personality type and life experiences, how to survive and thrive when you are different.

In order to make it more reliable for the reader she has helpfully provided (i) questionnaires (e.g. scale-ups suitability assessment on pg. 41), frameworks and models (e.g., personal introduction template on pg. 91 or her emotional superpower practice framework,



**Title:** How to Survive in a Scale-Up Business: Master the Human Skills Needed to Thrive in Young, High-Growth Businesses  
**Author:** Vidya Murali  
**Price:** ₹950  
**Publisher:** Routledge

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vidya Murali has been working in the UK’s leading tech businesses, including Amazon, and high-growth scale-ups such as Deliveroo

TOSTRI, pg. 147) plus a lot of *How to’s* generously peppered throughout the book and (ii) stories of struggles and of thriving in Part IV with coaching questions for the reader.

The final chapter *Turning your insights into practice* succinctly synthesises all the previous chapters plus pushes the reader

into action mode. All in all, quite helpful for the focused reader.

### UNDERSTANDING ISSUES

I mentioned a textbook feel earlier on in the review. Here’s why. I wish the author had given more examples of either individuals or companies.

You find some names interspersed through the book. For example, Karthik in Chapter 1 or Julie, Paula and Steve in Chapter 10 on pg. 47, 48 and 54 respectively. It might have been easier for a reader to understand an issue when the chapter starts with the situation of an individual.

For instance, Chapter 10 could have started with Julie, an early employee who rises to the level of CTO as the business grew, her inability to see the big picture or think strategically and how it affects senior level technology hires and finally the company itself. That story would have helped the author segue into the key issues she wants to discuss in that chapter.

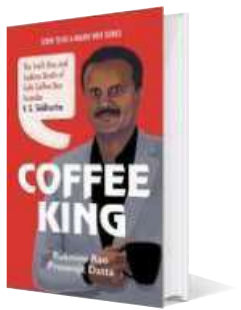
Similarly, the way the book is formatted makes one feel that it is styled more like an internal note for training, learning and development. Then again, it is a matter of individual style and this author has by and large chosen a particular set format for every chapter.

That said, the book is a practical educational resource for navigating the world of start-ups which are scaling up. The issues and challenges listed, the practical problems mentioned, why it happens as also ways to understand it and handle it better, speak of the author’s lived experiences.

Carefully read and assimilated, it provides a willing reader-learner ways by which s/he can think about and apply meaningfully if and when they decide to enter the world of scale-ups.

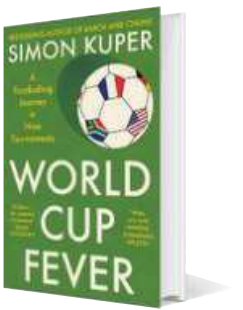
The reviewer is an IIMA alumnus and an entrepreneur, advisor and angel investor

## NEW READS.



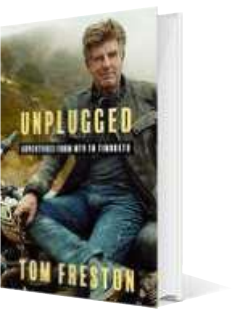
**Title:** Coffee King: The Swift Rise and Sudden Death of Café Coffee Day Founder V.G. Siddhartha  
**Authors:** Rukmini Rao, Prosenjit Datta  
**Publisher:** Macmillan

**An exhaustive investigation** into the meteoric rise and tragic collapse of a visionary entrepreneur



**Title:** World Cup Fever: A Footballing Journey in Nine Tournaments  
**Author:** Simon Kuper  
**Publisher:** Profile Books

**This book** is the story of how the tournament touches and sometimes even changes our lives, by one of the best writers on the beautiful game



**Title:** Unplugged: Adventures from MTV to Timbuktu  
**Author:** Tom Freston  
**Publisher:** Simon and Schuster US

**In this unique memoir** of risk-taking, and warm cultural exchanges, Freston shows how to be successful at living your life on your own terms

## thehindubusinessline.

## TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

December 1, 2005

### Economy grows at 8 pc in Q2

With the manufacturing and the services sectors on a roll, the economy clocked an eight per cent growth for the second consecutive quarter this fiscal. If the current trend were to continue, it might not be difficult for the economy to post a growth of 7.5 per cent for the full year, as projected by the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, on Tuesday. The Q1 growth in gross domestic product (GDP) was 8.1 per cent and the second quarter was close behind with eight per cent, whereas the comparative figures for the previous fiscal were 7.6 and 6.7 per cent, respectively.

### SemIndia to invest \$3 b in new unit with AMD tie-up

SemIndia, a consortium of non resident Indians, today announced plans to invest \$3 billion to set up a semiconductor manufacturing facility in the country in collaboration with chip maker Advanced Micro Devices Inc (AMD). Announcing the partnership, Mr Vinod Agarwal, Chief Executive SemIndia and later may also pick up stake in the proposed plant.

### Great Eastern Hotel handed over

The West Bengal Government on Wednesday formally handed over Great Eastern Hotel to the Bharat Hotels Group controlled by Mr Lalit Suri.

### Short take

## India’s tryst with the turning track

B Baskar

Much ink has been spilt over India’s recent 0-2 drubbing in the hands of World Test Champions South Africa.

That the debacle came at home on turning tracks, which is supposed to be to India’s advantage, has led to much hand wringing.

Of course last year too India lost to New Zealand 0-3, again on spinning tracks.

On both occasions, the New Zealand and South African spinners made much better use of the turning tracks than the more experienced Indian spinners.

Indian coach Gautam Gambhir cut a sorry figure in the post-match interview.

But he did make one pertinent point. It was after all the same team that played brilliantly in England in summer.

### THE ENGLISH SUMMER

The series, one of the most riveting ones in recent times, ended in a 2-2 draw, when most pundits expected a drubbing for India, which was a team in transition under a new captain. But the Indian team surprised everyone, with captain Shubman Gill scoring more than 700 runs and the team clicking as a unit.

Even the away series last year against Australia, which ended in a 1-3 loss for India, was a much more closely fought one.

But Gambhir’s lament about India needing to prioritise Test cricket didn’t quite ring true as India has played nine

Tests so far this year. But he was also right about one thing — playing a white ball series in Australia just before a home Test series against the reigning World Test champion’s is perhaps the worst way to prepare for it.

So are Indians now better at playing on fast and true pitches than spinning ones? Ravichandran Ashwin, who in the past has run through opposition teams on spinning tracks at home, offered an interesting reason for Indians’ trouble on turning tracks.

He said for domestic matches now, neutral pitch curators are appointed by BCCI, to nullify the home advantage. So Indian batters, playing at fast true pitches in domestic cricket, have become more adept at playing fast bowling than spin.

The focus now will turn to white ball cricket with the T20 World Cup coming up next year.

India plays Test cricket again only in August nest year against Sri Lanka, so Test cricket for the time being can go back to backburner.

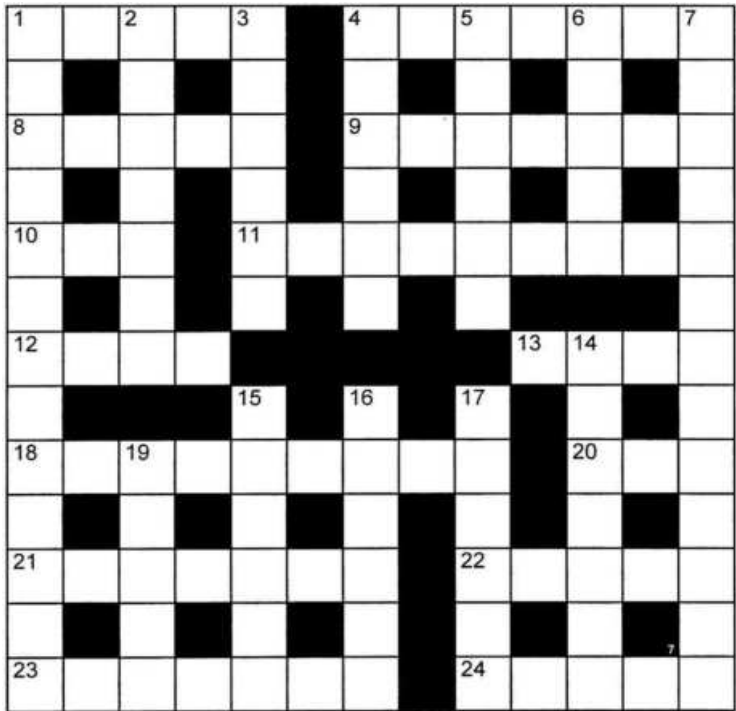
But since Test cricket is seen as the “real deal” and India, along with Australia and England are its biggest proponents, answers must be found for our recent home debacles.

Should we consign the “turning track” to history and prepare faster pitches at home? Will faster pitches in future become our “home advantage”?

This will not only help our batters but also our fast bowlers.

This is something our cricketing think tank must ponder over.

## BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2835



### EASY

#### ACROSS

- Yawning hollow (5)
- Scurries about (7)
- Alloy; intrinsic quality (5)
- Soft toffee (7)
- Give a sudden pull (3)
- Forty-scoring darts shot (6-3)
- Close (4)
- One-spot cards (4)
- Torment by holding out of reach (9)
- Sheltered side (3)
- Advice of goods sent, bill (7)
- Follows instructions (5)
- Item of apparel (7)
- Horizontal part of stair (5)

#### DOWN

- Fail to reach fruition (4,2,7)
- One of the Leeward Islands (7)
- Illness (6)
- Hurry! (4,2)
- Walk gently (6)
- Bound, restriction (5)
- Cool, calm, not agitated (4-9)
- Educational establishment (7)
- Sea-soldier (6)
- Not voiced (6)
- Work for newspaper, etc (6)
- At no time (5)

### SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2834

- ACROSS** 1. Brandishing 8. Rates 9. Stamped 10. Dispose 11. Image 12. Menace 14. Beagle 18. Denim 19. Muddled 21. Pothole 23. Eaten 24. Preferments  
**DOWN** 1. Boredom 2. Artisan 3. Disco 4. System 5. Imagine 6. Gap 7. Ledge 13. Compose 15. Glisten 16. Endings 17. Impede 18. Doped 20. Dream 22. Top

### NOT SO EASY

#### ACROSS

- Little Charles married, creating a great gulf (5)
- Makes oneself busy with antiquated dress features (7)
- Substance providing a repast around start of teatime (5)
- Toffee and cream Los Angeles produces (7)
- How might it lug heads off? (3)
- Twice as much cream in the milk will score forty (6-3)
- Being stingy, managed to reverse around the East (4)
- Deck members that can’t be got back (4)
- Excite but don’t satisfy last in tea-blending (9)
- There’s something that slips back to side away from wind (3)
- Bill is apparently singing well (7)
- Ex-schoolfellow disturbed, yes, but follows orders (5)
- Lady’s counterpart gets arm in something wearable (7)
- Pattern on tyre one will press with one’s feet (5)

#### DOWN

- Fail to materialise but count down, reaching zero (4,2,7)
- Island is against posh inclusion in Georgia (7)
- My French Dame has something wrong with her (6)
- You’ll be more cheerful if you hurry (4,2)
- It’s a way to go over and over a walk that’s not taxing (6)
- It’s bound to show one motorway in being illuminated (5)
- Quite collected, showing own ownership (4-9)
- Merry old king had pin put in part of university (7)
- In entering a horse, he has a military bearing on board (6)
- Is giving up, at time to give up, saying nothing (6)
- Get the story carried home at end-of-term (6)
- ‘What, \_\_\_\_? Hardly ever!’ (HMS Pinafore) (5)





OPINION

The  
Hindustan Times  
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

The message in high growth

Low inflation, tax cuts have boosted GDP numbers. Overall, the economy is on a high growth path, in the near term and medium term

An 8.2% GDP growth in the quarter ending September and an 8% growth in the first half of the fiscal year are unambiguously good numbers as far as the economy is concerned. This underlines the inherent robustness of the Indian economy at a time when the global economy is in a funk, and India has had to weather quite a few disruptions in its external economic engagements. The fact that this growth has come at a time when inflation is lower than normal — more on this later — also shows that the economy is anything but overheated at the moment. This is good news again.

What is driving this growth? The short answer is a growth boost in manufacturing and services on the production side. Services are clocking very close to double-digit growth, and manufacturing is slipping along at more than 7%. Once again, this is extremely encouraging. So, is there anything in the GDP numbers that does not call for an outright celebration? Three things need to be flagged here.

One, some of the boost could be statistical because of low inflation and, therefore, the GDP deflator ends up much lower. This statistical tailwind will weaken going forward, and the annual growth number is likely to end up below what it is in the first half. Two, some of the growth boost could be on account of one-time tailwinds to growth rather than a structural upgrade of the Indian economy's growth prospects. The 2025-26 Union Budget gave a consumption boost via income tax cuts. This was followed by another boost via a reduction in Goods and Services Tax rates on most commodities. It should not surprise that domestic private consumption is the primary driver of growth from the expenditure side. To be sure, the September quarter only factors in a week of the GST tailwind. Three, while the real rate is extremely impressive, the economy will have to deal with the effects of sub-par nominal growth, which is clocking just 8.7% for the first half of the fiscal year. Nominal growth is the base for revenue collections and debt servicing and also matters when it comes to business earnings. Managers, both at the finance ministry and those running businesses, would do well to brace for the headwinds from lower nominal growth this year.

These concerns aside, the latest GDP numbers do point to a healthy state of economic activity, which could, with careful policy intervention, embark on a higher growth path in both the near term and the medium term. That's a good position to be in.

Recalibrating Russia ties with an eye on EU

Russian president Vladimir Putin's visit to New Delhi for an annual bilateral summit this week comes at a time when India finds itself in a very delicate balancing act between the legacy relationships with Moscow and more recent partnerships with Washington and Brussels. It will be an opportunity for India to reassert its strategic autonomy by revitalising defence and economic ties with Russia, especially as there are indications that the two sides are close to big-ticket outcomes in areas ranging from military hardware to civil nuclear cooperation. However, India must keep in mind that its new partners in the European Union (EU) will be keeping a close eye on those very outcomes as New Delhi prepares to host the top leadership of the 27-member European bloc for another summit in January. India will have to resort to very deft manoeuvring to ensure that the summit with Russia doesn't affect what is an increasingly consequential partnership with the EU, especially as the two sides are set to conclude a major trade deal.

This is also about India smartly pivoting its foreign policy choices at a time of great geopolitical uncertainty and unpredictability on the international stage, mainly because of the policy shifts by the Trump administration in the US. With global institutions becoming increasingly irrelevant because of the whimsical positions of Trump 2.0, a period of bilateralism has kicked in. India has tackled this phase by actively pursuing legacy relations and scouting for new friends, and by expanding markets. Putin's visit comes against this backdrop. While defence acquisitions and joint development of hardware are central to India-Russia ties, New Delhi must address the lopsided nature of trade by ensuring greater access to Russian markets. India must also calibrate its approach to Russia's policy on Ukraine while keeping in mind Europe's concerns.

After Johannesburg, future of G20 comity

In a world of disruptions, India and other middle powers must take the lead to protect the sanctity of global institutions

The G20 Summit in Johannesburg took place on 22-23 November under the shadow of huge global geopolitical churning and a potential collapse of multi-lateral decision-making. For one, there was a threat of the summit becoming a non-event due to the boycott of the US and its attempt to discredit South Africa by accusing the host country that suffered apartheid at the hands of the white Afrikaners till 1994, of committing "white genocide" against the Afrikaners! Further, the South African presidency wanted the first "African" G20 summit to focus on development issues of Africa as well Global South, especially debt sustainability, finance for just energy transitions, disaster resilience and use of critical minerals for African growth. The US rejected almost all its priorities and even called South Africa's G20 theme of "solidarity, equality, and sustainability" as "anti-Americanism". The presidents of the US, China and Russia were no-shows. The Argentinian and the Mexican leaders also did not show up. Moreover, the Johannesburg Summit was the culmination of a cycle of

Global South presidencies, including Indonesia, India, Brazil and South Africa. Lack of inclusivity has always been a shortcoming of G20, and this is what India bridged by inducting the African Union into G20 as well as holding the Voice of the Global South Summit for the first time during its presidency. This gathered steam, and many Global South issues were reflected in G20 summit texts in Brazil and now, in South Africa. However, the renewed marginalisation of the voice of small developing States has been one of the most debilitating developments in the Trump 2.0 era — a collective abdication of responsibility by the West. But, despite the last-minute drama by Argentina and a bid by an absent US to block a consensus on the outcome, it is to the immense credit of South Africa that the Leaders' Declaration was finally adopted. With this, it is clear that announcements of the death of multi-lateralism are premature, and the withdrawal of the US has not dealt a death blow to either the G20 Summit in Johannesburg or the UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties in Belem, Brazil, as was widely feared. In fact, the summit brought out the strength of the middle powers to take the global agenda forward. As Canadian prime minister (PM) Mark Carney — no lover of the US administration — said, the Johannesburg Summit was a reminder that the centre of gravity in

the global economy was shifting. PM Narendra Modi's very presence at the G20 summit was an affirmation of India's solidarity with South Africa, with their African agenda and the Global South. Unlike Brics, where India is busy fending off anti-US sentiments and the Chinese push after the expansion of Brics from five countries to 11, in G20, India has always been an anchor of stability and a voice of reason. In a disruptive world, decisions are now taken unilaterally outside the mandate of relevant global institutions. For example, decisions on international peace and security are taken outside the UN Security Council (UNSC), or unilateral climate action by the developed world is taken outside the UN Climate Change Convention, or massive disruption of trade rules is happening outside the World Trade Organisation framework. India and other middle powers ensured that this did not happen in the G20 summit, and Global South concerns were addressed. PM Modi's six-point agenda was welcomed: It included a global traditional knowledge repository; an Africa skills multiplier (one million trainers); a global health care response team; an open satellite data partnership; a critical minerals circularity initiative; and a G20 initiative to counter the drug-terror nexus. Apart from emphasising climate action and food security, PM Modi called for revisiting development parameters and proposed "integral



TS Tirumurti



The main concern of the Global South now is undoubtedly that their modest gains will be lost under the US G20 presidency in 2026.

humanism" — viewing the individual, society and nature as one integrated system — as a guiding principle for growth. A timely Indian proposal was the critical minerals circularity initiative to boost recycling, urban mining and second-life battery innovations and ease pressure on supply chains, which was endorsed by G20. Equally significant was the agreement on the sidelines between India, Australia and Canada for a new trilateral technology and innovation partnership (ACTTI), which aims at critical and emerging technologies and building resilient supply chains — bringing friends and "former friends" together. The main concern of the Global South now is undoubtedly that their modest gains will be lost under the US G20 presidency in 2026, which has already pledged to radically reduce the scope of G20, including possibly curtailing crucial developmental issues. If that happens, none of the G20 countries will be in any position to resist the American juggernaut. The first post-Summit salvo has already been fired. Angered that South Africa "handed over" the presidency to the US only in their foreign office (since

the US sent only an Embassy official to take over), President Donald Trump has sworn not to invite South Africa to the 2026 summit in his golf club in Miami. While the jury is still out on whether golfers among Heads of State will have the upper hand in the negotiations, the world cannot afford to let G20 go the way of UNSC, WTO and others to become a lame duck. But if that happens, countries will just have to wait out Trump 2.0, especially American allies who have taken a big hit. While one year is a long time in geopolitics or in American politics, it is time that the middle powers become the fulcrum for a constructive agenda without being seen as a zero-sum game in relation to the US. With India coming under pressure from the US, China and in our neighbourhood, now is the time for New Delhi to further deepen its development partnership with the Global South and Africa. India's proactive role is a must to navigate global geopolitical, geo-technological and geo-economic disruptions.

TS Tirumurti is a former ambassador and Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations, New York. The views expressed are personal

{ STRAIGHTFORWARD }

Shashi Shekhar



Why Opposition parties seem to lose the plot against BJP

These days, Tejashwi Yadav is the target of intense trolling. Before him, the Hooda family in Haryana and the Thackerays in Maharashtra were subjected to the same treatment. So, is the battle of victory and defeat in electoral politics a tussle between dynasts versus the rest? Absolutely not. If dynastic politics were the only bane, then Hemant Soren in Jharkhand would have suffered a drubbing as was witnessed in the Maharashtra and Haryana polls. Soren not only bucked incumbency, but his party, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), returned with more seats than earlier. He proved that to win an election, you have to break the strategic contours of your opponent before humbling them. Taking a leaf out of his opponents' playbook, Soren, on the lines of Maharashtra's Majhi Ladki Bahin and Madhya Pradesh's Ladli Behna schemes, launched his own Maiya Samman scheme and systematically implemented it on the ground. With many other welfare initiatives, he tried to address the rights and needs of every voter segment.

Even then, anti-incumbency could have played spoilsport, but his arrest gave him a shot in the arm. The assembly elections added to his assembly seats while the Congress's tally remained unchanged at 16. The trends are clear in states where the Congress is the junior partner. Despite a supporting wave, the party is incapable of cashing in on it.

We can debate whether the distribution of freebies just before the elections has emerged as a unique new strategy to secure victory. However, this is the second popular but partial truth. Arvind Kejriwal initiated this trend and became its victim during the last Delhi assembly elections. After providing almost all the basic amenities such as electricity, water, health care, and education for free, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) emptied out the exchequer. As a result, once-cash-rich Delhi fell victim to a cash crunch, slowing down development and maintenance work. The results were evident.

You may ask if Soren benefitted from going to jail, then why couldn't Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia, who, along with many of their lieutenants, spent months behind bars, pull off a victory? We shouldn't forget that Kejriwal entered politics riding on a moral high horse, a veritable political knight in shining armour. However, his image started unravelling the moment news of the expensive refurbishing of his official quarters appeared in the media. People couldn't digest this volte face.

Are the BJP leaders immune to this weakness? It's true that since assuming power, a change in the behaviour and probity of some of the BJP leaders is visible. However, the saffron party never lets its ideological flow be interrupted by individual shallowness. No corruption charges have ever stuck to any of their top leaders. They do shower freebies, keeping the health of the exchequer in mind. Fundamental development remains their focus and calling card.

Unlike the Opposition, the BJP never rests on its laurels. The moment one election is over, it starts preparing for the next. Victory celebrations in Bihar were still on when the top party strategists and Union home minister Amit Shah deputed six organisational secretaries for the West Bengal assembly elections. As the elections near, the BJP's firepower will keep increasing. The question is: What options do the Opposition parties have? They should invest themselves in the concept of 24x7 politics. It's imperative for the morale of their workers that their leaders are available all the time. The days of appearing just before the elections and vanishing till the next voting are over. Also, they will have to launch street movements related to people's problems. They shouldn't hesitate about getting lathi-charged or going to jail. I remember the 1991 Uttar Pradesh assembly elections. Mulayam Singh Yadav's Samajwadi Party was left with just 34 seats. The BJP came to power for the first time with a clear majority. Their firebrand leader from Other Backward Communities (OBC), Kalyan Singh, had just taken oath as chief minister. I visited Mulayam Singh at his residence in Lucknow. During the initial conversation, he confidently said that he would tour the state in two months and win the elections the next time. He did what he promised. Lalu Prasad, Bal Thackeray, and others did the same thing when the need arose. Even Indira Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi, after losing power in 1977, displayed political resilience from Parliament to the streets. So, the writing on the wall is clear: Predecessors of the present political princelings believed in political struggle rather than coining catchy slogans. The problem is not in dynastic politics but the way it is being played out. Despite the fact that they are up against the well-oiled election machinery of the BJP, they are content with fighting on social media. Street campaigns are in their party's DNA, but they haven't displayed the necessary will to undertake that messy struggle. They merely coin hollow slogans, and that too remains confined to mere photo-ops. Within their own clan, an intense power struggle wages constantly, and they put up a show of being the undisputed leader. Last but not least, their spokespersons make a hash of an already precarious situation. Some cross all the limits of decency and logic. Every party has their bad apples, but the RJD is overflowing with them. Tejashwi Yadav became a victim of these self-styled party spokespersons. Their behaviour on TV channels was enough to give a glimpse of the "jungle raj". Dejection is becoming the destiny of those who yearn for a strong Opposition for a healthy democracy. If the Opposition doesn't break this predictable and disappointing performance, it will create far graver concerns for India's democracy.

Shashi Shekhar is editor-in-chief, Hindustan. The views expressed are personal

{ C P RADHAKRISHNAN } VICE-PRESIDENT

Research and innovation are the twin engines that will drive India's journey towards technological leadership

At National Institute of Technology in Kurukshetra

Nuances in the debate on the age of consent

Debates on children's issues often erupt into public controversy, and the current discussion on the age of consent is no different. The latest trigger is a petition in the Supreme Court of India challenging the criminalisation of consensual sexual activity between adolescents aged 16-18 years in *Nipun Saxena vs Union of India*. The age of consent is not the same as the age of majority or the age of marriage. It simply marks the age at which an individual can legally consent to sexual activity. The debate over this age has existed since the late 1800s, with the threshold shifting from 10 years to 16 years in 1949. It remained at 16 until the enactment of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act in 2012, which raised it to 18 despite concerns about the practical implications of such a change. Evidence shows that adolescents do engage in sexual relationships regardless of adult misgivings. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2019-21), nearly 40% of women aged 25-49 had their first sexual experience before turning 18. The courts are inundated with what are commonly called "love cases"—criminal proceedings arising from consensual adolescent relationships. Studies such as the 2017 HAQ: Centre for Child Rights study and *Implementation of the POCSO Act: A Study of the Functioning of Special Courts in Delhi and Mumbai* by Enfold Proactive Health Trust documented similar trends across four states and revealed how these cases are occupying court time, and also end up in acquittal by the courts. Most accused in these cases are boys between 16 and 18 who enter consensual relationships with peers. The courts themselves have acknowledged this reality. In *State v. Hitesh* (Delhi High Court, 2025), for example, the court observed that "love is a fundamental human experience" and that adolescents have the right to form consensual emotional and romantic relationships free from coercion. The former chief justice of India, DY Chandrachud, had also urged Parliament to reconsider the age of consent under POCSO, noting the disconnect between the law and lived realities. This divide frames the current debate. On one side are those who argue that adolescent sexuality is a fact of life and that the law must evolve to avoid criminalising young people in consensual relationships. On the other hand are those who believe lowering the age of consent will promote promiscuity, increase teenage pregnancies, and heighten vulnerability to exploitation, child marriage, and trafficking—especially among Dalit, Bahun, and Adivasi communities. The age of consent was discussed extensively when POCSO was being drafted, but proposals

for a lower age were disregarded, including recommendations from the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR). The rationale offered was the need to align with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Juvenile Justice law, and the Majority Act. The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 2013, subsequently revised Section 375 of the IPC on similar lines. Later, in *Independent Thought v. Union of India*, the Supreme Court clarified that POCSO applied even within marriage, effectively criminalising marital sex where the wife is below 18. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) has retained this position. As a result, all sexual activity involving anyone under 18—whether consensual or not—is treated as statutory rape. However, the UNCRC does not require the age of consent to be 18 years and instead the Committee on the Rights of the Child has urged States not to criminalise consensual non-exploitative adolescent. Mandatory reporting under POCSO has created further complications. Girls facing unintended pregnancies—often from consensual relationships—struggle to access safe, confidential abortion services because health care providers fear legal consequences. A 2021 fact-finding study by NLSIU and the Centre for Reproductive Rights found that clinics routinely deny services to underage girls. This forces many children to resort to unsafe and illegal abortions, exposing them to greater health risks and further vulnerability. Preventing such pregnancies is more effectively achieved through comprehensive sexuality education and access to contraception, not criminal prosecution. Let us be clear: The goal is not to encourage sexual activity among minors but to distinguish harm from innocence, coercion from curiosity. It is to provide protection to children—and not be protectionist. Protection is grounded in rights and empowers children; protectionism is rooted in social norms and often ends up restricting their autonomy. If criminal sanctions were the most effective solution, rape would have disappeared with the introduction of the death penalty. While the choices that the children and adolescents are making may not always be ideal, penal action cannot be the answer. The response lies instead in measures such as open conversations with young people about responsible sexual behaviour, empowering them to understand violence, and strengthening their capacity to protect themselves through education, life-skills training, and the creation of safety nets.



Enakshi Ganguly

Enakshi Ganguly, co-founder and former co-director of HAQ: Centre for Child Rights, is honorary professor, National Law University Odisha. The views expressed are personal



## GDP beats expectations

Nominal growth numbers may pose challenges

The Indian economy grew at a much faster pace than expected in the first half this financial year. The data released last week showed that gross domestic product (GDP) expanded by 8.2 per cent at constant prices in the second quarter, taking first-half growth to 8 per cent, up from 6.1 per cent last year. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had projected a growth rate of 7 per cent for the second quarter. Growth was supported by increased activity in segments such as manufacturing, which grew 9.1 per cent, and construction, which went up 7.2 per cent. The tertiary sector also recorded a growth rate of over 9 per cent. On the expenditure side, private consumption strengthened and grew 7.9 per cent, while growth in investment slowed a bit to 7.3 per cent compared to 7.8 per cent in the first quarter.

The Indian economy's performance, based on the available numbers, has been exceptional in the first half of 2025-26. It is worth emphasising that the external environment was not supportive. The United States' (US) trade policy has significantly increased uncertainty in the global economy. The US has also imposed a 50 per cent tariff on India, the impact of which is now beginning to show. Most economists, therefore, expect growth to soften a bit in the second half. However, on the positive side, the government is hopeful of arriving at a trade deal with the US soon. A bilateral investment treaty is also being negotiated, which should help improve investment over the medium term. On the domestic front, the impact of rationalisation and the reduction in goods and services tax rates, which became effective in late September, should be visible in the December-quarter numbers. Considering all factors, economists expect full-year growth could well exceed 7 per cent, which would be very encouraging, given the current global economic backdrop. Measures such as the notification of the four labour Codes by the government and the consolidation of over 9,000 circulars and directions by the RBI last week will also help improve ease of doing business.

Although the growth numbers are impressive in real terms, the level of nominal growth has raised some concern. In nominal terms, the economy expanded 8.8 per cent in the first half. In the second quarter, for example, the difference between the nominal and real growth rates was just 50 basis points, which can be explained by low inflation. However, corporate earnings and tax revenue depend on nominal expansion, which can have varied implications for the economy. Tax collection, for example, in April-October grew only 4 per cent, though there was a sharp uptick in October. To meet the full-year gross tax-revenue target, collection will need to clock a growth rate of over 20 per cent in November-March, which could be difficult to achieve.

From a medium-term perspective, since the government is moving to target the debt-to-GDP ratio, sustained low nominal growth could make things difficult. Notably, a lot will also depend on the much-awaited GDP base revision next year. However, the most immediate policy question is what the latest GDP numbers mean for the Monetary Policy Committee, which is scheduled to meet this week. As noted in this space recently, the MPC's decision will depend on how the recent inflation outcomes have shaped its projections for the coming quarters. At the current pace of growth, a 25-basis-point rate cut is unlikely to make a significant difference.

## Tackling urban pollution

A binding national plan is urgently needed

The National Capital Region attracts countrywide and global attention for its poor air quality almost all the year round. But a recent study by Climate Trends, a research consultancy, offers a sobering truth. No major Indian city has achieved a safe air-quality index (AQI) in the past decade. The study covers 11 major cities over 10 years (2015-November 20, 2025). It shows that even for those cities such as Bengaluru, which had the cleanest air quality, their AQI never hit the "good" category; it has consistently stayed in the "satisfactory" category.

The key message from this 10-year study is that despite policy intervention and technological improvement, India's major cities continue to suffer major air-quality challenges. Mumbai, the financial capital, and Chennai, an emerging industrial hub, are illustrative of the problem. Both have seen their air quality improve from "moderate" to "satisfactory". Mumbai saw its AQI improve from a high of 120 in 2022 to 83.2 in 2025. Chennai touched a high of 115 in 2016 to 74.67 in 2025. It is worth noting, however, that these numbers represent annual averages rather than median rates. There have been months when Mumbai's air quality has rivalled Delhi's in its inferiority. Unlike the drier plains of the north, where pollutant-dispersing winds subside in the winter, both cities also have the benefit of a long, heavy rainy season as well as year-round sea breezes to lighten air pollution. In other words, given their natural bounties, their air-quality indices should consistently be in the "good" category. In Delhi, where the air quality has stayed in the "poor" category with many perilous days of "severe" and "hazardous", the sharp diminution of farm fires, often cited as a key reason for winter pollution, also suggests that a different paradigm is needed. The need for a more structured national-level pollution plan is becoming more urgent by the day.

To be sure, the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), set up in 2019 by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, aimed to do just this. It targeted 131 cities in 24 states and Union Territories to achieve reductions of up to 40 per cent for particulate matter (PM) 10 concentrations. The NCAP's founding conception — of engaging all stakeholders and providing funds for cities to develop specific action plans — has yielded some positive results but the larger outcomes have been mixed and mostly suboptimal. This uneven performance has largely been the result of the absence of a legal mandate linking funding to performance. As a result, efficient states made some progress whereas inefficient ones performed poorly. The absence of state capacity in the form of the availability of trained technical expertise and integrated data standards has also hampered the programme.

Perhaps the exclusive focus on PM10 in the performance-assessment framework instead of including PM2.5, which, health experts say, has more harmful impacts, has also detracted from the NCAP's impact. The findings of the study by Climate Trends offer scope for a reframing of policy. A national air-quality programme should be all-inclusive in nature and outcomes framed in terms of specific mandates — such as promoting electric-vehicle infrastructure to reduce vehicular emission, augmenting public transport solutions, and, most importantly, educating the public to participate in a programme to avert a serious public-health crisis down the line.

# Relax, enjoy the AI era dawning

...and disregard frightening headlines

ILLUSTRATION: AJAYA KUMAR MOHANTY



I distinctly recall how in the mid-1980s, when I was in the first decade of my working life in Mumbai (then Bombay), newspaper headlines were dominated by things like: "Bank unions warn: Computerisation to throw thousands out of work".

Even a nerd like me, fresh out of IIM Calcutta and trying hard to get our advertising agency to take off, would wonder: "Is the world coming to an end? Is India about to experience a mass revolution that would change its character?" It was loudly proclaimed, in slogans and headlines (with no private television channels or Internet, these mattered back then), that the 80-odd giant textile mills — the mainstay of Bombay's economy — were losing money thanks to new technology like polyester and nylon textiles replacing cotton. The workers' salaries were not being paid. For us, the major advertising clients were these very textile mills... if they shut shop, what would the future of our business be?

These days, I find many of my friends and acquaintances sounding as if they are about to slide into a similar mood over headlines like: "AI in banking: Employees hear roles may shrink as automation speeds up". And then there are countless editorials warning about the threat of fake news, and the imminent decline of our tech services giants.



AJIT BALAKRISHNAN

I try pointing out to them that it is because of the computerisation of banks that we no longer have to stand in a 100-metre-long queue to draw cash from our own accounts, that we don't need to carry bags full of cash as we once had to, and that far from shrinking their workforce, banks have now extended their reach

from 10 per cent of India's population (primarily in urban centres like Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, and Delhi) to 85 per cent, covering previously underserved sections in rural India. When I quote such figures, I can notice their faces light up with relief.

Listening to contemporary anxiety about AI, I have started wondering whether it was a mistake to give the label "artificial intelligence" to a method that more accurately should have been called "large language models". The term "artificial intelligence" implies that tools like ChatGPT and Google's Gemini possess agency, intent and reasoning as humans do. But clearly, calling it AI makes it easier to enthuse investors and raise capital. This is not the first time such an investor-oriented naming has happened. In the 1970s, a computer-playing chess was deemed to be using AI to do so. In the 1990s, optical character recognition (OCR) was called "AI". Now, it's just a standard feature on your phone.

An even more accurate description would be

## Labour Codes: Policy vs execution

India's new labour Codes — four sweeping laws meant to replace 29 fusty statutes — promise to simplify compliance, broaden social security, and grant firms the flexibility to hire, fire, and grow. But then, India has a habit of announcing reforms that look splendid but get bungled on execution. Will the new Codes join this tradition? The country's recent economic reforms have followed this predictable arc: Ambitious legislation drafted in New Delhi, halting implementation in the states, and an eventual outcome far removed from the intent. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), for instance, was intended to be a swift and fearsome mechanism for disciplining errant borrowers. It soon became bogged down in court delays, procedural squabbles, and corruption. Delays and gaming the system look common. The Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act (Rera), designed to protect homebuyers, dissolved into a patchwork of diluted state-level regulations. Even goods and services tax (GST), the most dramatic fiscal reform in decades, continues to be a work in progress with complex rules and uneven enforcement.

The first obstacle is India's federalism. Though the Codes are central legislation, labour sits on the Concurrent List of the Constitution, meaning the states must craft their own rules and do the actual enforcing. In similar other cases, some have been diligent; many have not. Most of them are interested in political theatre rather than regulatory housekeeping. A worker in one state might enjoy benefits unavailable in another; a factory might be regulated differently across state lines. The new Codes promise to smooth these wrinkles. But if states drag their feet or carve out bespoke interpretations, the Codes will fall short of their intent.

The second problem is capacity and quality of governance. The Codes assume the existence of digital systems for worker registration, algorithms for risk-based inspection, and administrators capable of handling millions of online compliance filing. The reality is less flattering. India's government

machinery, usually poorly trained, badly supervised, and undermined by corruption, cannot enforce even modest regulations, let alone a generational overhaul. Digitisation is uneven; portals often crash under pressure. The Employees Provident Fund Organisation is causing untold harassment to millions. The IBC's collapse under the weight of overwhelmed tribunals should have served as a warning. Instead, the Codes seem to have borrowed its ambition without its lessons.

Their architects place much faith in digital compliance: Electronic filing, online grievance systems, and Aadhaar-linked social-security accounts. But India's digital landscape is uneven. GST filing remains a headache for many small businesses. Millions of workers lack reliable connectivity. Those in the informal sector — construction workers, drivers, and domestic staff — possess scarcely any reliable documentation.

India has already produced several digital-welfare schemes, which function more as databases rather than delivery systems. The e-Shram portal — for informal workers — remains incomplete, riddled with duplicates and missing beneficiaries. Construction workers' welfare funds sit unspent in many states for want of clean data, as a government audit found. Expecting the new Codes to succeed where these programmes have stumbled looks optimistic, if not fantastical.

Then there is populist politics, which is ready to undermine any reform. Any economic downturn, significant layoffs, or industrial accident could prompt politicians to dilute or delay implementation. Reform in India often depends less on economic logic than on political risk-aversion. Rera became weaker through state-level amendments; GST rates proliferated thanks to political compromises. Labour reform could easily face similar political recalibration.

The Codes earn credit for recognising gig and platform workers, but here India's regulatory ambition outruns its practical capabilities. Definitions are broad, contribution mechanisms vague, and

"high-dimensional pattern matching". What we call "AI" today may, in 10 years, just be called "superfast autocomplete". I asked my frequent consultant Gemini: "Why does the label AI matter instead of, for example, 'high-dimensional pattern matching' or some statistical term like that?" The answer I got was:

"The label 'AI' matters because it transforms a statistical tool into a mythological entity. If we called it 'high-dimensional pattern matching,' we would treat it as a utility — predictable and human-controlled. By labeling it 'intelligence,' we attribute agency to the machine. This framing exponentially inflates its economic valuation while simultaneously diffusing accountability: When a statistical tool fails, we blame the user, but when 'AI' fails, we blame the 'black box'. The label successfully rebrands computation as creation."

When I read this, I was forced to scratch my head in bewilderment. Gemini was so very truthful, even though I had expected it to give a marketing-oriented reply.

As is my usual practice, I asked my other pal ChatGPT the exact same question. This time, the answer was: "We call it 'artificial intelligence' not because today's systems think like humans, but because society needs a simple, evocative label for a sprawling scientific project whose ambition is to build machines that exhibit intelligent behaviour. Technical terms describe what the systems do; AI describes what the field aims for."

I was stunned by the truthfulness of this answer as well.

When we reflect a little, it is apparent that the reason we humans are stunned and impressed by the answers that ChatGPT, Gemini, and other similar tools in vogue today give is their human-like conversational format. The tone and phraseology that they use in their answers, or in the clarifications that they seek from us human users, are human-like. I suddenly remembered that Steve Jobs, when he designed the iPhone, did something similar — he introduced "touch" as a method of navigation (swipe, pinch, zoom), inspired by his study of the yogic principle of *pratyahara* (the withdrawal of senses from clutter into focus). Thanks to this, we users did not have to painfully type in characters for everything on our mobile phones. The touch-based phone became every human being's constant and inseparable companion.

So, let's all relax and enjoy the new era dawning: The AI era!

The author (ajitb@rediffmail.com) is devoting his life to unravelling the connections between technology and society

## How capitalism took over the world



MARCUS REDIKER

Any book about capitalism that begins almost 900 years ago in the port city of Aden, in what is now Yemen, promises a new story. In *Capitalism*, the Harvard historian Sven Beckert delivers on that promise with an epic 1,300-page account of the global leviathan that created the world in which we live.

During the Cold War, capitalism was the global force that dared not speak its name. To this day, most of Beckert's fellow historians rarely link their local, regional or even national histories to the larger system of which they are a part. Beckert has now proved once and

for all the necessity of naming the global beast in order to reveal its vast power, past and present.

Never before has so much qualitative and quantitative evidence been brought to bear on so broad a reinterpretation of this story. Previous histories have usually treated capitalism as a European invention, but Beckert, as ambitious as he is erudite, shows how capitalism arose as a global phenomenon, the peculiar behaviour of a few merchants in places as far apart as Cairo and Changzhou.

By mapping the diverse origins of capitalism, Beckert reveals its protean and resilient character. Over hundreds of years, merchants created small enclaves of capital within port cities and elaborate networks of trust that stretched over long distances.

In the 17th century, the sugar-producing island of Barbados became one of the first capitalist societies, and silver-producing Potosí (in present-day Bolivia) became one of the first capitalist cities. As many as a quarter of the people who

descended into Potosí's mines died in them, Beckert writes, but "wealthy Potosians could buy Ceylonese diamonds, Neapolitan stockings, Venetian crystal and Chinese porcelain."

Many histories of capitalism are abstract, structural and narrowly economic, but Beckert enriches his story by recreating for the reader the places where his subjects made their fortunes — the medieval merchant hubs of Central Asia, the sugar plantations of the Indian Ocean and the "production floors of 20th-century industrial behemoths" that pumped out cars in Detroit. He travels to the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh, where he interviews a textile worker at the factory gate and then weaves her experiences into his epilogue.

Beckert also humanises his history by anchoring it in the lives of specific capitalists like the Godrej family in British India. Committed nationalists, the Godrejs began manufacturing everyday goods like locks and safes at the turn of the 20th century and helped to finance

the Indian independence movement. They turned a big profit on the decline of the British Empire in the late 1940s, when their early support for the future Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru helped them win a contract to make typewriters for the post-colonial bureaucracy.

Beckert's book arrives on a crowded and bloody battlefield, where intellectual, cultural and geopolitical war has been waged for more than two centuries about what capitalism is and what the story of its rise might tell us. He offers an especially devastating critique of earlier mythologies of capitalism, showing how the "invisible hand" of the market does not peacefully guide world affairs, and how the development of capitalism was in no sense "natural."

Two leading thinkers of the 18th century, the French philosopher Montesquieu and the Scottish political economist Adam Smith, argued that world trade promoted peace and harmony because it advanced mutual interest and interdependency.

Beckert emphasises how capitalism has depended at every stage of its development on the military power of the

modern state and frequently on practices of extreme violence, such as the outright terror required to build the Atlantic system of slavery.

Even though Beckert pays close attention to technological developments like the steam engine and the railroad, he says remarkably little about the European tall ship, the machine that powered the conquest of the world from the 15th through the 18th centuries, and even less about the sailors whose labour made possible the creation of the world market. The book is fundamentally terracentric.

Workers and labour history in general do, however, play a central role in *Capitalism*. Labourers on plantations and in factories exert a collective force, often through acts of rebellion and resistance, especially during the Haitian Revolution and the many phases of the

Industrial Revolution.

Their main impact was to slow down the advance of capital and to create more

humane features, such as the welfare state, within it. Yet these movements against capital do not get the same human face as the actors who advanced its cause around the globe. The book is more a study in political economy than a history from below.

Still, *Capitalism* is a learned, formidable and vivid story. Its grand synthesis will engage not only general readers, but thousands of specialists, many of whom will object to this or that interpretation or omission. That is as it should be. Readers around the world will study and ponder this monumental work of history, agreeing and arguing with it, all the while affirming its generational importance for decades to come.

The reviewer is a historian at the University of Pittsburgh  
©2025 The New York Times News Service



CAPITALISM: A Global History  
by Sven Beckert  
Published by Penguin Press  
1,325 pages \$49





# GDP growth of 8% plus: How to sustain this pace

Last quarter’s economic expansion has cheered India but the challenge is to sustain a brisk rate for years to come. For private investment to chip in, revive infrastructure partnerships

India’s 8.2% growth in GDP reported for the second quarter of 2025-26 sprang a surprise. It exceeded expectations and took the first half’s pace of economic expansion to 8%. This has led economists to revise upwards the entire year’s rate of growth to around 7.5%. The good news is bound to cheer markets. However, it would not be out of place to temper this moment of optimism with a reality check. The 8.2% number for the three months from July to September rides on the back of a strong 9.1% uptick in manufacturing. This is at odds with the index for industrial production, which averaged under 4% over those months, and also data on the core sector, which registered cumulative growth of 2.9% over April-September. Bear in mind too the International Monetary Fund’s recent reservations about the quality of India’s income accounting; it gave India a ‘C’ in its data adequacy assessment. Since corporate earnings in the consumer goods sector have been anaemic, a rise in private consumption expenditure of 7.9% in the second quarter (9.3% in current prices) could tempt marketers of various consumer goods to break into a jig. But that would be premature. They should wait for another quarter’s numbers to reveal the impact of India’s mid-year GST cuts.

The difference between growth rates in constant and current prices is explained by inflation (both wholesale and retail). The second quarter’s real GDP expansion rate of 8.2% is just half a percentage point less than its nominal rate of 8.7%. For the first half, the ‘deflator’ is only a bit more; a nominal rate of 8.8% translates to 8% in real terms. This year’s budget, however, had assumed nominal GDP growth of 10.1%, which now looks steep. Unless infla-

tion jumps in the second half, the government’s annual tax collections may turn out less than projected, which means public spending would need a pullback to keep the fiscal deficit within 4.4% of GDP, its target for 2025-26. While robust consumption could conceivably ease the Centre’s need to support national output fiscally, it is unclear if we have reached that point. In the first half of this year, the ‘public administration, defence and other services’ component of GDP grew faster than overall output. Although this May’s hostilities with Pakistan lasted only four days, the broader mobilization would have been on a far bigger scale. In the second half, thus, public expenditure faces compression and the economy is expected to lose some pace.

This is not to overlook the possibility of a boom in consumer buying spurred by GST rate reductions that took effect on 22 September. How this stimulus is playing out, though, will not be known till early next year. The hope is that it will lure businesses to invest more in capacity. For the economy to sustain a growth trajectory of 8% plus for years together, fixed capital formation must rise at least five percentage points above 30.5% of GDP, a level it seems stuck at. As the Centre shifts to reducing its pile of debt as its fiscal target from 2026-27, it will not have much space to invest. Private investment would have to kick in. If clouds lift on the export horizon, all the better. But if capacity addition disappoints, we should bet on infrastructure to attract private funds. The budget speech had promised a policy for public-private partnerships (PPPs) for that. While whiffs of scandal had given PPPs a bad name, given sufficient transparency, such projects could deliver what the economy needs.

MY VIEW | THE INTERSECTION

# Creative conservatism can make our foreign policy more effective

India needs a framework that secures its national interests amid fast evolving geopolitical realities



**NITIN PAI** is co-founder and director of The Takshashila Institution, an independent centre for research and education in public policy.

straints keep us distant from our South East Asian neighbours. Then there is Brics, essentially an anti-American showboat that we don’t want to be completely aboard, and finally the fictitious ‘Global South,’ a collective noun coined by the West to refer in shorthand to the rest of the world.

It is clear that India needs a new strategic framework for this new world, one that conservatively carries forward core conceptions of national interests, but at the same time is creative enough to find its way through emerging realities. To have a chance of being implemented at all, any strategy must be consistent with India’s political culture and implementable by governmental machinery.

So what should India’s foreign policy for the next 10 years look like? When my colleagues and I pondered this question, the following outline emerged.

As outlined by the Prime Minister, India’s primary goal is to become a developed nation by 2047. This means sustained high economic growth, with peace, harmony and environmental sustainability our big national policy objectives. The role of foreign and defence policy is to create a conducive environment for achieving these goals. While this means a front-footed approach to border disputes, there is little room for ambitious military operations across India’s *de facto* boundaries.

Despite the challenges thrown up by the Donald Trump administration, New Delhi will have to find ways to strengthen its relationship with the US. It is likely that in its second year, the Trump administration will have a better sense of the consequences of its early policy decisions, and thus be in a better position to close a bilateral trade agreement. Even as the New Delhi establishment invests in repairing the relationship with Washington, it cannot and should not forget 2025.

We must also repair ties with China while being fully aware that power is the only language of this relationship. We should not yield on border questions,

nor accept that China is a normal trade partner. This does not mean that we cut ourselves off from our northern neighbour. At the risk of overdoing a pun, there is no one China policy. We must explore trade, economics, technology, territory and global issues on separate tracks: cooperating where we can and confronting China where we must.

The US-China relationship will remain volatile: it can be a G2 or its opposite, a Cold War or its opposite, or various other forms that can change from one to another in months. To manage the vagaries of its dynamics, India needs a new systematic approach to engage with the rest of the world.

It is in dealing with the rest of the world that Indian foreign policy will have to creatively shift towards a more purposeful sectoral plurilateralism. To create backstops and leverage against being pressured by the US or China, New Delhi should invest in a constellation of plurilateral groups centred around specific sectors and comprising countries that share similar geopolitical concerns. The most effective plurilaterals are those that require India’s participation to be viable. The recently concluded India-Australia-Canada partnership on technology and innovation is a case in point. There are a number of sectors, including defence, energy, biotech, space, higher education, public health, food security and environment, where India can bring together a few countries to achieve meaningful outcomes. In time, some of these overlapping relationships could grow into plurilateral blocs. Recall that it was the European Coal and Steel Community of 1951 that grew into the European Union four decades later.

Quite a lot of this is incrementalism, which is a good thing. Instead of flashy new doctrines and strategies, New Delhi’s foreign policy establishment should restructure and reorient its portfolio of relationships towards the more coherent purpose of creating meaningful leverage with its partners.



JUST A THOUGHT

“The 8.2% GDP growth in Q2 of 2025-26 is very encouraging. It reflects the impact of our pro-growth policies and reforms. It also reflects the hard work and enterprise of our people.”

NARENDRA MODI

MY VIEW | MODERN TIMES

# No, our election booth level officers aren’t dying of stress

MANU JOSEPH



is a journalist, novelist and screenwriter. His latest book is ‘Why the Poor Don’t Kill Us.’

A dangerous thing the Indian news media does is attribute reasons for suicide. Any straightforward ‘cause’ cited for this form of death is at risk of being erroneous, apart from being dangerous, even if such a reason is sourced from a person’s suicide note. People are not taken so seriously when they speak of themselves in their best times, yet a note they write in their darkest hour is used to explain their final act.

When there is no note, the media deduces a simple reason from what the family of the deceased say. At times, political motives amplify convenient reasons.

All this has surfaced once again with the suicides of booth-level officers of the Election Commission of India (ECI). A story has developed that across several Indian states, as the ECI pressures its officers to verify voter credentials, the stress has driven some of them to untimely deaths. The exact numbers are oddly hard to confirm; as reported, about ten officers have died, of which five are believed to be suicides.

Media outlets have attributed a ‘cause’ to these suicides: increased work pressure. This is in line with an old media habit. A few weeks ago, a doctor died of suicide and the ‘reason’ amplified by the media was the rejection of her application for a US visa.

When a young Instagram influencer killed herself, the ‘reason’ assigned was her falling number of followers. When students in Kota kill themselves, the ‘reason’ is exam anxiety. When a ‘farmer’ kills himself, the ‘reason’ is usually ‘debt.’

Look at some recent media headlines: “Gujarat teacher dies by suicide, cites BLO workload pressure”; “Another BLO in MP dies, fifth death so far”; “UP BLO takes poison and dies, leaves behind video of ‘stress’ from election duty”; “Cyber-slavery and debt: Man dies by suicide while on video call with friend, citing mounting loans”; “India’s School Crisis: Rising Student Suicides due to unchecked bullying and academic stress”

Across the world, health professionals have denounced the promotion of simple ‘causes’ for suicide.

The underlying ‘reason’ for most suicides is mental health, which is complex. ‘Triggers’ are worthless ways to understand the act; often they may not be triggers at all. The amplification of a simple ‘reason’ could lead

to a phenomenon known as ‘copycat’ suicides. People in similar circumstances begin to identify with the dead, find a justification for killing themselves, and if their mental health is frail, proceed to do so, often using the same method. For instance, if the media reports that “indebted farmers” have been consuming pesticides, we begin to see other indebted farmers end their lives the same way. Those who are already vulnerable are pushed further to the edge. A feeling develops among them that it is natural for them to die, even heroic.

Also, the attribution of cause to an effect has created a perception that a truly wronged person would kill himself. Thus a false proof of misery has come about, putting those who are miserable but cannot escape life at a disadvantage.

If triggers like ‘stress’ and ‘debt’ are a poor analysis of suicide, what explains the sameness of a first wave of deaths before its media amplification? For instance, of Indian booth level officers?

What is going on is this. Any professional group in India is quite large. There are over a million booth level officers, and a little over half a million are reportedly involved in the 12 states undertaking special intensive revisions of their electoral rolls. In any large pool of people, there would be several untimely deaths, including suicides. Five suicides in half a million is, in fact, less than the national suicide rate.

Politicians and activists are given to exploiting branded suicides. Influential opposition leaders have reacted to the officers’ deaths by lamenting the electoral roll revisions.

Even the segment of Indian media that claims to uphold journalistic rigours tends to report on suicides as an effect of a simple and often sociological malaise. It is as though guidelines to how the media must report suicides are to be overlooked if they fit a convenient story. In the West, the norms are clear. The American foundation for suicide prevention, for instance, states: “Reporting one ‘cause’ leaves the public with an overly sim-

plistic and misleading understanding of suicide, and promotes the myth that suicide is the direct result of that cause.” Several mental health bodies make this suggestion. A World Health Organisation report warns, “Widely disseminated stories of death by suicide are often followed by more suicides in the population...” This is what happened with ‘farmer suicides’ and ‘student suicides’ in India. The media is not innocent.

Similar misunderstandings of phenomena afflict popular analyses of politics, war and economics. Oddly, it is even common in the analysis of physical ailments, which are much simpler than other aspects of the human condition. For instance, when someone who is ‘overworked’ dies of cardiac arrest or a heart attack, which are two different things, ‘stress’ is cited as the ‘reason.’ But the underlying reason is likely to be a combination of physiological factors, lack of exercise and poor diet.

The invocation of ‘stress’ for most famous human ailments has resulted in people spending considerable time on sedentary breathing exercises and then eating five *samosas*. Poor labelling of the underlying reasons for poor mental health, which must never be reduced to clichés, has resulted in even more ridiculous ways of living.

It’s incorrect and dangerous to publicize causes of death that vested interests may want to magnify







MONDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2025



# The Indian EXPRESS

JOURNALISM of COURAGE

NEW DELHI, LATE CITY, 22 PAGES

₹7.00 (₹8 RAIPUR, ₹15 SRINAGAR) • www.indianexpress.com

DAILY FROM: AHMEDABAD, CHANDIGARH, DELHI, JAIPUR, KOLKATA, LUCKNOW, MUMBAI, NAGPUR, PATNA, PUNE, VADODARA

## Happening today

● **THE SUPREME COURT** will hear pleas in which it had earlier directed the Centre to expeditiously fill up the vacancies in the CIC and SICs.

● **THE BIHAR ASSEMBLY** will hold its first session after the recent Assembly elections. Newly elected MLAs will be administered the oath of office.

TRACK THESE AND MORE ON  
[WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM](http://WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM)

## Business as Usual

By EP UNNY



Rajasthan minister asks schools to celebrate Babri demolition day, withdraws order

**Parul Kulshrestha**  
Jaipur, November 30

THE RAJASTHAN Education Department on Sunday withdrew an order to mark December 6, the date on which the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya was demolished in 1992, as "Shaurya Diwas (Bravery Day)" at schools in the state.

Education Minister Madan Dilawar said in a statement that Shaurya Diwas celebrations were being postponed because schools would be conducting exams then. "All schools in the state are conducting examinations, which will be held on December 5 and 6. Therefore, it is not possible to conduct any other activities or events in schools during the examination period. Therefore, the 'Shaurya Diwas' celebrations are postponed," he said.

On the decision to celebrate Shaurya Diwas, he said Lord Ram represents the ideals of Indian culture, and that the Ram Mandir movement symbolises cultural pride. He said that learning about the Ram Janmabhoomi movement will "inspire students and instil a spirit of patriotism and national unity".

According to the official  
»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



'Schemes for women aren't freebies. We are correcting historical injustice, they now have financial freedom'

**SHIVRAJ SINGH CHOUHAN**  
UNION AGRICULTURE AND FARMERS WELFARE MINISTER  
PAGE 14

## GOVT SEEKS OPPOSITION COOPERATION, LISTS 13 BILLS

# As Winter Session begins today, Opp pushes for debate on SIR

## At all-party meet, Opp parties raise Red Fort blast too

**Manoj C G & Liz Mathew**  
New Delhi, November 30

THE WINTER Session of Parliament begins on Monday under the shadow of an Opposition united on the demand for a discussion on the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls and warning that it might stall proceedings if the government does not agree.

The Opposition on Sunday indicated it was open to discussing SIR as part of a broader debate on electoral reforms, even as the government sought the cooperation of Opposition leaders for smooth functioning of Parliament. It is learnt that the government told the Opposition that it would get back to them on the SIR issue, even as it proposed a discussion on Vande Mataram. The negotiations between the two sides first took place at an all-party meeting and then during the meetings of the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) of the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha.

At the BAC meeting for the Rajya Sabha, chaired by Vice President and House Chairman CP Radhakrishnan, the government is learnt to have proposed a discussion on 150 years of  
»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Union Ministers Arjun Ram Meghwal, Kiren Rijiju, Rajnath Singh, J P Nadda and L Murugan with Congress MPs Pramod Tiwari, Jairam Ramesh, Gaurav Gogoi and K Suresh during the all-party meeting at the Parliament Annexe Building on Sunday. AMIT MEHRA

## E. EXPLAINED

### Test for Opp unity

After the Bihar poll defeat, the Winter Session provides the Opposition an opportunity to unite against the government. The SIR is of concern for not just Congress, but also parties such as TMC, DMK and CPI(M), with the states where they are in power set for polls next year.

## Amid petitions in SC, poll panel extends SIR deadline by a week

**Damini Nath**  
New Delhi, November 30

THE ELECTION Commission on Sunday extended the deadline for electors to submit enumeration forms in the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) in nine states and three Union Territories from December 4 to December 11, pushing the elec-

toral roll publication date from February 7 to February 14 next year.

This comes days after a Supreme Court bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said it can always direct the EC to extend the deadline for publication of the draft electoral rolls if the petitioners make a case for it.

On November 26, seeking the EC's response on petitions challenging the SIR exercise in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, the bench said: "If you make out a case, then we can direct them to extend the date. Can that date be a ground for the court to say that we don't have any power now? The court can always say."  
»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## 2022 PROTESTS AGAINST AGNIPATH SCHEME

# 'Joining Army is not a person's dream, but a family's... One case shouldn't destroy a future'

## As UP begins review of cases against protesters, many say they have seen their hopes of a govt job fade away

**Manish Sahu**  
Lucknow, November 30

MATHURA NATIVE Deepak, 25, had spent nearly four years preparing, with a single-minded focus to join the Army. But the dream collapsed in an instant when he was arrested in

2022, for allegedly taking part in a protest against the then newly introduced Agnipath defence recruitment scheme.

A resident of Nagla Jheenga village in Mathura, Deepak, who doesn't use a second name like many in his Jat community, says: "It was my last at-



Badal (23), Hari Om (24) and Kapil (24) were among those booked over protests against the Agnipath defence recruitment scheme

tempt to join the Army as a jawan... With that, all the dreams I had, all the hopes my family had pinned on me, came crashing down."

Because of the criminal charges, it was unlikely he could secure a government job. With his family unable to afford  
»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## FIRST WOMAN TO GET PRESIDENT'S MEDAL (BRONZE) FOR 'OVERALL ORDER OF MERIT'

# UP teacher's daughter gets top NDA honour

**Sushant Kulkarni**  
Pune, November 30

BEFORE SIDDHI Jain got selected for the 149th course of the National Defence Academy (NDA) as part of the second batch of female cadets in December 2022, she was preparing for the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) in Kota. On Sunday, Jain, 21, became the first female cadet to be awarded

the President's Medal (Bronze) for "overall order of merit".

The batch of 329 cadets who were commissioned into the Armed Forces included 15 women. While two female cadets have topped the academic streams so far — one in the 148th course and another this time — Jain is the first to be awarded the President's Medal (Bronze) for "overall order of merit".

The President's Gold Medal



Siddhi Jain (21) is set to join the Indian Air Force. EXPRESS

was awarded to Deepak Kandpal, and Silver to Siddharth Singh. The "overall order of merit" is based on several parameters including academics, outdoor training activities, joint training, officer-like qualities and performance in specialised service subjects.

"I am delighted to see the second batch of the women cadets graduating today, 15 of them  
»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



A fan touches Virat Kohli's feet after he scored a century against South Africa on Sunday. PAGE 17

## Kohli gets rolling in Ranchi, rolls back years with 52nd ODI century

**Sandeep Dwivedi**  
Ranchi, November 30

AT M S DHONI's hometown, they set the bar high for their heroes.

On the long walk to the stadium, fans in India blues articulated their wishes to reporters and influencers eager to capture the voice of the people. With 18 or 45 printed on their back, they wanted the men who made those numbers iconic — Virat Kohli and Rohit

Sharma — hit sixes and hundreds, too. They got what they wished, almost.

Virat Kohli finished on 135 from 120 balls, Rohit Sharma scored 57 from 51 balls. And between them, they hit 16 sixes. Virat's 52nd ODI ton and Rohit overtaking Shahid Afridi to become the highest six-hitter ever were the entertaining outcomes that took India to 349 for eight against South Africa in the opening match of the ODI series — a total that led to a nail-

biting 17-run win for their team.

In many ways, the 136-run partnership between Kohli and Rohit, after the unbeaten 168-run stand they put up last month against Australia in the last ODI India played, turned back the clock.

Of late, the batting stars, in their late 30s, had been asked to play domestic cricket to prove their relevance. At Ranchi, they proved the permanence of class and the futility of judging them  
»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

● FROM SAME AREA OF PAKISTAN, BEING QUESTIONED OVER THEIR MOTIVES FOR CROSSING OVER

# Two Pak couples in custody in Gujarat, pledging 'love' across the salt desert

**Brendan Dabhi**  
Ahmedabad, November 30

ALL THEY knew was to "head south" from a hillcock called Merudo Dungar, located approximately halfway between the India-Pakistan border and the first village on the Indian side, Ratanpar in Kutch. All they needed was a "full moon night".

As per the Gujarat Police, that night was October 4. In the wee hours, Tara Ranmal Chudi, or Toto, donned a black Pathan suit, and Puja Karsan Chudi, or

Meena, slipped on a light-blue sweatshirt over a salwar-kameez, and the two set out from their village Lasri in Islamkot tehsil in the Sindh province of Pakistan.

Three days and 50 km later, they had made their way to Ratanpar.

A month-and-a-half later, on November 24, another couple, Popat Kumar Nathu Bhil a.k.a Popat and Gauri Gulab Bhil a.k.a Gauri, were picked up by the Border Security Force (BSF). They claimed to have made a similar journey

from their village Mungaria, the second-last village in Pakistan from the border, and located also in Islamkot tehsil.

Both couples are now in custody, being questioned by police and investigating agencies over their motives, particularly as they arrived so close to each other and from the same area of Pakistan, and over the truth of their stories — of having walked through the tough Thar desert and its marshy lakes, over several days.

Sources said that all four, who are Bhil tribals, maintain that they were only looking for



Toto and Meena walked for three days to reach Ratanpar village in Kutch district in October; Popat and Gauri were apprehended by the BSF and handed over to the police on November 24

a way to be together, which was not possible back home.

In 1979, celebrated author



and poet Keki Daruwalla wrote an acclaimed short story called *Love Across the Salt Desert*,

about a couple separated by the border who find each other across these same Thar sands that Toto and Meena, and Popat and Gauri claim to have crossed.

In their accounts to the authorities, Toto and Meena have talked of a story closer home, told down generations, of a grandfather who took the same route to Kutch decades ago.

### The Walk-I

Lasri village lies just 2 km from the international border, on the Pakistan side. It is inhabited primarily by shepherds,

who come up to the border all most daily to graze their cattle. There are only about 25 mud-brick and thatched-roof houses in Lasri and, as per Toto and Meena, almost everyone is related to each other.

Standing at the border fence on a clear day, police officials on this side can zoom in and spot the houses and people of Lasri, including the neighbourhood near a Lord Shiva temple from where the couple claim to have fled.

From the Lasri side, the most distinctive feature, visible to the naked eye, is Merudo

Dungar.

The Bhil community frowns upon marriages within the village. Toto and Meena have said they are also related, being second cousins, and feared violence if they tried to be together. What prompted them to flee was a suicide attempt by Meena, police said.

The two left on October 4 night carrying some rotis, jaggery and a big bottle of water. They speak a mix of Sindhi and Kutchi, and understand a bit of Gujarati due to similarity in the languages, and so were  
»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2









# In era of AI and climate change, energy policy must navigate new trade-offs



**OVER THE BARREL**  
BY VIKRAM S MEHTA

INDIA'S ENERGY policy has been focused on universal access, affordability and the security of supply. It has, in the main, achieved these objectives. All villages are electrified; the poorest of the poor receive subsidised fuel, and even though India still imports 85 per cent of its oil and gas, it does not face the supply risk it once did when the preponderant share of its imports was sourced from the volatile Middle East. Today, it has multiple supply options including from the more stable export hubs of the US, Australia, Brazil and in the near future, Guyana.

This relative success has been achieved through a governance structure spearheaded largely by the government. Post-Independence, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru entrusted the custodianship of the energy sector to government-owned public sector entities (PSEs). He was sceptical about the motivations of the private sector. Decades on, when it became apparent that PSEs could not, on their own, deliver the expectations of energy policy, the government relaxed their hold and permitted the private sector to invest. As a consequence, today, we have an energy sector that operates along the twin tracks of public and private sector investments and a governance structure that shares responsibility across the central and state governments and multiple government ministries. There is no one executive body responsible for formulating and implementing a national energy policy; no one forum is accountable for building an integrated energy ecosystem.

Looking ahead, the focus of our energy policy and governance structure has to change. This is because of a shift, caused by global warming and AI, in the contours of the energy landscape. Our energy policy must now prioritise the weakening of the link between economic growth, technological innovation, energy demand and en-

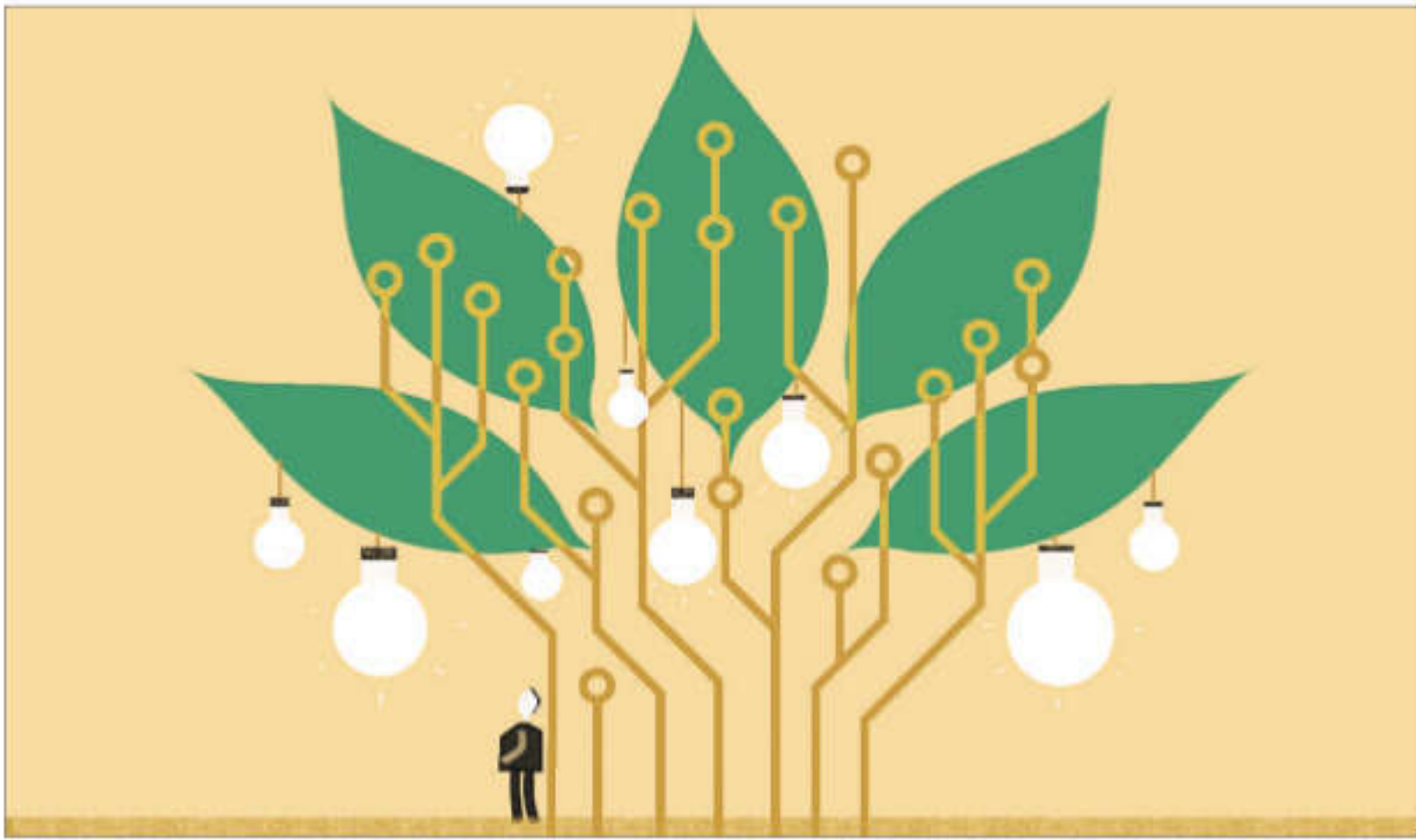


ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

vironmental degradation. This is no easy task as the issues involved sit at the nub of our politicians' deepest dilemmas. The challenge is to create a governance structure that will enable decision-makers to navigate these dilemmas.

Three trade-offs illustrate my point.

The first relates to the conflict between the dynamics of the "green energy transition" and the political and social reality. The PSE Coal India employs approximately 3,50,000 people (full time and contract) and millions more draw their livelihood from the downstream and cross-sectoral linkages created by its operations. A politician from a coal-producing state who calls for the "phase out" of coal would struggle to get re-elected. Even a "phase down" would raise electoral hackles. On the other hand, the environmental consequences of our fossil fuel energy system cannot be ignored. The World Air Quality report for 2024 has listed six Indian cities in the list of the 10 most polluted cities in the world.

The dilemma distils to three questions. Given these realities, what should be the right fuel mix? How quickly should we endeavour to reach this mix? And what

**Our energy policy must now prioritise the weakening of the link between economic growth, technological innovation, energy demand and environmental degradation**

policy instruments are needed to navigate this conundrum?

The second centres around China's dominance of the green energy manufacturing and supply chain backbone. As is well documented, 80 per cent of global solar panels, 95 per cent of polysilicon wafers and solar cells, and 80 per cent of lithium-ion processing is controlled by China. It is the cheapest source of global supply for these green intermediates.

The dilemma: Should we turn to the cheapest supplier to accelerate the competitiveness and pace of the green transition? Or should we be cautious because of the security implications of overdependence on one supplier — China, at that?

Finally, there is the conundrum created by investment in AI data centres. Google has recently committed to investing \$15 billion to create an AI hub in Visakhapatnam. Reliance has announced a JV to do the same in Jamnagar. Reportedly, there are several other tech giants scouting for locations. These data centres require gigawatt-scale amounts of electricity. Most (if not all) companies have committed to meeting this electricity demand from renewables.

## For academic ghar wapsi, India must first fix basics at home



SUKANTA CHAUDHURI

SOMAK RAYCHAUDHURY'S piece 'Bringing Back Indian-Origin Faculty will need changes in policy, culture' (*IE*, November 27) plants ideas but also raises concerns. His suggestions are perfectly implementable. They require the Centre to invest big money, which the government is not averse to doing for branded flagship projects. There lies the danger. Too many government initiatives focus on the flagship, or even just the flag, ignoring the rest of the fleet.

Like all such proposals, this one calls for radical departures from current practices. But these reforms will be customised for returning expatriates and not the academic community as a whole. We are not offering the returnees a ready, full-fledged, working academic order where they seamlessly find a place. Rather, we are mulling mechanisms to insulate (Raychaudhuri's term) the returnees from the shortcomings of the current order.

This is the reverse of any globally metropolitan academic system. All major knowledge orders in the West have built themselves up with talent from home or near neighbours, achieving a happy state where they could attract talent from across the world. China, the closest precedent for India, has a flourishing academic agenda to attract returning expatriates, now reaching out to citizens of other countries. But this is the embellishment to a massively funded general consolidation of education and research over decades.

The depressing truth is that India has never invested thought, money or energy to do justice to the human resource pool of a populous post-colonial nation. In the first 50 years of Independence,

the public university system partly realised this purpose, hampered by inadequate funds and a grossly deficient school system. The current dispensation, split between an upbeat but go-as-you-like private academic sector and an increasingly anaemic and demoralised public system, has no common purpose at all. The National Education Policy 2020 offers little beyond general principles and all later proposals show no significant focus or impact. Their reforms are selectively targeted and thus, exclusionary.



ILLUSTRATION: KOMAL

Expatriation would institutionalise sharp divisions between the returnees and their home-keeping colleagues. It implies a dual system of management, one group of faculty and their programmes allowed funding and freedoms denied to the other. Justice apart, this would create serious fissures in the statutory fabric of the university: Two sets of financial guidelines, two sets of service and conduct rules. These would need tackling through a maze of minor regulations, or by an arbitrary regime eschewing all regulation. Neither will conduce to smooth management, let alone academic morale.

The biggest anomaly concerns free speech and open research. This will be a major determinant for returnees from the US in particular, where recent developments have impacted their institutions, if not themselves personally. In India too, restrictions on free speech and academic interaction grow more rigid by the day. Add to this a byzantine visa regime and foreign contribution laws whereby international collaboration, conferences or even visits by scholars become a bureaucratic ordeal with deeper legal pitfalls. If this academic ecology endures, schemes like that of Raychaudhuri cannot find a natural habitat there. They will at best coexist like introduced species, and gradually succumb to the milieu. Earlier schemes to reverse the brain drain have left virtually no mark because the schemes were vitiated by a perverse cocktail of apathy and over-management from external authority and internal execution.

Finally, such a scheme is likely to come up against the worsening caste system in Indian academia. Raychaudhuri recognises that India's finest research centres are divided between the public and private sectors, and in the former between central and state-run institutions. Yet, a consistent policy bias groups these institutions in a hierarchy, with yawning differences in funding and opportunity. All too likely, a well-funded repatriation scheme would be restricted to the uppermost rungs of this hierarchy, and to a favoured group within them.

In all our repatriation schemes, as in Raychaudhuri's, the authorities offer placements to the returnees. That is not what happens in an academically congenial scenario. There, scholars make their own choices, negotiating with individual institutions. Until we expand our thinking to embrace this inclusive vision, the best-intentioned schemes for academic ghar wapsi will not last to any purpose beyond the opening fanfare.

The writer is professor emeritus,  
Department of English, Jadavpur University

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### GDP data

THIS REFERS to the report, 'GDP growth tops outlook...' (*IE*, November 29). The government cannot paint a rosy picture of the country's economy when millions find themselves in dire financial straits. It is hard to reconcile the claim made by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation that India posted 8.2 per cent GDP growth in the second quarter (July–September) of the financial year 2025–26 with the "C" grade given to India's national accounts statistics by the IMF in its annual assessment of the Indian economy. The depreciation of the Indian currency is a negative indicator of the state of the economy.

David Milton, Maruthancode

### Pressure on BLOs

THIS REFERS to the report, 'Another BLO dies of "heart attack" in Gujarat...' (*IE*, November 28). It is unfortunate that the BLOs appointed by the Election Commission to conduct the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the voters list are overburdened in performing this exercise. They have to distribute the new enumeration forms to all the voters in their zones, guide them in filling in the forms, and collect them after making repeated visits to their homes. One wonders why the EC wants the voters to also run from pillar to post to provide the required details of whether they had voted in 2002, which can be easily traced by the EC itself.

Tharcius S Fernando, Chennai

### Congress's woes

THIS REFERS to the editorial, 'Bihar to Karnataka, Congress must ask why' (*IE*, November 29). There are two broader electoral realities that Congress continues to misread. First is the management of coalition optics; voters generally prefer cohesive silence over chaotic noise. Second, and perhaps most critical, is the failure to recognise that negative campaigns rarely defeat tangible welfare delivery.

Krishan Kumar Chugh, New Delhi



SYED ATA HASNAIN

THE SUPREME Court judgment in Lieutenant Samuel Kamalesan's case has stirred a sensitive and essential debate about the relationship between personal faith and professional duty in the Army. The officer, a Christian, was dismissed from service after allegedly repeatedly refusing to participate in religious parades or enter regimental places of worship — temples and gurdwaras — because doing so conflicted with his beliefs. His refusal, the Court held, was not simply a religious stance, but a breakdown in leadership and regimental cohesion.

This judgment should not be seen as a critique of any faith, but rather as an affirmation of a foundational military truth: In uniform, personal belief cannot be allowed to overshadow institutional duty. The Indian Army, perhaps more than any other institution, is built on a unique model of secularism — one that is not of indifference, but inclusion. Regimental mandirs, gurdwaras, *sarv dharm sthals*, and unit churches are not places for religious conversion or compulsion. More than faith, they represent fraternity.

I write this not as a legal analyst, but as someone shaped by similar crossroads of faith and profession. I was educated in Roman Catholic and then Protestant institutions, while my father — also an Army officer — and my mother moved in and out of regimental mandirs,

**Supreme Court's decision reminds us that in the Armed Forces, faith is respected, but duty commands, and duty always leads**

A few days ago, however, a new social media post from Bendre went viral. This time, she credited her healing to "autophagy". Autophagy is a normal biological housekeeping process through which damaged cells are recycled into fully functioning cells, triggered by fasting and exercise. For her followers who may be unaware of the extensive and costly medical treatment Bendre received in the US and in India, it would be easy to assume that she beat cancer through autophagy.

This understandably set off a storm, with medical professionals criticising her for not providing context and leaving out crucial information about the modern medical treatment she received. Any alternative therapy she may have tried, they said, would have been complementary, and not the primary protocol for treating a

condition as life-threatening as hers, and that such claims, when presented without the full picture, especially by public figures with millions of followers, can be misunderstood and lead people to believe that cancer can be treated with methods that are neither clinically tested nor scientifically validated.

Her response to the wave of criticism came swiftly, with a post saying she "never

**In 2023, India introduced guidelines to increase transparency in the health and wellness space, aiming to curb misleading advertisements. Their efficacy remains in doubt**

ethos. Brigadier Desmond Hayde, a Christian CO of 3 Jat, led his Jat troops into the fierce Battle of Dograi in 1965, earning both the Maha Vir Chakra and his men's eternal devotion. He could sing their bhajans better than any of them. Lieutenant Colonel Ardes-hir Tarapore, PVC, a Parsi officer of The Poona Horse, is remembered not for his religious identity but as a legend of the Armoured Corps. The Sikh Regiment has seen Christian and Muslim officers lead with distinction. The Garhwal Rifles, my regiment, has been commanded by officers from every faith under the Indian sun.

Military service is perhaps the only profession where the individual does not just work for the institution; he becomes the institution. Faith, identity, ego, and preference all become subordinate to one collective purpose. That is why, in uniform, one's faith is never lost. It is not abandoned, it is honoured.

In the end, the Court's decision is legally correct and institutionally vital. It reminds us that in the Armed Forces, faith is respected, but duty commands, and duty always leads.

Because when one wears the uniform of India's Armed Forces, the question is no longer "what is my faith?" The question becomes: What is my duty and whom do I lead?

The writer is a former corps commander of the Srinagar-based 15 Corps and member of NDMA. Views are personal

## For health's sake, look for disclaimers in celebrity stories

claimed to be a doctor, but I'm certainly not a quack either", that "no two cancers are the same, and no treatment path is identical." She seemed to have missed the point entirely.

Personal stories of debilitating health conditions shared by celebrities can certainly help normalise conversations around difficult topics. But beneath this effort is a growing cult of celebrity influence that often extends beyond a person's actual area of expertise. A well-known tech CEO holding forth on longevity, another questioning vaccines, movie stars sharing personal accounts of health vulnerability — what many may not realise is that, however well-intentioned, these statements can sometimes do more harm than good in a country already grappling with widespread misinformation around public health. Last year, for instance, actor Samantha Prabhu

claimed to be a doctor, but I'm certainly not a quack either", that "no two cancers are the same, and no treatment path is identical." She seemed to have missed the point entirely.

Personal stories of debilitating health conditions shared by celebrities can certainly help normalise conversations around difficult topics. But beneath this effort is a growing cult of celebrity influence that often extends beyond a person's actual area of expertise. A well-known tech CEO holding forth on longevity, another questioning vaccines, movie stars sharing personal accounts of health vulnerability — what many may not realise is that, however well-intentioned, these statements can sometimes do more harm than good in a country already grappling with widespread misinformation around public health. Last year, for instance, actor Samantha Prabhu

invited a similar backlash when she spoke of seeking alternative therapies for her autoimmune condition.

In 2023, India introduced guidelines to increase transparency in the health and wellness space, aiming to curb misleading advertisements and unsubstantiated online content, and requiring non-expert celebrities to provide disclaimers. The effectiveness of these regulations remains in question. This is a critical moment to hold public figures accountable for claims that can have devastating consequences and distort our understanding of who is genuinely qualified to offer medical advice and who is not.

The writer is an independent journalist  
and author who reports on public  
health, policy and culture



# Family of Haryana student killed in UK stabbing incident demands probe

Express News Service  
Chandigarh, November 30

THE FAMILY of an Indian student, who was stabbed in the UK on November 25, has appealed to the MEA for assistance in repatriating his mortal remains and for intensified investigation into the case.

Vijay Kumar, 30, a resident of Jagrambass village in Haryana's Charkhi Dadri district, had been pursuing an MBA at the University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol, since January this year. His elder brother, Ravi Kumar, told *The Indian Express* on Sunday that the family was informed of his death on November 25 evening. According to them, Vijay had no known enmity with anyone, but they suspect that individuals from Haryana or Punjab may have been involved in the killing.

Ravi added that after completing his studies, his brother had planned to settle in the UK.

The family also wrote to Minister of External Affairs S Jaishankar Wednesday. In his letter, Ravi stated, "Our family is devastated. We request the Ministry's support to bring back my brother's mortal remains for last rites. The complex foreign procedures, legal formalities, documentation, and financial

aspects make it extremely difficult for us to manage the process on our own."

He also urged the minister to direct the Indian High Commission in the UK to provide assistance. Ravisaid, "Even after four days of our communication to the Union minister, we have not received any response. The UK police investigators remain in touch with us, but we also need updates on the ongoing probe, which the Indian High Commission could facilitate."

Meanwhile, Charkhi Dadri BJP MLA Sunil Satpal Sangwan has also sought Jaishankar and Union minister Manohar Lal Khattar's intervention. In separate letters to both leaders on Sunday, Sangwan requested urgent steps to ensure the early repatriation of Vijay's mortal remains.

The son of an ex-serviceman, Vijay completed his master's degree in Physics from Chandigarh University in 2018. He later worked with Haryana's PWD department for nearly two years before being selected for the Central Board of Excise and Customs as Inspector in 2021. In December 2024, he was posted in Kochi, but opted for voluntary retirement to pursue higher studies in the UK. His MBA at UWE was set to conclude in May 2026.

EVENT ATTENDED BY POLITICIANS, POLICE OFFICERS

# Rival gangs exchange fire at Ludhiana wedding, 2 killed

Both groups, invited by the groom, fired at least 20 rounds at each other: Police

Divya Goyal Gopal  
Ludhiana, November 30

RIVAL GROUPS opened fire at a wedding ceremony in Ludhiana's Bath Castle resort on Pakhowal Road late on Saturday, leaving two persons dead and another injured.

Rupinder Singh, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Ludhiana, said the dead were identified as Vasu Chopra, the grooms neighbour and Neeru Chhabra, his maternal aunt. They died after receiving bullet injuries as both groups fired at least 20 rounds at each other. The injured person is undergoing treatment.

Police said that both groups were invited by the groom and had come to the wedding with weapons. One group was led by local gangster Shubham Mota, currently out on bail, and the other by his rival Ankur. Both Shubham Mota and Ankur, along with their accomplices, have been booked under Sections 109 (attempt to murder), 103 (murder), 191 (3) (rioting), and 190 (unlawful assembly) of BNS and Sections 25 and 27 of the Arms Act.

Those booked include Ankur and his accomplices,



Bath Castle resort in Ludhiana, where the shooting took place. EXPRESS

Jasvir Singh alias Jassi of Noorwala Road, Rubal Pardhan of Salem Tabri, Jatinder Kumar Dabur of Shakti Vihar, Haibowal and four to five accomplices. The second group includes Shubham Mota, Yuvraj Singh and four to five unidentified accomplices.

The FIR registered on the complaint of ASI Sukhwinder Singh states that police got to know of the gunfight at Bath

Castle around 1 am Sunday.

The groom, Varinder Kapoor, a resident of New Kartar Nagar is a contractor. The wedding was a high-profile one, with several politicians, MLAs, police officers and other influential people of the city also in attendance, said police sources.

Ludhiana Police Commissioner Swapan Sharma said: "The management of the wedding venue was also booked for

repeatedly violating security guidelines and norms issued by the administration, and the groom for inviting notorious people. The marriage palace owner flouted the norms by allowing people carrying weapons inside the venue. The clash escalated under the influence of alcohol over an instant issue," he said.

The groom denied inviting Shubham Mota and Ankur to the wedding. He said, "We don't know what happened. The baraat arrived around 11.30 pm. The wedding was going on when eight to nine outsiders entered the venue. My The family told me to hide under the stage. We heard gunshots being fired continuously. My maternal aunt and neighbour died. We did not invite any such elements. The marriage was completed at home after the incident and the reception party scheduled for today (Sunday) has been cancelled."

He added that they had invited some MLAs, including (Ludhiana North) MLA Madan Lal Bagga, as "we have family relations with them" AAP Ludhiana Central MLA Ashok Parashar said, "I was invited to the wedding, but I did not go."

# Assam's Scheduled Tribes warn of stir as GoM backs ST status for 6 groups

Sukrita Baruah  
Guwahati, November 30

AFTER A Group of Ministers in Assam tabled a report recommending that six more communities in the state be granted ST status, the body leading the opposition by Assam's existing Scheduled Tribes against this has warned of widespread agitation.

The GoM, which had been constituted to submit recommendation on how to accommodate the demand for ST status by the Tai Ahoms, tea tribes or Adivasis, Moran, Motok, Chutia and Koch-Rajbongshi while "ensuring full safeguard to protect the interests, rights and privileges of the existing Scheduled Tribes of Assam", said in its report that it finds "full justification" for the inclusion of these communities in the ST list.

The ST communities in Assam are currently categorised as ST (Plains) with 10% reservation and ST (Hills) with 5% reservation. It has been recommended that the relatively smaller communities — the Morans, Motoks and Koch-Rajbonghis in the undivided Goalpara area — be included in the ST (Plains) list.

The report recommends the creation of a distinct ST (Valley) category for the Ahom, Chutia, tea tribes and Adivasis, and Koch-Rajbongshis — excluding those residing in the undivided Goalpara region — which will have separate reservations for state government recruitment and educational institutions. The GoM report states that with this arrangement, "existing ST(P) and ST(H) quotas will remain fully protected".

However, the report recommends that in the case of central government reservations, all these communities compete under the common ST pool, as there is a single national ST list.

The district administration in Kokrajhar, the headquarters of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), on Sunday issued prohibitions on gatherings in the town and near the BTC Secretariat, citing the likelihood of "occurrence of law and order situation due to activities by anti-social elements". It said "many political/student and other organisations may organise agitational programmes like bandh, railway NH blockade, dharna, strike, etc in the district".

# Haryana govt removes top sports officers after deaths of 2 athletes

Express News Service  
Chandigarh, November 30

DAYS AFTER the death of two young athletes caused by the collapse of rusted iron poles in basketball courts in Haryana, the state government Sunday removed two top officers from the sports department.

Vijay Singh Dahiya, a 2001 batch IAS officer, has been appointed commissioner of the sports department, replacing 1994 batch IPS officer Navdeep Singh Virk. Dahiya will continue to hold additional responsibilities for the animal husbandry and printing and stationery departments.

In another change, 2013 batch IAS officer Parth Gupta has been given charge as director of sports, replacing 2004 batch IAS officer Sanjeev Verma. Gupta has also been appointed director of tourism.

The reshuffle follows two tragic incidents in which basketball players lost their lives after iron poles holding hoops collapsed.

While national-level basketball player Hardik Rathee, 16, died in Rohtak on November 25, a day earlier, Aman, 15, succumbed to his injuries during treatment at PGIMS Rohtak.

The changes in the sports department were part of a larger transfer and posting order involving 20 IAS officers in Haryana issued on Sunday.

# FROM KORBA TO KABADDI GLORY

## How a leap of faith landed Sanju Devi 'MVP' tag at Kabaddi WC

Jayprakash S Naidu  
Raipur, November 30

AT THE age of 17, Sanju Devi, the daughter of a rice farmer in a remote village in Chhattisgarh's Korba district, faced a tough choice: study and get a job to support her family or take a leap of faith by pursuing a career in kabaddi.

Eight years later, on November 24, India defeated Chinese Taipei to win the second edition of the Women's Kabaddi World Cup. And Sanju, who powered her team to several wins in the tournament in Dhaka, bagged the title of "Most Valuable Player (MVP)".

India had also won the first World Cup, held 13 years ago, against Iran.

Growing up in Kerakachhar village in Pali block, around 90 minutes from Korba, Sanju first played kabaddi in Class V at her government school. Back then, it was just for fun.

It was when she saw her two cousins, who played kabaddi in college, that she grew interested in the sport. "Except for my family members, not many girls were interested in playing kabaddi in Pali. I had no role model but I took inspiration from my parents who always stood strong in tough times and my teachers who said we need

8 years back, farmer's daughter had tough choice: Find job or chase sport



Sanju Devi, 25, during the recently concluded Women's Kabaddi World Cup in Dhaka. India won the final against Chinese Taipei on Nov 24.

to make our country proud," she said.

At the age of 15, she played kabaddi at the inter-school level. "At the time, I could not

get girls to even form a team to practice with," she said.

The turning point came when her two cousins, who had given up on the sport, saw her skills and advised her to join the district kabaddi association.

"I had heard that winning a medal or representing the country in national games could make one eligible for a government job. So, I decided to pursue my studies while playing the sport."

Thus, her professional journey began in 2021. Initially, Sanju would travel to Korba — a 90-minute journey — for training. "I was pursuing an ITI course in Pali. To avoid the daily travel, I stayed in a hostel in Korba for four days and then returned to Pali for two days for my course," she said.

Despite the free coaching, pursuing the sport professionally had its own expenses.

"A lot of credit goes to my coach, Anuj Pratap Singh, at the Kabaddi Sangh who trained me from scratch. But we had to incur money on my food and stay in Korba. My father, Ramji, and mother, Amrika did everything they could and kept my

needs before the family's needs," said Sanju, now 25.

Her father earns around Rs 75,000 a year and is the sole breadwinner. Her mother is a homemaker. She has a younger brother, who wants to pursue a career in law.

Relief came in 2023, when the Khelo India State Centre of Excellence and the Girls Residential Kabaddi Academy was inaugurated in the Bilaspur district; Sanju was selected to be part of the centre and received free training, food and accommodation.

On Monday, when India beat Chinese Taipei 35-28 to win the World Cup and Sanju was adjudged MVP of the tournament, she said she was not even aware that there was such a title. "I received \$1,500... I will give it to my father to strengthen our home," said a proud Sanju, who scored 14 points in the final.

On what the government can do to produce more athletes like her, Sanju said, "First, support is needed in the initial stage... My family could not afford the expense (on diet and accommodation), but we managed somehow... Many athletes are talented but because they do not have money, they leave. The government, with help from corporates, can sponsor expenses in this initial stage."

# INTERCASTE RELATIONSHIP

## After family kills man she loved, Nanded woman 'marries' his body

Chandan Haygunde & Manoj More  
Pune, November 30

A DAY after a 20-year-old man in Nanded district was allegedly murdered by the relatives of a 19-year-old woman, with whom he was in a relationship, the woman "symbolically married" his body before his funeral, and said she would stay at his house henceforth.

Police have arrested five persons, including the woman's parents and her brother, in connection with the murder of Saksham Gautam Tate, who was allegedly murdered on November 27. According to police, the family of the woman, Aanchal Mamidwar, opposed their relationship as Saksham was from a different caste.

On November 28, while the last rites were going on at Saksham's house, Aanchal performed marriage rituals by applying turmeric on his body and vermilion on her forehead. Videos of the incident has since been widely shared on social media. Stating that their love would "remain immortal", Aanchal said, "Our love has won even in Saksham's death... my father and brothers have lost."

Demanding death sentence for her family members and justice for Saksham, Aanchal said, "We were in love for the past three years. However, my family was against it because he was from a different caste. So they killed Saksham. His murderers should be hanged. He



Aanchal Mamidwar grieves at Saksham's residence.

should get justice."

Police said that Saksham, a labourer and a resident of Itwara area, and Aanchal's family members, living in Siddhanathpuri, have previous criminal records.

According to police, Saksham had cordial relations with the woman's family but his relationship with Aanchal led to a dispute. On November 27, Aanchal's brother Himesh Mamidwar allegedly fired at Saksham at Milind Nagar in Itwara area of Nanded, and later smashed his head with a tile, killing him on the spot.

An FIR was registered based on a complaint by Saksham's mother Sangita Tate (40) at Itwara police station against eight persons, including Aanchal's parents and brothers, under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) sections 103, 61 (2), 189, 190, 191 (2), 193 (3), sections of the SC & ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and sections of the Indian Arms Act.

# 'Drunk' techie rams car into pub's parking, attendant killed

Express News Service  
Pune, November 30

A VALET attendant was crushed to death by a Volkswagen car at Toit Pub and Restaurant in Pune's upscale Kalyani Nagar area on Sunday afternoon. Police have detained the driver, identified as Pratapsinh Daingade (49), an IT professional residing in Dhanori, and confirmed that he had consumed liquor.

The deceased, identified as Satyendra Mandal, was in his 30s and a native of Bihar. Police said the process of registering an FIR was underway at the Yerwada police station.

Senior inspector Ajum Bagwan of Yerwada police station said the incident took place around 2.30 pm. "The car driver is from Atlanta Society, Nerul in the Navi Mumbai area. He works at the Commerce IT Park in Pune and is currently residing in Dhanori," Bagwan said.

# 'Reconsider extravagance': MP CM's son gets married at mass wedding

Express News Service  
Bhopal, November 30

MADHYA PRADESH Chief Minister Mohan Yadav's younger son, Abhimanyu Yadav, got married at a mass wedding ceremony in Ujjain on Saturday, along with over 21 other couples.

The venue, which featured five ceremonial domes, a 40x100-foot stage, and 22 individual pavilions, accommodated nearly 25,000 guests. The scale of the wedding served inclusion rather than ostentation, with couples from different social and economic backgrounds participating as equals.

"Our beloved son, Dr Abhimanyu, and fortunate daughter-in-law, Dr Ishita, along with 21 newlywed couples, were united in holy matrimony in a grand collective wedding ceremony.

On this auspicious occasion, which became a sacred confluence of Sanatan culture, so-



Madhya Pradesh CM Mohan Yadav at his son Dr Abhimanyu Yadav's wedding in Ujjain on Sunday. EXPRESS

cial harmony, and equality, all of you showered the newlywed couples with your priceless blessings, love, and best wishes," Chief Minister Yadav said.

Yoga guru Ramdev, who conducted the Vedic wedding rituals for all the couples, called Yadav "the first Chief Minister to present such an example". He suggested the gesture could

inspire influential families nationwide to reconsider wedding extravagance, potentially easing financial pressure on middle and lower-middle-class households.

A senior BJP leader who attended the wedding said the Yadav family have "turned what could have been a private affair into a powerful public

statement on social harmony and cultural pride".

The 22 couples took their vows together.

In attendance were Karnataka Governor Thawarchand Gehlot, Union ministers Jyotiraditya Scindia and Durgadas Uike, Assembly Speaker Narendra Singh Tomar, and senior ministers from the Cabinet and several ruling party MLAs who sat alongside ordinary citizens.

Abhimanyu and Ishita arrived at one of the pre-wedding ceremonies in a bullock cart — a nod to Malwa's rural heritage. The other grooms rode horses while the brides travelled in decorated carriages during the collective procession.

CM Mohan Yadav also listened to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 128th edition of 'Mann ki Baat' from the wedding venue's premises.

Governor Mangubhai Patel praised the Chief Minister for "demonstrating social harmony in practice".

# Actor couple 'assaulted' for feeding stray dogs in Kolkata

Tanusree Bose  
Kolkata, November 30

BENGAL TELEVISION actor couple Sayantani Mullick and Indranil Mullick were allegedly assaulted by a group of people over feeding of stray dogs in their neighbourhood in the Kasba area of Kolkata on Friday night.

The actors, who have lodged a complaint with the police, have alleged that residents of the Rajdanga neighbourhood accused them of littering the area as they were feeding stray dogs around 10.30 pm on Friday, and assaulted them and their staff member.

"Our staff member, Chandan, regularly feeds dogs over there. At first, the locals, sitting inside a club, came out and alleged that since a dog had bitten one of the residents, we could not feed them anymore. My husband (Indranil) tried to speak to them and make them understand, when suddenly some of the people started as-



Sayantani and Indranil Mullick

saulting Chandan," Sayantani told *The Indian Express* over the phone.

"My husband tried to reason with them and also save the staff member when he was also assaulted. One of them also threatened me, which I have recorded... They actually laid hands on me. While stopping us, they got physical — something that is completely unacceptable," added Sayantani, who had gone live on Facebook during the alleged confrontation. "I could have had a second stroke," the actor, who had recently recovered from a

stroke, said, adding that other residents intervened to calm down the situation.

The actor said her husband, Indranil, and staff member, Chandan, who sustained injuries, were taken to Bangur Hospital for primary treatment.

"We never thought this could happen — assaulting for feeding the strays, which is the right of every human being. We are still coming to terms with the entire incident," she said.

Meanwhile, police said that they are probing the incident.

"We have received a complaint, and are investigating the matter. Statements of both sides will be recorded. We are scanning the CCTV footage of the incident," a senior police officer at Kasba Police Station said, adding no one has been arrested so far.

According to her neighbours, the residents were unhappy with the littering of the place by the actor couple, leading to an increase in the number of stray dogs in the area.



• ECONOMICS

Understanding IMF’s ‘C-grade’ for national account statistics, before new GDP series

Siddharth Upasani  
New Delhi, November 30

IN ITS annual staff report for India for 2025, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) last week retained its C-grade for India's national account statistics or GDP data, meaning the data provided to the Fund have “some shortcomings that somewhat hamper surveillance”.

Separately, on Friday, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) released data showing the GDP growth rate surging from 7.8% in April-June to a six-quarter high of 8.2% in July-September.

As is usually the case when economic data exceeds expectations, questions have again been raised about what the GDP numbers really mean. But the IMF’s assessment also merits an explanation.

Data adequacy assessment

First things first: why is the IMF evaluating India’s data? The assessment is part of the multilateral agency’s annual bilateral discussions with its members, required by Article IV of the IMF’s Articles of Agreement. An IMF staff team visits the country, collects information, and discusses the country’s economic developments and policies with government officials. A report is then prepared.

In its report for the 2025 consultation, the IMF staff said “enhanced quality, availability, and timeliness of macroeconomic and financial statistics would support policy formulation”. It acknowledged the Indian government’s ongoing efforts to update key macroeconomic indicators, such as GDP and the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

Additionally, it made suggestions: regular revisions of national accounts, prices, and other key statistics according to international best practices, and conducting the delayed 2021 population census on a priority basis, among others.

The Indian government responded that efforts were on to improve official statistics, with the new GDP and CPI series set to be launched in February 2026. “Given these developments, the authorities considered that more favorable ratings would be warranted in the staff’s Data Adequacy Assessment for Surveillance”, the report said.



National statistics have invited scrutiny even before the recent GDP data. VISHAL SRIVASTAV

Favourable ratings, however, were not forthcoming, with the IMF staff retaining all the grades from the 2024 Article IV consultation report. While national accounts received a C rating, the overall rating was a B due to other aspects — prices, government finance statistics, external sector statistics, monetary and financial statistics, and inter-sectoral consistency — all receiving Bs.

Ratings range from A to D. An A rating is given when the data is adequate for IMF surveillance, while a B is used for data that has “some” shortcomings but is “broadly adequate”. C rating is for data with “some” shortcomings, which “somewhat hamper surveillance”. Finally, a D rating shows “serious shortcomings that significantly hamper surveillance”.

Like India, China and South Africa received median B ratings, while the US and the UK got A ratings.

Pre-2024 rating system

The four-tier rating system is fairly new, implemented only in 2024. Prior to that, in 2023, IMF staff had noted that India’s data was “broadly adequate”. This had been the case since 2016.

It is worth recalling that the last time the MoSPI updated the GDP series was in early 2015. Back then, the new growth numbers had confounded one and all, with even the IMF staff noting that “large revisions to historical series, the relatively short time span of the revised series, and major discrepancies between GDP by activity and GDP by expenditure complicate analysis”.

Why has the IMF since downgraded its assessment of India’s statistics? For one, it has repeatedly pointed out deficiencies. It said in its 2023 report that India’s GDP data, with 2011-12 as the base year of comparison, was “outdated” and should be “rebased as soon as feasible”.

Another long-standing criticism has been the use of the Wholesale Price Index, and not the Producer Price Index, to deflate many economic activities while calculating the real GDP from nominal GDP. To arrive at the real growth rate, the ministry ‘deflates’ the nominal GDP by a combination of wholesale and retail inflation, with the former playing a larger role. Globally, PPIs are used instead of WPIs as the former includes services along with goods, and measures price change at the production stage.

What comes next

To be fair to Indian authorities, the IMF’s latest annual report comes months before the MoSPI launches its new GDP series with 2022-23 as the base year. The first quarterly number under the new series — which is expected to update its methodology and incorporate new data sources — will be released on February 27, 2026, when data for October-December 2025 and the second advance estimate for 2025-26 as a whole will be published.

The new series is part of the MosPI’s major statistical overhaul. Days before that data is published, the first CPI inflation number under the updated series will also be released on February 12. Based on the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey for 2023-24 with 2024 as the base year, it will replace the current CPI series, which is based on the 2011-12 survey and has 2012 as the base year.

Some other updates include a revised Index of Industrial Production, also with 2022-23 as the base year. Meanwhile, the Reserve Bank of India is also planning to release Balance of Payments data — including the key current account balance metric — every month in addition to the current quarterly practice.

LONGER VERSION  
INDIANEXPRESS.COM/EXPLAINED

• ECONOMICS

Beyond headline number: Rupee’s fall is ‘real’ this time



HARISH DAMODARAN

LAST WEEK saw the rupee breach the 89-to-the-dollar mark for the first time, closing at 89.46.

But it wasn’t just the US dollar. Between November 21 and November 28, the rupee’s exchange rate weakened against the dollar (from 88.64 to 89.46) and also the euro (102.32 to 103.63), the British pound (116.08 to 118.27) and the Japanese yen (0.5642 to 0.5720).

The depreciation has been higher over a one-year period since November 28, 2024 — from 84.49 to 89.46 against the dollar, 89.12 to 103.63 against the euro, 106.97 to 118.27 against the pound and 0.5574 to 0.5720 to the yen.

Thus, the rupee has fallen against all the four major currencies — more against the euro and pound than against the dollar.

Effective exchange rates

A better idea of the rupee’s weakening in the last one year can be obtained from the movements in its so-called nominal effective exchange rate (NEER) and real effective exchange rate (REER).

The NEER and REER are indices similar to the consumer price index (CPI). The CPI is the weighted average retail price of a representative consumer basket of goods and services for a given month or year, relative to a fixed base period.

The NEERs/REERs are indices of the weighted average of the rupee’s exchange rates vis-à-vis the currencies of India’s key trading partners. In this case, the basket comprises 40 currencies and the base year (used as a reference for comparison with its value set at 100) is taken as 2015-16. The currency weights are derived from the share of the individual countries in India’s total foreign trade, just as the weight of each commodity in the CPI is based on its relative importance in the overall consumption basket. The 40 currencies are of countries accounting for about 88% of India’s annual trade flows.

Any increase in the NEER/REER indi-

cates the rupee’s effective appreciation against the 40-currency basket and decreases point to its overall exchange rate depreciation.

Falling trend since 2025

The accompanying chart shows movements in the rupee’s NEER and REER from 2022.

The NEER index has ruled below 100 since 2018-19. A value of 90 means that the rupee has fallen relative to the currencies of India’s main trading partners by 10% since 2015-16.

However, it is significant that the NEER hovered above 90 till the start of this calendar year. Between January 2022 and January 2025, the decline was a mere 3.4%, from 93.94 to 90.75. Subsequently, the drop has been marked, to 84.58 in October 2025 — or by 6.8% over just nine months.

The extent of the rupee’s recent depreciation is even more if one looks at the REER. The REER is a summary index capturing movements in the external value of the rupee against a basket of global currencies. But it doesn’t factor in inflation: If a currency’s nominal exchange rate falls less than the domestic inflation rate, it has ac-

Singh Chouhan.

Responding to a question by Congress member Randeep Singh Surjewala on August 8, Minister of State for Agriculture and Farmers’ Welfare Ramnath Thakur said 43,001 seed samples were found “non-standard” in the last three years (2022-25). West Bengal accounted for 62 per cent (26,603) of such seeds, followed by Tamil Nadu (4,448) and Madhya Pradesh (3,517).

“During the last three years (2022-23 to 2024-25), Centre and States authorities combined tested a total of 5,27,814 fertilizers samples out of which, 28,303 samples were found non-standard. Similarly... 5,97,859 seed samples were tested out of which, 43,001... were found to be non-standard,” the minister said.

States issued 12,287 warnings, 12,915 stop-sale orders, filed 1,914 FIRs/cases, and reported 164 forfeitures over the same period, Thakur said.

How much seed does India require annually?

According to the Agriculture Ministry, annual seed requirement in 2024-25 was estimated at 48.20 lakh tonnes, against the availability of 53.15 lakh tonnes. India’s seeds market is valued at about Rs 40,000 crore.

From May 2014 to August 2025, 3,053 varieties were released — 85 per cent from the public sector and 15 per cent from the



India’s seeds market is valued at about Rs 40,000 crore. ARCHIVE

Open for feedback

● The ministry has invited public comments before finalising the Bill for introduction in Parliament.

● The deadline for feedback is December 11. After incorporating the feedback, the draft will go to the Union Cabinet for approval.

2 THINGS TO KNOW

Ditwah: How are tropical cyclones named?

CYCLONE DITWAH, which was located around 90 km southeast of Cuddalore in Tamil Nadu as of Sunday evening, is expected to weaken into a deep depression soon, the Regional Meteorological Centre said.

Cyclones that form in every ocean basin across the world are named by the regional specialised meteorological centres (RSMCs) and Tropical Cyclone Warning Centres (TCWCs), including the IMD.

In 2000, a group of nations called WMO/ESCAP (World Meteorological Organisation/United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific), which comprised Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, Myanmar, Oman, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Thailand, decided to start naming cyclones in the region. After each country sent in suggestions, the WMO/ESCAP Panel on Tropical Cyclones (PTC) finalised the list. More countries were later added to the grouping. The names are chosen on a



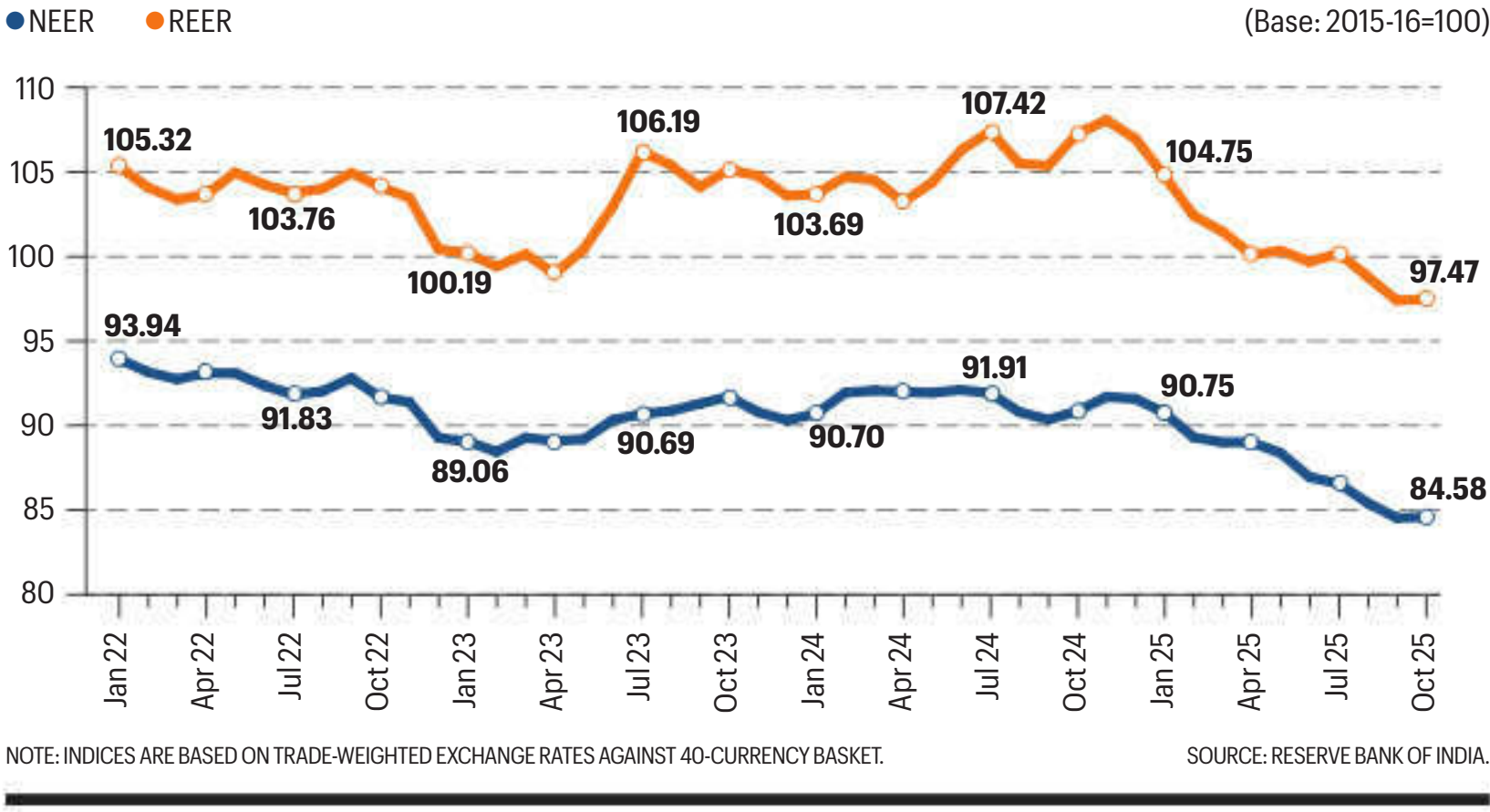
High waves lash the Kasimedu shoreline in the wake of Cyclone Ditwah, in Chennai on Sunday. PTI

rotational basis, with each country submitting multiple options for use over many years. However, all nations must adhere to certain rules. The proposed name should be neutral to politics, political figures, cultures and gender. It should be short, easy to pronounce and should not be offensive to any member country. Ditwah was submitted by Yemen. ENS

{ CLIMATE }

The domestic currency has weakened not only against the dollar, but also the euro, pound, yen and yuan. Inflation is one factor

Nominal and Real Effective Exchange Rate Indices of Rupee



NOTE: INDICES ARE BASED ON TRADE-WEIGHTED EXCHANGE RATES AGAINST 40-CURRENCY BASKET.

SOURCE: RESERVE BANK OF INDIA.

Key Point

A better idea of the rupee’s weakening in the last one year can be obtained from the movements in its so-called nominal effective exchange rate and real effective exchange rate.

● The NEER and REER are indices similar to the consumer price index

tually appreciated in “real” terms.

The REER is basically the NEER index adjusted for the inflation differentials between the home country and its trading partners. The REER is, in that sense, a true gauge of whether a currency is undervalued, overvalued or fairly valued relative to that of other countries, after taking into consideration both exchange rate and relative price movements. If the rupee’s nominal exchange rates stay the same, but prices in India rise faster than in other countries, the REER goes up, making Indian products relatively more expensive and less competitive in the global market.

From the chart, it can be seen that the REER index, in fact, soared to an all-time-high of 108.06 in November 2024. From that peak, it has plunged by 9.8% to 97.47 in October 2025. In other words, from being highly overvalued, the rupee is undervalued today.

There are two reasons why this has happened.

The first is the rupee’s general weakening against most international currencies, including the Chinese yuan (from 11.66 to 12.63 in the last one year). The NEER’s dipping below 85 is a reflection of the overall nominal depreciation.

• POLICY

Higher penalty, regulating quality: What new Seeds Bill proposes

Harikishan Sharma  
New Delhi, November 30

THE CENTRE has come out with a new Seeds Bill, proposing mandatory registration of seed varieties and stricter punishments for violations. The draft law, released by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare on November 13, will replace the Seeds Act, 1966 once enacted.

Why is the new Seeds Bill required?

The existing law regulates only notified seeds (new varieties ‘notified’ for public cultivation by the government). Also, registration of seeds is not compulsory. Green manure seeds, commercial crops and plantation crops are excluded. Penalties under the current law are low, going up to six months in prison and a fine of Rs 1,000.

These gaps have long prompted the demand for a new law. A previous attempt was made in 2004, when a Bill was introduced in the Rajya Sabha on December 9. It was referred to a Parliamentary committee on December 17, 2004, but never became law.

How big is the problem of spurious and substandard seeds?

There have been complaints of substandard seeds in the market, repeatedly flagged by Agriculture Minister Shivraj

Singh Chouhan.

Responding to a question by Congress member Randeep Singh Surjewala on August 8, Minister of State for Agriculture and Farmers’ Welfare Ramnath Thakur said 43,001 seed samples were found “non-standard” in the last three years (2022-25). West Bengal accounted for 62 per cent (26,603) of such seeds, followed by Tamil Nadu (4,448) and Madhya Pradesh (3,517).

“During the last three years (2022-23 to 2024-25), Centre and States authorities combined tested a total of 5,27,814 fertilizers samples out of which, 28,303 samples were found non-standard. Similarly... 5,97,859 seed samples were tested out of which, 43,001... were found to be non-standard,” the minister said.

States issued 12,287 warnings, 12,915 stop-sale orders, filed 1,914 FIRs/cases, and reported 164 forfeitures over the same period, Thakur said.

How much seed does India require annually?

According to the Agriculture Ministry, annual seed requirement in 2024-25 was estimated at 48.20 lakh tonnes, against the availability of 53.15 lakh tonnes. India’s seeds market is valued at about Rs 40,000 crore.

From May 2014 to August 2025, 3,053 varieties were released — 85 per cent from the public sector and 15 per cent from the



India’s seeds market is valued at about Rs 40,000 crore. ARCHIVE

Open for feedback

● The ministry has invited public comments before finalising the Bill for introduction in Parliament.

● The deadline for feedback is December 11. After incorporating the feedback, the draft will go to the Union Cabinet for approval.

private sector.

What are the key provisions of the new Seeds Bill?

The Seeds Bill, 2025 proposes mandatory registration of seed varieties and penalties of Rs 30 lakh and three years’ imprisonment for major offences such as sale of “spurious” and non-registered seeds.

Section 13 states: “On and from the date of commencement of this Act, no seed of any kind or variety except farmers’ variety and kind or variety produced exclusively for export purpose shall... be sold unless such kind or variety is registered...”

Existing varieties notified under Section 5 of the Seeds Act, 1966 will be deemed registered under the new law.

Bibi asks for pardon: Cases against him

ISRAELI PRIME Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday asked the country’s president to grant him a pardon in the corruption charges he is facing, weeks after US President Donald Trump wrote to his Israeli counterpart with the same request.

Netanyahu is the only sitting PM in Israel to stand trial, charged with fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in three different cases. Netanyahu has consistently called the



Trump and Netanyahu at the White House earlier this year. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The second has to do with inflation. Year-on-year CPI inflation in October 2025 for India, at 0.25%, was lower than the latest rates for the US and Japan (3% each), United Kingdom (3.6%), Euro Area (2.1%), Indonesia (2.9%) and Brazil (4.7%). The combination of nominal depreciation with unusually low CPI inflation (sub-3% since May 2025) is what has pushed the REER index to below 100, resulting in an undervalued rupee.

Looking ahead

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has, in a staff report released on November 26, reclassified India’s exchange rate regime as a “crawl-like arrangement”. This is after having moved it from “floating” to “stabilised” in November 2023.

The “stabilised arrangement” classification was made citing the Reserve Bank of India’s (RBI) frequent interventions in the foreign exchange market to limit any excessive depreciation or appreciation of the rupee.

A “crawl-like arrangement”, as per the IMF’s definition, implies an exchange rate regime that is neither fully floating (i.e. market-determined) nor pegged at near-fixed levels relative to other currencies (“stabilised”). A “crawling” peg allows the currency’s value to be adjusted gradually within a 2% band around a statistical trend for six months or more.

Whatever be the classification, it’s clear that the RBI under the present governor Sanjay Malhotra (he assumed office on December 11, 2024) has adopted a more flexible exchange policy with only occasional interventions through dollar purchases and sales.

The changed approach has been influenced partly by easing domestic inflation (reducing the need for a strong rupee to keep import costs artificially low) and also the imperative to maintain India’s trade competitiveness (especially following the US President Donald Trump’s unilateral tariff actions and increased threat from China redirecting its exports to the rest of the world).

If the current nominal depreciation (the domestic currency shed 73 paise against the dollar in November) and relatively low CPI inflation is sustained, the coming months could see a further decline in the rupee’s REER.

The Bill seeks to regulate the quality of seeds for sale and import and to ensure supply of quality seeds.

According to the ministry, the Bill is “aligned with current agricultural and regulatory requirements” and will replace the Seeds Act, 1966 and the Seeds (Control) Order, 1983. “The draft Seeds Bill, 2025 seeks to regulate the quality of seeds and planting materials... ensure farmers’ access to high-quality seeds at affordable rates, curb the sale of spurious... seeds, protect farmers from losses, liberalise seed imports... and safeguard the rights of farmers,” the ministry said.

“On the enforcement side, the draft Bill proposes to decriminalise minor offences... while maintaining strong provisions to penalise serious violations effectively,” it said.

What happens next?

The ministry has invited public comments before finalising the Bill for introduction in Parliament. The deadline for feedback is December 11. After incorporating the feedback, the draft will go to the Union Cabinet for approval.

Once cleared, the Bill can be introduced in Parliament.

At an event on October 30, Chouhan said the government aims to introduce the Seeds Bill and Pesticides Bill during the Budget Session early next year.

charges a “witch hunt” and “conspiracy”. He is seeking pardon for charges he has denied in order to promote unity in the country, he claimed.

The most serious accusation is that Netanyahu helped a telecom company, Bezeq, with regulations, in return for a news website owned by Bezeq giving him favourable coverage. The second is that he accepted expensive gifts — nearly \$200,000 worth of cigars, champagne, jewellery, etc. — from Hollywood producer Arnon Milchan and Australian billionaire James Packer. In return, for Milchan, Netanyahu lobbied on US visa matters, tried to legislate a generous tax break for him and sought to promote his interests in the Israeli media market. Packer reportedly wanted Israeli residency status for tax purposes. The third case has to do with Bibi offering to bring in a legislation that would weaken a newspaper publisher’s main rival, in return for that publisher giving him favourable headlines. AP

{ GLOBAL }

{ CLIMATE }



## WHY SHIVRAJ SINGH CHOUHAN

As Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare as well as Rural Development, Shivraj Singh Chouhan has the crucial responsibility of shaping the core BJP constituencies — farmers and villages. Given his strong grassroots connect, electoral successes as the longest-serving Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh and a Lok Sabha win from Vidisha with a record margin, he is a bridge between the central leadership and the party cadre. Given his organisational experience, he has mass acceptability. He initiated cash transfer schemes for women, which have turned out to be a game-changer in BJP's electoral politics



## ON STATUS OF STUBBLE BURNING

*Stubble burning has reduced in Punjab and Haryana. The soil has become more fertile due to mixing of stubble with it. Stubble burning has gone up in MP because more land has been brought under paddy cultivation*



## ON THE BJP'S FUNCTIONING

*No party is more democratic than the BJP. Every decision is discussed and debated. BJP is the only party whose booth units meet every month. Which political party in India does this?*

# ‘Schemes for women aren’t freebies. We are correcting historical injustice, they now have financial freedom’

Union Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on the lab-to-land agriculture infrastructure, protecting farmers with MSP, why women voters need to be respected and BJP's electoral wins. The session was moderated by Harikishan Sharma, Senior Assistant Editor, *The Indian Express*



Union Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan (right) in conversation with Harikishan Sharma TASHI TOBGYAL

**Harikishan Sharma: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has set a goal of making India a developed nation by 2047. How do you see the agriculture sector contributing to this goal?**

Agriculture is the backbone of the Indian economy and the farmer is its soul, its life. Even today 46 per cent of our population directly depends on farming for their livelihood and agricultural revenue contributes significantly to India's economy. Most importantly, the agriculture sector guarantees our food security because we have a population of more than 140 crore. Therefore, our priorities are ensuring the country's food security, the income of farmers, the continuity of their livelihood and nutrition. Along with these, we have to look at crop diversification.

After 2014-15, our foodgrain production has increased by almost 44 per cent, from 240 million tonnes to around 352 million tonnes. Rice and wheat are abundant and there is no need for imports. But if we talk about pulses and oilseeds, we have to import quite a bit. An *atmanirbhar* and developed India means that we should not depend on anyone for essential foodgrains. Especially in today's context when anyone can refuse to trade anything, anytime. Then there is the issue of climate change. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) is continuously carrying out research to develop climate-resilient and fortified, nutrient-rich varieties. We have tried to develop about 150 such varieties. We have to increase production significantly for which we need good seeds. Over the last decade, our scientists have succeeded in developing almost 3,000 varieties of seeds, including those of wheat, rice, pulses and oilseeds. We are trying to create digital infrastructure through satellite-based remote sensing so that the farmer can get correct information on weather and germ attacks. For example, if the farmer knows about wind direction in advance, he can know when the germ attack is headed his way and avoid damage.

**Harikishan Sharma: The government had set a target of doubling farmer's income by 2022. Have you reviewed the situation? What are the big challenges to Indian agriculture?**

Both crop production and productivity have increased, the first by 44 per cent. Along with this, the government has announced Minimum Support Price (MSP). There has been record procurement. Therefore, income has definitely increased. ICAR did research on 3,000 farmers and found incomes had more than doubled for many. We also have farmers who have increased their income five to six times more. But a major problem with our farming is the size of the land — up to three acres — unlike Australia, Brazil or the US, where each farm spans 10,000-15,000 acres. Nearly 86 per cent of our farmers are small land-holders. If the crop is ruined once, they are affected. Despite this, income has increased.

The first big challenge is the availability of quality seeds, along with good pesticides and fertilisers. Second is the middleman cutting into farmers' profits. Third is connecting modern technology from the lab to the land. What use is AI if the farmer does not know how to use it? Which is why we are educating farmers.

**Harikishan Sharma: Do you think the government has a window to implement agricultural reforms?**

Work on agricultural reforms is ongoing. Every farmer will now have an ID, so that all their information — the size of their land, the crop sown every year by them, their animals — is in one place. Then we can collect details of crop damage through remote sensing so that the farmer can be given the right compensation. The government has decided to bear the cost of transporting crops from the farm to city markets. We will also try to make arrangements for storage.

We have the Market Intervention Scheme (MIS) scheme, a price support mechanism for perishable and horticultural commodities not covered by the Minimum Support Price (MSP) system. We fix a certain price based on the farmer's losses. The Central Government will pay 50 per cent of the difference and the State Government will do so for the remaining. Many states have taken advantage of it.

**Nikhil Ghanekar: What do you have to say about stubble burning, which is very high in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh now, and has a direct impact on air pollution?**

There has been a significant reduction of stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana. We have given shredder machines on subsidy. Ransih Kalan village in Moga district of Punjab has not been burning stubble for 11 years and its farmers are also educating others in surrounding villages. The use of chemical fertilisers has been reduced by 30 per cent as the soil has become more fertile due to mixing of stubble with it. Many people are buying stubble to make biomass. Stubble burning has gone up in Madhya Pradesh because more land has been brought under paddy cultivation. We are educating farmers there too.

**Vikas Pathak: Why is there a delay in electing the BJP president?**

The party has been in election mode because of constant Assembly elections and we haven't got a chance to think about any-

thing else. That's why, every four months, we have to prepare for the next elections. I believe that one of the major obstacles in this country's progress and development is the continuous cycle of elections. For example, in the last two years, Assembly elections were held in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Four months later, Lok Sabha elections were held. Haryana, Jharkhand, Jammu and Kashmir, Maharashtra elections followed. When those finished, we had to gear up for Delhi. When that got over, there was Bihar. Now, the fatigue of Bihar is not yet over and we are heading towards Bengal. That's why it's time to consider "One Nation One Election." If Lok Sabha and Assembly elections are held simultaneously once every five years, there will be a good chance to serve the country, pursue progress, development and public welfare peacefully for at least four-and-a-half years.

**Jatin Anand: Recently, you were in Bhopal and said that you had expected to be Chief Minister again in 2023. But then you decided to accept the organisation's decision and moved to Delhi. What was the need for this explanation after two years?**

First of all, I didn't say that it was my expectation. People were making assumptions about it. I was giving a speech to motivate people on how one should live their life. One should not complain about what they have not got. I talked about how people thought that I would become the CM, but when the decision was taken, truly, I felt like it was a test for me, to see if I behaved appropriately as a *karyakarta* (worker). I am also proud to say that the BJP made me an MP and MLA six times. It made me Chief Minister four times. If I keep complaining even after these milestones, then I think it would be my great misfortune. Sometimes roles change in life.

**Deeptiman Tiwary: Over the last two years, the incumbent BJP governments in states have launched**

**a cash benefit scheme for women six months before an election and gone on to win massive victories. Nitish Kumar was Bihar Chief Minister for 20 years and was facing anti-incumbency. Then he put Rs 10,000 in the bank accounts of women, resulting in a landslide victory. Empowerment or poll sop?**

I want to draw your attention to a historical injustice. Women also have a right to the resources of this earth. But the male-dominated society kept them confined to the home for years and did not give them a chance to live a normal life. I introduced the Ladli Lakshmi Yojana in Madhya Pradesh in 2007, during which I realised that society would not let a daughter be born till it considers her a burden. The sex ratio in the state had also deteriorated, with 900 daughters being born per 1,000 sons. So, I thought that the birth of

a daughter should become a boon, not a burden. By creating the Ladli Lakshmi Yojana, we incentivised girl child education by grading deposits depending on enrolment at schools and higher education institutions. A final payment of Rs 1 lakh was made when the girl child turned 21 and had completed her education.

This scheme arose from the pain of seeing mothers differentiating between a son and a daughter. After that, we gave 50 per cent reservation to women in our local body elections. But Nitishji's (Bihar Chief Minister) efforts were more publicised, even though we did it first. We were also the first to distribute bicycles, provide maternity support to unorganised sector workers, which again en-

titled the woman to cash benefits, from prenatal check-ups to birth of the child. We then announced a concession on registration fee for anyone who bought property in

## ON THE CONGRESS DEBACLE

*The Congress could not even manage its own flock. The problem is that it neither understands party organisation nor the ways to run it. It needs to understand how to manage the organisation, how to take people along and what issues to raise*



prosperous, rich, developed and self-reliant India is truly amazing.

**Liz Mathew: There was a time when the BJP parliamentary board met frequently and took decisions. It hardly meets now; the old leaders aren't in it. The decisions flow from the top, which some BJP workers are themselves calling a high command culture. You have an open-door policy for defectors. Are we seeing a 'Congressisation of the BJP'?**

First, the parliamentary board meets when there is a need for it and all important decisions are still taken by it. Why should old faces remain, new people should come in. That should keep happening in all political parties. I believe no party is more democratic than the BJP. Every decision is discussed and debated. BJP is the only party whose booth units meet every month and are one of our biggest strengths. Which political party in India has booth workers meeting every month? We have district and block meetings, where programmes are decided and work is done to implement them. BJP cadres keep working on one programme after another, it is a dynamic entity. The Congress can neither decide its district presidency or the state presidency.

**Harish Damodaran: When you were CM, you started the Bhavantar Bhugtan Yojana (Price Difference Payment Scheme) so that the price difference goes to the farmer. If you look at soybean, it is currently selling at Rs 4,200-4300 per quintal, which is not just less than this year's MSP but also last year's MSP. Can't your old scheme be revived at the Centre?**

Soybean is being procured in Madhya Pradesh under the Bhavantar Bhugtan Yojana. A model rate is fixed and the difference between the crop's MSP and the rate at which it is sold is put into the farmer's account. But it depends on which state wants to adopt this scheme. We have decided to buy arhar, masoor (lentil), urad (black gram) from registered farmers at MSP.

**Vineet Bhalla: What was the inside story of Jyotiraditya Scindia joining the BJP in 2020?**

Nothing was inside, everything was outside. In 2020, Scindiaji broke away with his associates, everyone knows about that. The Congress could not even manage its own flock. The problem is that its leaders neither understand party organisation nor the ways to run it. Today, the situation has become so pathetic that whoever the Congress joins hands with, loses. The Congress needs to understand how to manage the organisation, how to take people along and what issues to raise. Was the SIR (Special Intensive Revision of Electoral Rolls) an issue in the Bihar elections? Who will refuse a corrected voters' list? What do people have to do with this? If we say that infiltrators should go out, who among the citizens of India can object?

But leaving aside other issues, they went after "vote chori." Even after the Bihar defeat, they are saying they will rally around this plank. If you don't raise the public issues properly, how will the public support you?

**P Vaidyanathan Iyer: When the farm laws came in 2020, there was a demand for giving legal guarantee to MSP. Given that it can mitigate price risks, what are the hurdles in implementation?**

First, I would like to tell you that we can buy 100 per cent of wheat and whatever the farmer wants to sell. However, what the farmer wants to sell depends on his preferences. Some he keeps for consumption, some for the open market where he gets a better price. For example, Sarbati wheat from Madhya Pradesh sells for Rs 4,000 per quintal, so he will not sell it at MSP. We buy the entire rice crop. Sugarcane is sold only at fair and remunerative prices declared by the government. We guarantee 100 per cent purchase for masoor (lentil), tur (pigeon pea) and urad (black gram). For crops like soybean, there is the Bhavantar Bhugtan (Price Difference Payment). So the farmer has the option to take the MSP price.

Of course, implementation depends on the jurisdiction of the state. The Modi government has decided to declare MSP by setting a 50 per cent profit on the cost (A2+FL or actual paid out and family labour cost). It has made arrangements for purchase. We are trying our best to offer better prices. The Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-Kisan), loans of over Rs 10 lakh through Kisan Credit Cards (KCC) are currently being given to farmers to bring down the cost of production. Fertiliser subsidies have crossed Rs 2 lakh crore.

**Anil Sasi: Fertiliser subsidies go to companies. Are you exploring any provision to give them directly to farmers through DBT (Direct Benefit Transfer) and Aadhaar?**

This is a matter for consideration. As I said, we are creating IDs for farmers. Before this, the details of the farmers, meaning the map of their land, their ownership rights were not completely clear. After the farmer ID is created, we will get all the information we need at a click. But in such a large country, building consensus is necessary. Then States are autonomous, they make decisions that they deem fit. But this is definitely a matter for consideration.



## Move fast on free trade

The antidote to protectionism lies in greater openness; India can easily reduce tariffs

THE COMING UNION Budget would do well to send an unambiguous signal through large-scale customs duty cuts that tariff escalation or preservation is not on India’s agenda. New Delhi must place itself at the vanguard of the global response to the Donald Trump administration’s mindless retreat into protectionism. Instead of responding in kind, India should double down on free trade and economic openness. With 90% of customs revenues coming from less than 4% of tariff lines, and free trade agreements (FTAs) with as many as 50 countries under negotiation, India has ample headroom to lower duties across most remaining lines with minimal revenue loss. Customs receipts now account for barely 4% of the Union Budget and are steadily losing significance as a revenue source. Tariff protection, therefore, can be confined to a narrow set of finished industrial products and a wider basket of agricultural items, where domestic sensitivities are real. Lower duties on a broad range of industrial raw materials and intermediates would promote value addition and job creation at home. Easier access to such inputs also sits squarely with the objective of *atmanirbharta*. The recent rollback of quality control orders on several basic industrial imports signals that the policy needle has already begun to shift.

India urgently needs abundant supplies of low-cost inputs for sunrise sectors such as electric vehicles, semiconductors, and renewable energy. That is why incentive schemes are being rolled out to tap rare earths and other critical minerals, with the aim of building integrated domestic supply chains. But India must also ensure that external shocks—such as China’s arbitrary curbs on rare earth magnet exports—do not derail its manufacturing ambitions, which are still real but not open-ended. While most capital goods already enter through preferential FTA routes with little or no duty burden, raw materials for many traditional industries continue to face high tariffs and non-tariff barriers.

Trump’s jibe about India being a “tariff king” does not withstand close scrutiny. While India’s simple-average import tariff is among the highest in the world, the actual tax burden on imports is far lower. Customs collections amount to just 3.8% of the value of merchandise imports, indicating a comparable effective tariff rate. What lends partial credibility to the criticism, however, is India’s pause in tariff liberalisation after 2009 and a brief phase of tariff escalation between 2018 and 2023. Though this trend has been reversed, the correction needs to go much further.

For Trump, tariffs are not merely a negotiating tool but a source of revenue and leverage. His treasury secretary, Scott Bessent, recently claimed that the US was “reaping the rewards” of this strategy, noting that tariffs now account for roughly 5% of federal revenues, up from about 2% earlier. The administration is also betting on “tariff-jumping” foreign investment—firms setting up plants in the US to circumvent import duties. This is a distorted strategy and unlikely to endure. The true antidote to protectionism lies in freer flows of goods, services, and capital. It is entrepreneurial logic, not political fiat, that ultimately reshapes global supply chains. Strong profit motive is what drives entrepreneurs across the globe. The rapid reconfiguration of trade routes in response to Trump’s tariffs demonstrates this amply. Indian exporters, too, have shown an ability to adapt. The Budget should reinforce—not restrain—this instinct by decisively moving India away from tariff defensiveness and towards openness.

## The pension revolution is better for savers

ONE OF THE first things I learned about retirement finance is that there are only three ways to increase income once you stop working: Save more; work longer; take more risk. This is true whether you have a traditional defined benefit plan or a defined contribution plan, such as a 401(k). And yet, the few people running pension funds, savers and much of the financial industry seem unable to accept this hard truth.

Defined benefit pensions are much less common in the private sector, having been largely replaced by defined contribution plans. But the delusion you can get something for nothing makes the traditional pensions much riskier than they appear. Making promises far into the future enables pension fund managers to fully embrace this fallacy as their investment strategy. Sure, defined contribution plans have their own risks, but those are transparent and there are no incentives to ignore risk. People worry defined contribution pensions made the world riskier, but many savers should be grateful they have control over their savings.

The latest example is the insurance industry, which has taken on the obligations of some large defined benefit pensions. The insurers are funding benefits by investing in private assets with dubious value, have taken on reinsurance to justify holding less capital even though those reinsurance firms are their own affiliates and located off-shore where they are under-regulated. Private credit now accounts for about 35% of the investment portfolios of North American insurance firms, *Institutional Investor* reports, citing International Monetary Fund research. A decade ago, it was about 31%.

On paper, it looked like a reasonable idea because the strategy promises high returns, which allows insurers to set aside less money to pay out on things like life insurance and annuities. It’s tempting to believe you can get something for nothing, and no one falls for that more than those who should know better, meaning institutional investors such as pension fund managers and insurers. This is why public pensions are chronically underfunded and why many private sector plans went bankrupt before they were better regulated in the 1970s.

The latest iteration of the good-idea-ending-badly story is funds investing in private markets, whose promise of high returns comes at the expense of liquidity and transparency. It also means no one really knows what the investments are truly worth. So as pensions need their money to fund payouts, many are finding these investments weren’t so great.

Of course, if insurers invest wisely and undertake good risk management, there is nothing wrong with this arrangement. But if an insurer’s investments falter, pension beneficiaries could have few protections given that insurers can be less well-regulated than private-sector pensions. It should be noted that the Bank for International Settlements said last month that insurers tend to rely on smaller ratings firms when determining the safety of their private investments, raising the risk of “inflated assessments of creditworthiness”.

In principle, traditional defined-benefit pensions seem better than, say, 401(k) plans because the risk is pooled among many beneficiaries and the assets are professionally managed. But history shows the power of managing large pools of assets combined with the temptation to believe you can consistently beat the broad market often leads to underfunded liabilities that need to be paid long into the future.

The advantage of defined contribution pensions is they are more transparent and, more recently due to good regulations, invested in low-cost funds. A proposal by the US government to let them invest in private and even more exotic assets is a mistake. But as long as private assets are not included as a default investment (what you automatically get invested in when you sign up for a 401(k) with your employer), they probably won’t cause the same problems that we have seen with traditional pensions.

Defined contribution plans do have one big weakness: They are effective at helping people accumulate assets, but less good at helping people manage the risk around spending in retirement. Neither the retirement industry nor regulators have figured out a solution. But whatever they come up with, here’s hoping it includes options that are well-regulated, transparent and don’t promise something for nothing.

## RBI POLICY PREVIEW

SCOPE FOR 25-50 BPS RATE CUT, GIVEN THE ELEVATED REAL RATES AND A COMFORTABLE INFLATION TRAJECTORY

# Room for more easing

## UPASNA BHARDWAJ

Chief Economist, Kotak Mahindra Bank



ground. Economic activity has stabilised, aided by softening inflation, lower interest rates, and front-loaded government spending. Of course, much of the lift-off in consumer spending has been witnessed during the festival period with the GST cut-led euphoria. Expectedly, the discretionary spends (specifically witnessed across auto sales and white goods) have outperformed the staples. Rural demand has continued to surpass urban demand, but the recent trends suggest a narrowing of the gap as urban demand shows signs of a sequential pickup. While the recent pickup in economic activity is likely to continue through this quarter given the pent-up demand in certain sectors following the GST relief, we remain wary of the sustainability of these trends amid a likely pullback in government spending as tax collections remain tepid, a fading of urban demand after a surge in Q3FY26, and as lower food prices distort the terms of trade for farmers, taking the sheen off the robust rural demand.

Furthermore, while real GDP growth appears to be robust, nominal GDP growth, at below 10%, raises a point of concern. Persistently weak nominal growth can strain corporate revenues, tax collections, and debt servicing capacity, increasing the risk of financial instability. This could amplify vulnerabilities in credit markets and weigh on investor confidence, making it critical to monitor systemic risks closely.

While growth remains broadly firm in the near term, the inflation trends in India have been very comfortable across the board, providing room for further monetary easing. Favourable monsoons have kept food inflation well in check, while the GST-led price cuts have led to a significant downside to the core-core inflation trajectory (core excluding bullion registered 2.6% in October). The recent October inflation data confirms that inflation is tracking 80-100 bps below the Reserve Bank of India’s (RBI) forecasts for 2HFY26 and also into FY27.

We expect the FY26/27 inflation to average around 2% (RBI: 2.6%) and 4.1% (RBI: 4.5%) respectively, with the core inflation also expected to converge towards the 4% mark. Meanwhile, the plausible upside risk to food prices in the coming quarters could be offset by the record high stock of rice and wheat maintained with the Food Corporation of India. Furthermore, the benign global crude oil prices could provide room for fuel price cuts at the retail level in case of any adverse scenario.

Overall, we see a scope for an addi-

**We expect the RBI to announce OMO purchases in the December policy once the full impact of the CRR cut has played out**

# Power transmission needs competition



## SHRIRAM SUBRAMANIAN

Founder and MD, InGovern Research Services

India’s progress on transmission will decide how fast renewables can scale. For it to succeed, every capable market participant should perform at peak efficiency

INDIA’S AMBITION To deploy 500 gigawatts (Gw) of non-fossil energy capacity by 2030 depends on a robust interstate transmission network. While generation capacity can be built in 18-24 months, transmission corridors often require about four years and multiple clearances. The current national grid has already achieved synchronous integration of all five regional grids. India’s renewable energy ambition is among the loftiest globally. Meeting it will depend as much on the efficiency and inclusiveness of its transmission architecture as on the megawatts being built. A competitive transmission sector is therefore not just good economics—it is good grid governance.

A key reform—the Tariff-Based Competitive Bidding (TBCB) framework—was introduced to open up transmission to both public and private sector companies. Private sector companies bring value through faster execution, adoption of new technologies, like drone-based monitoring or advanced tower designs, and access to global finance. Yet, recent trends point to a shrinking competitive field and many projects being awarded to one company. In FY25, the state-owned Power Grid Corporation of India Ltd (PGCIL) secured 26 out of 45 interstate transmission projects. This accounts for nearly 60% of the projects by value. While PGCIL has had a history of building our national grid, such a high concentration of new project awards to a single company signals a market that

is becoming less competitive.

The core issue is the structural advantage that PGCIL enjoys as a public sector company with a cost of capital that is significantly lower than that of any private developer. The lower cost of capital is not a reflection of efficiency but of financial stature. In a bidding process heavily weighted on tariff, this creates an uneven playing field where private players, despite bringing genuine efficiencies and new technologies, consistently finish second. Rational market participation is not possible when there is no level playing field. When private developers repeatedly lose bids despite significant investment in preparation, they will inevitably pull out of participation. This leads to narrower competition, and the sector loses the very diversity and innovation that competition was meant to inject.

The consequences can be disastrous for India’s energy security. A report by the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis highlights a worrying shortfall as in the last fiscal year, India commissioned only 8,830 circuit kilometres of new transmission lines against a target of 15,253 circuit kilometres, a 42% deficit. Additionally, with PGCIL handling an enormous portfolio of projects worth over ₹1.50 lakh crore, capacity strain is a

real concern. The Central Electricity Authority has noted delays in several transmission projects.

This is not just a transmission sector problem; it becomes a renewable energy problem and an energy security problem. Delays in building transmission corridors mean that completed solar and wind projects are left waiting for connectivity, leading to power curtailment and financial losses for power generators. This, in turn, hurts investor confidence, both domestic and international, at a time when it is most needed. The solution is not to sideline PGCIL, but to create a framework where multiple players can thrive, ensuring interstate grid build-out is resilient and efficient. A few policy adjustments can help bring the build-out on track.

First, bid allocation must be rationalised. Similar to renewable energy auctions, a ceiling should be applied so that a single participant cannot win more than a set percentage of projects in a bidding round. For instance, a single bidder cannot be allocated more than 50% of capacity within a given tranche. This would ensure PGCIL remains the main market participant while creating space for other participants.

Second, institutional neutrality should be ensured. The Central Transmission Utility, which plans and procures these

projects, must be perceived as entirely impartial. To bolster confidence, its processes, from project design to bid evaluation, should be subject to periodic independent review.

Third, the bidding model warrants a revisit. The current emphasis on low tariff discovery as opposed to the e-reverse auction generates aggressive tariff bids that strain execution. A shift to a sealed-bid process combined with quality and cost-based selection (QCBS) would be a positive reform. Under QCBS, qualitative parameters such as execution track record, proposed technology, and operation and maintenance plans would weigh alongside cost. Given the long-term asset nature of transmission, quality matters.

India’s green energy transition is a marathon, not a sprint. India’s progression transmission will ultimately determine how fast renewable energy can scale. For it to succeed, every capable market participant should be performing at peak efficiency. By ensuring a genuinely competitive transmission sector, India can build a grid that is not only unified but also reliable, innovative, and capable of guaranteeing the country’s energy security. The time to correct the balance is now, before project delays become a permanent bottleneck to our ambitions. As India moves toward its 2030 and 2047 energy milestones, restoring competitive intensity in the transmission sector will be essential for maintaining affordability, reliability, and investor confidence.

*Views are personal*



## ALLISON SCHRAGER

Bloomberg

insurers can be less well-regulated than private-sector pensions. It should be noted that the Bank for International Settlements said last month that insurers tend to rely on smaller ratings firms when determining the safety of their private investments, raising the risk of “inflated assessments of creditworthiness”.

In principle, traditional defined-benefit pensions seem better than, say, 401(k) plans because the risk is pooled among many beneficiaries and the assets are professionally managed. But history shows the power of managing large pools of assets combined with the temptation to believe you can consistently beat the broad market often leads to underfunded liabilities that need to be paid long into the future.

The advantage of defined contribution pensions is they are more transparent and, more recently due to good regulations, invested in low-cost funds. A proposal by the US government to let them invest in private and even more exotic assets is a mistake. But as long as private assets are not included as a default investment (what you automatically get invested in when you sign up for a 401(k) with your employer), they probably won’t cause the same problems that we have seen with traditional pensions.

Defined contribution plans do have one big weakness: They are effective at helping people accumulate assets, but less good at helping people manage the risk around spending in retirement. Neither the retirement industry nor regulators have figured out a solution. But whatever they come up with, here’s hoping it includes options that are well-regulated, transparent and don’t promise something for nothing.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Sustaining growth

Apropos of “Sterling show” (*FE*, November 29), the 8.2% growth in the September quarter is encouraging, but it underlines the need for careful policy judgement. Much of the momentum stems from a favourable base, strong services activity, and front-loaded festive demand, while manufacturing and private investment continue to show uneven recovery. With inflation still above comfort levels and

bond yields rising, the case for an immediate rate cut is not as clear-cut as the headline numbers suggest. At the same time, delaying support for too long could dampen consumption and weaken confidence just as global uncertainties add fresh pressure. A measured approach—keeping policy flexible while strengthening public investment, improving credit flow to micro, small, and medium enterprises, and easing bottlenecks that hold back private capital—would help sustain

growth without fuelling new risks.

—A Myilsami, Coimbatore

### Focus on public health

Apropos of “Small town India reveals big appetite to eat out” (*FE Sunday*, November 30), the sharp rise in eating out spends in tier-II and -III cities, driven by Unified Payments Interface transactions and higher disposable incomes, shows how aspirations and consumption are moving beyond the metros. At the same time, this trend

raises important questions about nutrition, food waste, and the impact on local eateries when national chains dominate high streets. It is vital that policymakers and the restaurant industry link this growth to clear norms on hygiene, local sourcing, and healthier menus, so that rising demand strengthens public health and farmer incomes, not just revenue charts.

—K Sakunthala, Coimbatore

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



# How Britain 2025 is Hastening Brexit 2.0

Taxing the affluent can't be the answer

Britain had been padding up for wealth tax for a while. What it received last week in its budget, instead, was stealth tax. Chancellor of exchequer Rachel Reeves has tied herself in knots over her promise not to raise income-tax, and the workaround — trapping taxpayers in high brackets — lays it on the chin of the affluent, not the rich. Their turn is due, though. The Labour government will push through with taxes on profits, inheritance and even migration, which is seeing a flurry of m/billionaire ex-its to more placid shores. The most high-profile departure could be that of Lakshmi Mittal, the irony contained in his name not lost on Indians worldwide. Winston Churchill held an apocryphal low opinion on how Indians would go about taxing themselves. His prescience would, by some accounts, not be amiss in c. 2025 Britain.

Since Brexit, every chancellor has walked on a razor edge while presenting the budget. This year, Britons were especially focused on what their government would unveil. Reeve has made her job even harder by delaying her budget. Embarrassing leaks and irresponsible presentation of economic forecasts added to the mood. The freeze on tax slabs hurts those about to become rich, including doctors in the National Health Service. Labour's taxes are designed to protect the NHS. Not quite the way to go if doctors start fleeing the island state. Then there's some explanation needed why inheritances in other countries need to be taxed in Britain. Reeve has judiciously left that fight for another day.

Britain has a history of muddling up taxes. It's gone to war on their account. It is now battling to keep capital within the country to maintain a quality of life that draws in the rich from across the world. Taxing them unduly surely can't be the answer. Not when their businesses are spread outside the country and businessmen are relocating to the likes of Dubai, Italy and Switzerland. Britain has to apply its mind to growing business at home, with some help from expat businessmen. It certainly can't afford a taxing brain drain.

# News Flash: Dowry is Illegal, But 'By Law'

A man from Muzaffarnagar recently made national news for refusing to accept dowry of ₹31 lakh. Welcome as his action is, hailing him for his 'quiet act of resistance' is rather ironic, considering Dowry Prohibition Act — a law prohibiting the giving or taking of dowry — has been in existence since 1961. Effectively, he was being feted for following the law.

Breaking laws in many spheres in India is the rule, not an exception. Flouting traffic rules, littering public spaces, rampant use of vehicular horns near hospitals and schools, and bursting firecrackers beyond regulation time are just a few other things that Indians have come to see as their way of life despite regulation or prohibition on paper. An overwhelming number of dowry-related cases come about only when Section 85 of BNS (earlier Section 498A of IPC) — cruelty by a husband or his relatives towards a married woman — comes into play. This is akin to hauling up someone for drunk driving only if the driver hits a pedestrian. Such a laissez-faire attitude to illegality not only endorses the practice of dowry, but also punctures the very notion of lawful-unlawful itself.

We need to change our approach from being reactive to proactive with law. This will normalise the very notion of legality and drive home the point that de jure is meant to be de facto, and not a societal fig leaf. This would mean reading out the law to law enforcers, who will have to understand that laws are only as useful as their implementation. Without such an effort, it is impossible to transform or abandon practices that have become so inimical to our society. For being viksit is as much about a society having a developed sense of what is lawful and what is not, as it is about fast trains and tall buildings.



**JUST IN JEST**

Being a district magistrate's wife won't be as cool in UP soon

# A Macaulay Mindset That Suited Mrs DMs

The sola topees may have left the country in 1947, but their vestiges never really checked out. And we're not obsessing about The Phantom of Macaulay playing at an opera house near you. For 165 years, UP law automatically made a district magistrate's wife Zilla Mahila Samiti president. Because leadership, as Rabri Devi knows, apparently runs in the marital surname. Thankfully, the Supreme Court has finally nudged the state to scrap the rule, exposing the notion that a better half can do a good job no matter her qualifications, or the lack thereof. But it's a peculiar romance. Many state governments seem to be devoted to colonial vestiges — as long as these relics keep power snugly within the corridors of, well, power. But mention that it's a colonial legacy, and suddenly headless chickens want the 'problem' urgently corrected. Love it when it helps, hate it when it embarrasses.

The UP government has promised a bill, with the apex court setting a firm 2-mth deadline. But, till then, petitioner Bulandshahr Zilla Mahila Samiti will savour the last taste of colonial privilege by appointing the DM's wife as its boss. Once the new law arrives, leadership will be determined by — OMG! — merit. As penitence for its 'Macaulay mindset', don't be surprised if the UP government goes on a postcolonial (both Mughal and British) renaming spree of places.

While the RBI governor and GDP figures may hint otherwise, it would be best to hold the rate line

# ACTION IN INACTION

## Guv, Keep the Powder Dry



Sugata Ghosh

Rarely, if ever, has an RBI governor met a journalist less than a fortnight before a monetary policy meet to drop a loud hint on the probability of an interest rate cut. Sanjay Malhotra, who will be completing a year as governor on December 10, has been different from his predecessors. He's a man of binaries and staccato statements, instead of the veiled phraseology that central bankers revel in.

So, after his interview with a Hindi business channel last week, where he said that there was room to further reduce policy rates, almost everyone in the money market thinks a rate action on December 5 is a foregone conclusion.

Even dyed-in-the-wool analysts and traders who are sticking to their no-change forecast — unable to reconcile to the idea of a rate cut amid high growth numbers — are not ruling out the possibility of a cut. In fact, growth would improve in Oct-Nov on the back of full impact of GST cut on consumption.

While rate decisions depend on the 6-member MPC, RBI, with 3 members in addition to the governor's casting vote in the event of a tie, has the last word. In such an arrangement, the guv's soundbite makes all the difference.

Perhaps Malhotra had expected the interview to play out differently. Or maybe he wasn't quite aware then that real GDP growth for Q2 would be as high as 8.2%. And, now, he finds himself boxed in a corner with very little choice but to go for a cut.

But it could well have been a deliberate signal, a conscious decision not to dodge the question. Probably he knew the growth number would be high, and felt it was necessary to guide the bond market that could start betting on a rate status quo (and further push up bond yields) once the number is out. So, why not use the opportunity to temper the bond yields.

In a Goldilocks zone of high growth and low inflation — which would have been further lower if gold prices hadn't surged — for RBI, inflation, not growth, seems to hold the key for rate change. Also, Mint Street is careful not to betray any obvious and immediate concern over a weaker rupee or equity outflows. Even if there's a lurking fear, it must appear to be in absolute control to keep off speculators.

No one in the financial markets or policy world is under the impression that RBI is on a different wavelength from GoI. So, it could well be the central bank's foremost priority to take advantage of the sharply lower inflation and low-debt corporate balance sheets to cut rates and keep alive the feel-good element.

With fiscal tools already used thro-

ugh income and GST cuts, RBI may be expected to keep the story going. More so when not many fear that higher growth could cause overheating. More than anything, RBI's focus could be to accelerate growth to counter the negative impacts of trade tariffs, wait for government spending to infuse cash into the system, and create whatever liquidity is possible through open market operations in the face of a balance-of-payments outgo that tends to squeeze liquidity.

But the best bet for RBI would be to hold rates for now, soften stance and use dovish language to preserve hopes of a rate cut, and then cut when there is a greater need. A rate cut now may neither be essential nor achieve much. Instead, it may make a greater sense to keep the powder dry for a rainy day: a delay in trade deal with the US, or ending up with a less than favourable agreement, or dip in growth when high-ticket consumption wanes.

A cut now could push banks on the



Hold, hold, hold...

back-foot. It's transmitted to more than half the bank loans that are linked to external benchmarks like policy rate or 1-yr treasury bill. But with a high credit-deposit ratio and deposits becoming less durable, banks will be left grappling with margin pressure, as they can't offset the lower returns on loans with a matching reduction in the interest on deposits.

A reason for low inflation is the high weight on food inflation in CPI. Next year, growth could taper off while inflation, pushed by the base effect and a new inflation index that puts a lower weight on food, would increase inflation. But that would not justify a rate hike.

Some recent money market volatility stems from RBI. Its decision to cut by half-point in June — against the anticipated quarter-point — and simultaneously harden from 'accommodative' to 'neutral', pushed up bond yields as traders felt there would be a long pause. The market defeated the very purpose of an aggressive cut aimed to stoke on loans and spending. A rate cut this week poses no such risk. But it may be little more than a blank fire.

sugata.ghosh@timesofindia.com



Mythili Bhushnurmath

## RBI, Now Go GDP Figure!

India's June-September 2025 GDP numbers, released by NSO last week, beat even the most optimistic of estimates. At 8.2%, growth is not only the fastest since Q4 of the last fiscal but it's also way above RBI's estimate of 7.0% released in early October, as well as those by all brokerages and multilateral organisations.

Granted, part of the bump-up is due to the exceptionally low rate of growth (5.6%) during the comparable period last year. But that can't take away from the fact that the economy has demonstrated unexpected (exceptional?) resilience during a period marked by huge uncertainty post-Trump tariffs, subsequent flip-flops and geopolitical tensions.

With the exception of mining and quarrying, which recorded a negative 0.04%, every sector has performed well. Most heartening of all, manufacturing, long a laggard, has put in a strong showing, with a growth of

an undershoot of growth and overshoot of inflation, India is experiencing exactly the opposite — an undershoot of inflation (0.25% in October) and overshoot of growth.

US inflation is 3.01%, against its target of 2%. GDP numbers for the July-September quarter are likely to be declared only in December; thanks to the prolonged government shutdown. In Britain, growth is down to 0.1%, inflation at 3.7%. Japan's economy contracted during the same quarter.

Reason enough to uncork the bubble? Not quite. As IMF's October 2025 World Economic Outlook warns, "The rules of the global economy are in flux. Prolonged policy uncertainty could dampen consumption and investment. Further escalation of protectionist measures, including non-tariff barriers, could suppress investment, disrupt supply chains, and stifle productivity growth."

Add to that the possibility that the coming months could see the AI bubble bursting, plunging the world into a repeat of the dotcom bubble burst, and we must temper our exuberance.

Moreover, the latest estimates come with a caveat. Ministry of statistics and programme implementation is revising the base year of national accounts from FY11-12 to FY22-23. Quarterly estimates are likely to undergo revisions due to changes in estimation methodology. But since the next quarterly GDP estimates for Q3 FY26, based on the new series, will be released only in end-February, budget calculations for FY27 will be based on these numbers.

This is good news for the FM. Nirmala Sitharaman starts her preparations for Budget 2026 on a good wicket, and deservedly so. GoI has done its bit to support growth, whether through I-T concessions or GST rationalisation, notifying new labour codes, QCOs and export support packages.

Unfortunately, what is good news for GoI is not good news for RBI. On the contrary, NSO has bowled a googly at RBI and its rate-setting MPC that meets this week. With growth above estimates and inflation below what is it to do? Sit tight, perhaps, for the third consecutive time.

Market aficionados are bound to protest. It's not cricket, Sanjay Malhotra will be told. But he can silence his critics by emulating Mohandas Gandhi's words, "When doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and I see not one ray of hope on the horizon, I turn to the Bhagwad Gita and find a verse to comfort me."

So, if quizzed about his inaction, the governor could turn to Chapter 4, Shloka 18, and point out how "Those who see action in inaction and inaction in action are truly wise among humans." Amen.



9.1%, well above 2.2% in the comparable quarter of the last fiscal.

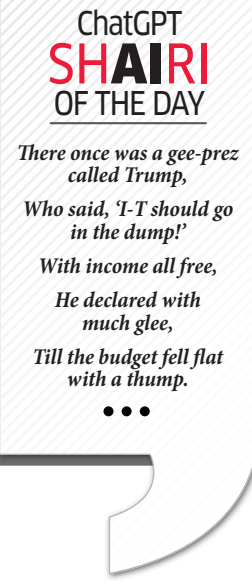
Together with robust growth in agriculture (3.5%), these two sectors, which together employ close to 70% of the labour force, laid the foundation for a strong consumption push. The only fly in the ointment is the decline in gross fixed capital formation, or investment, from 7.8% in Q1 to 7.3% in Q2, indicating a slowdown in government capital spending.

India's growth is the fastest among all major economies. Our Q2 growth rate is actually far ahead of China's 4.8% for the comparable period.

Better still, a trend line of GDP growth of the two countries from 2010 (see graph) shows that, except for 2020, when our GDP declined 5.8% while China's grew 2.2%, India's trend line is upward sloping, while China's is downward, suggesting something unimaginable less than a few years ago.

Even as our growth rate increases, China's will decrease. True, the Chinese economy is 4.6x ours. It's also true that China's growth is on a higher base and, hence, will be lower. But it would be unfair to belittle our achievement.

India seems to be in a sweet spot, enjoying the best of both worlds. At a time when most countries are having



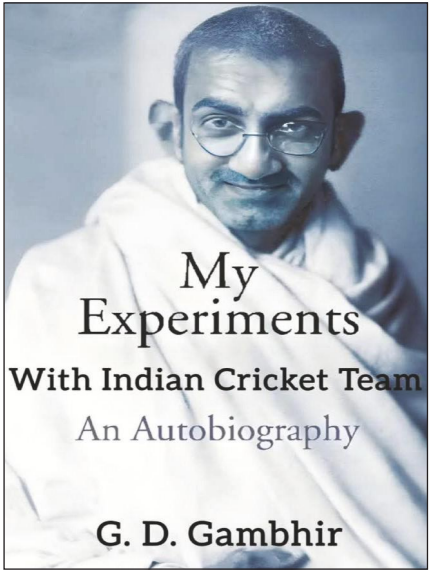
**ChatGPT SHAIRI OF THE DAY**

*There once was a gee-prez called Trump,*  
*Who said, 'I-T should go in the dump!'*  
*With income all free,*  
*He declared with much glee,*  
*Till the budget fell flat with a thump.*

Violence Against Women			
Prevalence of physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence against women*, 15 years and older			
		Figs in %	
		Lifetime	Past-12-months
by SDG region, 2023	WORLD	24.7	11.4
	SSA	31.7	17.4
	N Africa & W Asia	29.2	13.5
	E Asia	18.8	6.3
	Southern Asia	31.1	18.6
	Eastern Asia	18.7	8.7
	SE Asia	16.3	6.2
	LatAm/Carib	23.5	6.5
	Aust+NZ	22.0	1.5
	Oceania*	55.4	37.9
	Europe	18.6	4.1
	N America	27.9	6.6
Select countries*	INDIA	29.9	22.4
	CHINA	20.2	10.6
	JAPAN	14.7	3.7
	PAKISTAN	24.8	13.1
	BANGLADESH	48.9	15.7

\*National prevalence estimates (ever-married/-partnered women aged 15-49 years) LatAm/Carib: Latin America and the Caribbean; N: North; SE: southeast; C: Central; E: Eastern/east; SSA: Sub-Saharan Africa; \*excl. Aust+NZ; \*Ever-married/-partnered Source: WHO's Violence against women prevalence estimates, 2023

### MEME'S THE WORD



## Champagne Problems

NARAYANI GANESH

Taylor Swift uses the phrase 'Champagne problems' in one of her songs where she begins by saying: 'You booked the night train for a reason/ So you could sit there in this hurt/ Bustling crowds or silent sleepers/ You're not sure which is worse.' The song is from the woman, who has declined her lover's proposal. In the second verse, she goes on to say: 'Because I dropped your hand while dancing/ Left you out there standing/ Crestfallen on the landing/ Champagne problems.' According to dictionary sources, the term means having to choose between two non-issues that are not real issues at all — or a 'luxurious' problem that comes with privilege.

By this token, how could heartbreak be a Champagne problem? Heartbreaks are painful, whether you are privileged or not, rich or poor, or of any gender: Getting rejected is not a choice, it is something you have to deal with; there is no choice here between two good options, as the phrase Champagne problems seems to suggest. To call a heartbreak a Champagne problem is to trivialise it. But ask ChatGPT if there is a spiritual angle, and pat comes the answer: 'The phrase 'Champagne problems' refers to problems that are trivial in the grand scheme of life, typically experienced by wealthy or privileged individuals.'

The spiritual meaning extends this by suggesting an internal conflict with materialism, the nature of suffering, and a call for introspection and gratitude, regardless of one's external circumstances. Perhaps any choice we face in the material world of illusory reality is not a big issue; we need to rise above and beyond.

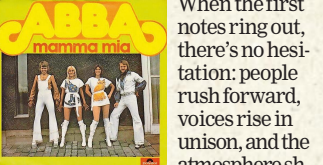


## Mamma Mia

ABBA

ABBA's momentous anthem, Mamma Mia, the opening track in their eponymous 1975 album, is transcendental shorthand for joy, nostalgia and collective release. From its opening skittish piano riff to the soaring syncopated chorus, the track embodies the kind of instantly recognisable melody that transcends generations and genres.

On dance floors, it is *this* familiarity that is its greatest move.



When the first notes ring out, there's no hesitation: people rush forward, voices rise in unison, and the atmosphere shifts from passive engagement to collective delirium.

Unlike much of contemporary EDM, which often relies on unfamiliar drops, layered synths and experimental beats, MM thrives on its recognition and accessibility. DJs spinning obscure tracks may impress niche audiences (and themselves), but they rarely achieve the universal eruption that familiarity guarantees. It is like meeting an old friend over and over and over again.

People crave connection, and nothing bonds a crowd — even of strangers — like a shared soundtrack of memory. ABBA's most familiar hit provides that sweet, rapturous hit. 'Mamma mia/ Here I go again/ My my, how can I resist you?' Indeed.

### Chat Room

## Un-Discovery Of America

Apropos the Edit, 'Trump's Club USA Membership Rules' (Nov 29), Donald Trump's recent pronouncement that the US will permanently pause migration from all 'third-world countries' signifies not only his harsh immigration policies but also a sweeping indictment of entire populations for the misdeeds of a few. An unfortunate incident and the subsequent announcement have shaken the very foundations of a nation formed on migrants from across the world. The vilification of 'aliens' will give White supremacists a free pass to run riot, fuelling unrest across the country and make immigrants more vulnerable to hate crimes. The US administration must identify high-risk individuals as well as groups. The call for reverse migration to reduce the unwanted population will only trigger panic and instability. Gregory Fernandes Mumbai

# Reassure Our Eco-Anxious Young



Bharati Chaturvedi

So far this year alone, India has battled devastating floods in Uttarakhand, Himachal and Punjab. From January 1 to September 30, Centre for Science and Environment's 'Climate India 2025' recorded extreme events on 270 of the 273 days.

Physical crises apart, a hidden mental health crisis runs deep. A 2023 Aangan study in West Bengal revealed that the financial impact of climate change compelled 16% of all adults surveyed to send a child to work, marry them off or pull them out of school. 65-75% of young respondents claimed to know someone who experienced this. Such harsh shifts cause irreversible mental health damage among youngsters.

Many children witness climate imp-

acts and see how little agency society, including figures of authority, has to stop these catastrophic events. A 2022 WHO review on 'Eco-Anxiety in Children' crystallises evidence for strong emotional responses to climate-related phenomena, ranging from sadness and despair to fear for their loved ones.

A 2021 Lancet Planetary Health study, involving 10,000 youngsters aged 16-25 across 10 countries including India, found 59% to be at least 'very worried'. Over half reported being sad, anxious, angry, powerless, helpless and guilty. About 45% stated that



Demographic dividend?

climate anxiety affected their daily functioning, and 75% found the future 'frightening'. Heat stress, in particular, is associated with a rise in mental health issues, even increased incidents of self-harm.

A 2024 Chintan study, 'The Future We Want', examined urban children's perceptions of climate change. About 89% of all respondents, from marginalised and middle-class backgrounds, converged around eco-anxiety. Such anxiety affects children for years, if not for perpetuity. It prevents them from being able to stay focused, increases vulnerability, and reduces their ability to manage relationships and hold down jobs as adults. The study believes India could face about 5.5% decline in GDP by 2047 if the climate impact on the vulnerable young is left unaddressed.

It is key to acknowledge the problem's seriousness. Grassroots granularity is also vital. Enabling youngsters to act on problems can be done through teaching environmental science with on-ground activities, and sharing case studies of fellow youngsters who have successfully addressed climate crises.

Schools, parents and the broader ecosystem must also learn to address eco-anxiety. This requires mainstreaming ecosystem capacity, especially in the most vulnerable districts. For this, teachers require training and access to simple modules that offer them both tools to act and nudges to develop hyper-local approaches.

Eco-anxiety is not a subject, it's *how* children learn today. After any climate event, a trained team must stay on-ground to address specific issues, including counselling distraught and impoverished parents. This requires additional approaches by National Disaster Management Authority.

Not only should more public funds be allocated, but more philanthropic investment is also vital. But addressing eco-anxiety in a country facing almost a climate crisis a day, along with weeks of hazardous air in many regions, requires a systemic embracing of this reality and a political will to move the needle in favour of our young.

The writer is founder-director, Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group





### CONTRAPUNTO

My wife and I tried two or three times in the last 40 years to have breakfast together, but it was so disagreeable we had to stop

— WINSTON CHURCHILL

## Swiss Sense

The popular idea that taxing the rich heavily can fund solutions to all problems is fundamentally flawed

Almost 65% of Swiss identify as German speakers, and given the language's penchant for long “tapeworm” words, Sunday seemed ripe for the coining of “gretathunbergisation”. While we wrote this, the Swiss voted in a referendum on a 50% inheritance tax for the super-rich. What for? Not to make public transport free and housing cheaper – that would be “zohranmamdanisation” 🇨🇭. JUSO, the leftist proponents of the tax, want to use the estimated \$7.5bn in additional revenue to soften the impact of climate change.

It's the beauty of Swiss democracy that any radical idea backed by 100,000 signatures can be put to a national vote. But unlike India, where that big a crowd is only a clearance sale away, in Switzerland 100,000 is almost a quarter of the biggest city, Zurich. So, good job, JUSO, but for a terrible idea. Inheritance taxes simply don't work, and in Switzerland's case they could actually cause a ‘tobleronisation’ of the rich – basically, an exodus.

The public gets this – in poll after poll held since last year, at least two-thirds of respondents have said no. The only demographic to show

strong support (44%) is those aged under 35. But Switzerland's median age is 43. Last Dec, the Swiss govt also rejected the proposal. Besides, history is not on JUSO's side, as a 2015 referendum on a 20% inheritance tax to fund pensions was rejected by 71% of voters.

The Swiss know how impractical such a tax would be. Even if the 2,500-odd people with assets worth over 50mn Swiss francs (\$62mn) stay on, most can't pay the tax. Last year, 65% of such respondents in a PwC poll said they would have to sell their firms, wholly or partly, to pay up. That would cause job losses just the same as an exodus, which is the likelier outcome, considering how Dubai, US, Singapore are all keen to court HNIs. Net result: less tax revenue, not more; and greater tax burden on ordinary folk.

In 2017, the Swiss laid down strict rules for products claiming Swissness. Almost everything, down to the water in beer, had to be Swiss to claim that credit. It forced chocolate brand Toblerone – which has a factory in Slovakia – to drop the Matterhorn peak image from its packaging. That didn't bother the Swiss. But tobleronisation of the wealthy will.

## Scrambled For Power

Easygoing & informal, political breakfasts are wake-up calls that pacify and mollify, build both consensus and pressure

The far more interesting follow-up to the news that Karnataka's CM and deputy CM brokered peace after breaking bread together, is to ask what graced the table rather than what tiresome trajectory the power tussle will take. The shared meal was no light bite, but a hearty meal, cooked hot, spicy and certainly gladdening – for the ceasefire between the two Congress veterans in the political theatre was immediate. Breakfasts signal the start of a new day, renewed purpose and fresh resolve, and a sumptuous breakfast can make 'hangry' (modern lingo for hungry-angry) men eat their words. Call it breakfast diplomacy, breakfast bilaterals, pre-summit breakfast meeting, or early morning working meal, morning repast shows the day – open minds and sunny side up.

The informality of breakfast is why it's not lavish state dinners nor long formal lunches but the morning cuppa and breakfast bounty that politicians opt for when it's a quick strategy-meet on the political menu – the food stays on record, not so much the chatter. It is said that at EU

meetings, all political deals are struck over the pre-summit breakfast that has become a permanent fixture – way before the national leaders even sit together in the same room. Back in 1957, when an American hotel cited 'coloured' to refuse to serve Ghana's finmin, President Eisenhower compensated by inviting him to breakfast at the White House, starting what became a tradition. Years later, Reagan was known for his regular breakfast meetings with Republican freshmen Congressmen. Even GOI had started a 'breakfast' series of govt interactions with industry and experts.

So, was the Siddaramaiah-DKS meeting a fledgling desi rendition of the Blair-Brown pact? That roller-coaster time in UK politics when Labour netas Tony Blair and Gordon Brown came to an agreement the latter would not run for leadership – a deal forged over several breakfast meetings. The pact was toast soon enough, but the breakfasts were splendid. And no one left with egg on their face.

## Cyclist uncle

Bildungsroman of a man pedalling for likes

Milind Ghatwai

It takes roughly six months for the amateur cyclist uncle to resemble an AI version of himself, from the day he sheds inhibition to indulge in what he later calls his passion. It begins when he rides the bicycle left rustling by his grown-up children, in a corner of the parking lot. Initial rides are usually meant to signal his unhappiness with the children, for abandoning the bicycle wastefully.

His early sorties do invite curious looks, as he heads past security guards and morning walkers. But all too soon, his worn down Bermuda shorts, faded tees and ancient sports shoes, stop turning heads. One day, he gets a request to deliver homemade tea to a patient admitted to a nearby hospital. What would have been an aimless ride finds purpose. The sugar-coated plea appeals to his higher consciousness. And yet, he takes a break the next day, lest the hospital visits become a boring routine.

Observing the younger cyclists who speed past him, uncle slowly begins to transform himself. Cycling shoes are followed by padded shorts, colourful goggles, gloves and a trendy cap. As his new get-up draws notice, his choices become bolder, brighter. The small issue of protruding belly is taken care of by loose tees and windcheaters. When he walks up to the bicycle, the image of a firefighter pilot approaching a plane plays in his mind. All cast admiring glances when they see him set off on daily rides, or so he thinks. Only the wife has an unalloyed, unvarnished opinion about his looks: cartoonish.

Uncle is no longer bothered by snide remarks but the first steep climb is a different kind of reality. He doesn't want to get off the bike, at least doesn't want to be seen doing so.

Of course he joins a group of regular, young riders and becomes the most active member of WhatsApp groups. He posts group photos at the end of every ride. Long rides do drain him but the prospect of a photoshopped image gives energy. He forgets how to pose normally and has both his thumbs up even during temple visits. Then he graduates to the signature Usain Bolt pose. Somehow, he's convinced that the owners of expensive cars envy him when they whiz past him on the road. Then the wheel turns. The number of likes for his daily posts dwindles. After some time, how to get along with neighbourhood dogs remains the only concern.

Chakshu Roy

# Policy, Politics...Paralysis?

Winter session is set to be fiery – a new VP as Rajya Sabha chair, decision on impeachment of two HC judges pending, at least 10 bills and electoral rolls to debate. But will Parliament function? That's the real question

The winter session of Parliament begins today with more than 700 MPs expected to be in Delhi for three weeks. As govt seeks Parliament's approval for additional funds and critical legislation, Opposition parties have sought a debate on SIR, EC's project to make new electoral rolls that is underway in several states. Opposition will also be pushing for debate on unemployment and flood relief measures. Parliamentary affairs minister Kiren Rijiju has said Vande Mataram should be discussed. Whatever the

project to make new electoral rolls that is underway in several states. Opposition will also be pushing for debate on unemployment and flood relief measures. Parliamentary affairs minister Kiren Rijiju has said Vande Mataram should be discussed. Whatever the

Focus today will almost entirely be on Rajya Sabha, as newly elected Vice President CP Radhakrishnan presides over the Council of States as its chairman for the first time. House proceedings will begin with PM felicitating VP, followed by Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge and chiefs from other political parties. VP's response will set the tone of his approach to debate in the House.

In the 15 working days of the winter session, govt has plans to pilot at least ten new legislative measures on three separate tracks. First are the legal proposals to amend existing laws, such as the Insurance Act to allow foreign investment in insurance companies up to 100%. This bill will also reduce the money required to start an insurance business for companies working in underserved areas. The next track contains proposals to introduce new ideas into our legal system. An example of this is the Higher Education Commission of India Bill. It proposes establishing a commission to determine academic standards in higher education, research, and scientific and technical institutions.

And finally, the third track contains proposals to overhaul existing laws. On GOI's legislative agenda, the Atomic Energy Bill, 2025 falls into this category. During this year's budget, govt announced the Nuclear

Energy Mission for Viksit Bharat. It aims to achieve up to 100GW of nuclear energy by 2047 as well as open up the nuclear energy sector to private players who meet the required safety standards. The 2025 bill will replace the 1962 Atomic Energy Act to bring about these changes.

On the table are also plans to see through a bill to address procedural delays and interpretational issues the existing Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code 2016 finds itself caught up with. Lok Sabha had sent this bill for detailed scrutiny to a committee of its MPs, headed by Baijayant Panda. The committee has been meeting regularly and plans to submit its report

the bill's provisions on the floor of Parliament. Legislative agenda aside, govt is likely to bring in some other key bills. For example, **TOI** reported that govt is planning new taxes on tobacco products to replace measures that will end soon.

Opposition MPs will of course seek to corner govt on Delhi's appalling air pollution and deteriorating air quality across metros. But it is their concerns about discrepancies in electoral rolls revision, EC's SIR exercise, expressed during the Monsoon session – that incidentally disrupted much of the session – will, in all likelihood, carry through into this session as well, given there has been no satisfactory closure to the matter.

With elections months away in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Assam and Kerala, opposition parties will want to ensure the sanctity of electoral rolls. Rijiju has already stated a debate on independent bodies such as EC is not advisable as govt cannot speak on the commission's behalf.

Notably, the Deputy Speaker's seat in Lok Sabha has been vacant since 2019. Could that position be filled during the session? In Aug, LS Speaker Om Birla appointed a three-member committee to inquire into corruption allegations against Justice Yashwant Varma. If the committee presents its report during the session, it will clear the way for the discussion on Varma's impeachment in Parliament. The new VP has inherited the decision on whether the impeachment motion against

Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav has the required 50 Rajya Sabha members' signatures. If requirements are met, it would be a first for Parliament to impeach two high court judges.

Arun Jaitley once quoted former Rajya Sabha chairman S Radhakrishnan to say Parliament can't be the tyranny of govt; it can't be the tyranny of the well either. With critical issues pending, Parliament must function without disruptions. It will require bipartisanship and a balance between discussing govt's business and debating critical issues raised by Opposition.

The writer is with PRS Legislative Research

## ‘World wants the Ukraine war to end, but Russia doesn’t seem serious about peace’

It has stepped up attacks at a time when peace talks are on, showing that it has systematically chosen war, write the envoys of Germany, France and UK, while promising their countries will stand by Ukraine

Philipp Ackermann, Thierry Mathou & Lindy Cameron



For over three years now, Ukrainians have defended their country with courage

and fierce determination against Russia's unprovoked war of aggression on their home. Russia could end the war tomorrow by withdrawing its forces and ending its illegal invasion, or at least by agreeing to a ceasefire and truly engaging in negotiations. Instead, Russian attacks have risen sharply in 2025, and since peace talks began, President Putin has launched 22 of his largest air attacks of the entire war on Ukraine.

Every day sees new indiscriminate Russian attacks in this illegal war, targeting civilian infra, destroying homes, hospitals, and schools. Attacks that continue to kill innocent civilians, including children. This last week alone, Russia has launched over 1,200 drones and over 60 cruise and ballistic missiles at Ukraine.

These are not the actions of someone that is serious about peace. Neither are these indiscriminate attacks mere accidents – they are a systematic choice by Russia to wage its war of aggression with absolute ruthlessness. And it must end.

The world changed when Russia invaded Ukraine. Russia continues to prove its lack of respect for the national sovereignty of its neighbours – contributing to global instability that affects us all, and undermining the core principles of the international order we all live in. Most notably, independence and territorial integrity.

Russia has violated the treaties it has signed regarding the Ukrainian border. Russian fighters are making dangerous and escalatory incursions into European airspace. And they continue to try to exploit and undermine trust in key democratic institutions, including elections, independent media, civil society

and the rule of law, to further their own interests.

Russia's malign global activity, including through cyber-attacks and disinformation, shows us that the Russian leadership's appetite for territorial expansion and global destabilisation goes well beyond Ukraine.

President Putin is the one leader who could end the war any time he so wishes.

Let's be clear: It is Russia that sustains troops in Ukraine, not the other way around. It is Russia that rains bombs on Ukrainian cities night after night. And again, it is Russia that refuses to engage in meaningful negotiations or even a ceasefire that everyone else is



calling for. Finally, it is Russia's heinous policy that has seen more than 19,500 innocent Ukrainian children forcibly transferred or deported to Russia and the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

Russia's illegal invasion has caused a grim human cost on both sides.

We should not forget that President Putin's illegal war, and his total disregard for human life, have taken a huge toll on his own people.

After colossal casualties and a frontline essentially where it was three years ago, Russia has failed in its

military and political objectives. Since the frontlines stabilised in Nov 2022, Russia has gained only 1% of Ukraine's territory – at a cost some estimate at up to 1mn casualties, including 250,000 fatalities.

The world agrees – this war needs to end. What we must achieve is a just and lasting peace, decided with Ukraine. India's voice on the matter is also loud and clear, and as PM Modi put it: "A solution cannot be found on the battlefield." A lasting peace must be supported by credible long-term security support from Ukraine's partners, to deter future Russian aggression.

We believe in Ukraine's fight today, and the country's incredible potential to thrive in the years to come. As President Trump and President Zelenskyy continue to make efforts to secure a just and lasting peace, and end the killing, Russia continues to block and obstruct, terrorising Ukraine and its people.

That's why we, the govts of Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, will continue to give Ukraine our ironclad support. Today and every day.

Over recent days, our govts have been having detailed discussions with Ukraine and other allies, united in our desire for a ceasefire, and a permanent end to the horrendous suffering that this war has brought to Ukraine.

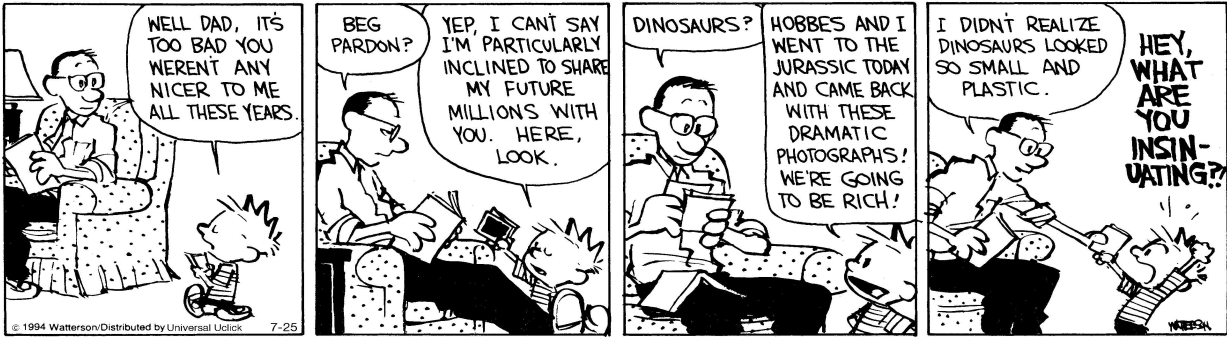
As President Putin stalls and delays on serious peace talks, we will continue to step up our military and non-military support to Ukraine, so that it can rightly defend its people, its land and its sovereignty.

Russia was never forced into this war and its devastating consequences, from abhorrent casualty figures to global economic instability and rising inflation at home. Russia is the only nation that wants this war, and it is up to it to put a halt to this aggression.

And we must never forget the price Ukraine is paying, fighting for its own freedom – and the security of all free nations. Its voice must be at the heart of the drive for peace.

Ackermann and Mathou are respectively German & French ambassadors & Cameron is British high commissioner

### Calvin & Hobbes



## Kurukshetra 2025 In A Digital Economy & AI Era

Ullhas Pagey

We live in an age when Artificial Intelligence (AI) predicts our desires before we feel them and quietly reshapes the very meaning of human intelligence. The digital economy has woven an invisible web that binds continents in an instant yet leaves the individual soul strangely orphaned. In such a time, the *Gita* descends like grace, offering the timeless path of Karm Yog, yog of action without attachment to fruit.

When an individual surrenders the feverish clinging to success or failure to likes or crashes to market volatility or algorithmic prophecy, then alone does the human spirit remain sovereign.

AI may take over the task, but it can never touch the sanctity of selfless action.

In surrendering the ego's demand for reward, we discover the deepest freedom; the soul stands unshackled amidst super-computing machines that can compute everything except surrender.

Yet the outer world burns. Nations posture, alliances fracture, the shadow of multipolarity lengthens across the globe like the darkening before Kurukshetra's war. Missiles replace chariots, drones circle where once Garuda soared, and the same ancient fear grips the heart of humanity: how shall we act when strength is in our hands and anger in our

blood? The *Gita* does not counsel retreat into mountain caves nor the pacifism of the powerless. It thunders the truth that true nonviolence is not the absence of

action but the presence of dharm. When Krishn urges Arjun, "Fight, but without hatred", He is revealing the beautiful mystery of righteous strength, shakti that protects rather than destroys, power that restores the broken order instead of feeding the cycle of revenge.

The real Mahabharat rages in the hidden chambers of the mind where fear, greed, and attachment reside. Only when a leader, a nation, a civilisation wins that inner war, establishing the steady throne of equanimity can the outer world be touched by lasting peace.

The *Gita* is not asking us to lay down weapons; it is commanding us to first lay down the ego that yields them for selfish ends.

It is not just a scripture in the narrow



THE SPEAKING TREE

### Sacred space



**Think Like A Farmer**

- Don't shout at crops
- Don't blame crops for not growing fast enough
- Don't uproot crops before they've had a chance to grow
- Choose best plants for the soil
- Irrigate, fertilise, remove weeds
- You can't control seasons; you can only prepare for them

Source: Internet



# From potential to prosperity: Bihar’s unfinished revolution

Bihar’s redemption lies in building strong institutions and investing in its true assets — its soil, its youth, and its indomitable resilience. The soil of Bihar has always been fertile — for crops, for ideas, and for dreams. The land of revolutions now awaits its long-overdue economic one — its tryst with destiny



SAAGAR SRIVASTAVA

There is something irresistibly powerful about the soil of Bihar — its social fabric, value systems, and milieu. Bihar has long been a land of revolutions — ideological, political, and social — that have shaped not only its destiny but also that of India. Yet, as the state emerges from one of its most defining assembly elections in decades, the paradox could not be starker: a land blessed with fertile soil, abundant water, a youthful population, and a legacy of scholarship remains trapped in economic morass. The saga of a state infinitely rich in potential yet persistently poor in economic outcomes continues to confound economists and policymakers. Over the past two decades, another conundrum has emerged: Bihar has recorded among the fastest GDP growth rates in the country, yet remains at the bottom of all human development rankings. Swaminathan Aiyar in 2010 inexplicably dubbed Bihar “India’s miracle state”, but its lived reality still tells a story of deprivation and missed opportunities.

## The Economic Morass

With a population of 130 million, Bihar would rank as the world’s tenth-largest country. It has 9 per cent of India’s population, but only 3 per cent of its land mass, and contributes barely 3 per cent to national GDP. With an FY 2024–25 GSDP of ₹9.9 lakh crore and a budget expenditure of ₹3.17 lakh crore, the state remains overwhelmingly dependent on central transfers (74 per cent of its revenue), while its own tax revenue is a meagre ₹59,000 crore.

Nearly a third of Biharis live in poverty, and the state’s per capita income — ₹67,000 — is just a third of the national average. In the country’s youngest state, with a median age of under 20 in 2011, agriculture contributes around 20–25 per cent to GSDP and employs 80 per cent of the workforce, while industry’s share languishes at 18 per cent. Urbanisation, at 13 per cent, stands where the national average was in 1901.

## The Mirage of Growth

Between 2005 and 2015, Bihar’s GSDP grew at over 10 per cent annually — second only to



BIHAR MUST RECLAIM BOTH ITS DIGNITY AND ITS DESTINY, AND ITS TRANSFORMATION DEMANDS THE “FIERCE URGENCY OF NOW” ON THE PART OF ITS NEWLY ELECTED GOVERNMENT.

The writer is an Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officer. He studied Economics at the LSE, and worked previously as an investment banker in London

in/saagarsrivastava  
@ssrivastava2011  
in/saagarsrivastava/

Gujarat. Even in recent years, its growth rates have exceeded national averages, touching 13.5 per cent in FY 2024–25. This is particularly salient, as a high growth rate is paramount for expanding the economic pie. Yet, as Arvind Panagariya cautioned, such revival from a low base is merely a reversal to the mean, not an economic “model”. Bihar has been growing, but is it also developing? Roads are being built, but jobs remain scarce; schools have multiplied, yet learning outcomes lag; millions continue to migrate in search of work while local industries stagnate.

This schism between economic expansion and human development defines Bihar’s crisis. It ranks lowest across NITI Aayog’s SDG metrics and has the highest poverty rates. Despite higher spending on health and education, outcomes remain muted. Gross enrolment ratios in schools have improved, but dropout rates in higher education exceed 50 per cent. Health infrastructure is grossly inadequate — only one district hospital was built between 2012 and 2019; the number of referral hospitals remained stagnant at 70 in 2019; and per capita health spending is the lowest among major states.

Industry’s contribution to GSDP remains around 18–20 per cent, versus 31 per cent nationally, and the state contributes just 0.5 per cent to India’s industrial output. Jobless growth threatens to turn Bihar’s demographic dividend into a demographic disaster: over 7 per cent of its population has migrated. If the trend persists, the state risks social unrest, à la the “tunnel effect”, as warned by Albert Hirschman, where

growing expectations collide with stagnant opportunities.

## The Burden of History

Bihar’s backwardness stems from both historical legacies and contemporary failings. Even a century ago, Bihar (then part of the Bengal Presidency) had among the lowest per capita government expenditures of tax revenue (Mukherji & Mukherji, NIPFP), penalised for its active participation in the national movement. The British-era Zamindari system, coupled with the Permanent Settlement, disincentivised productivity and entrenched inequality. Post-independence, while Zamindari was abolished, the failure to implement land reforms — unlike in West Bengal — remains one of the state’s great unfulfilled missions.

The Freight Equalisation Policy of 1952 further crippled Bihar’s industrial prospects. By ensuring that coal, steel, and cement cost the same nationwide, it nullified undivided Bihar’s locational advantage and favoured coastal states. The state thus suffered from Sachs and Warner’s classic “resource curse”: a strong correlation between abundant natural resources and poor economic growth.

Being a state that has often defied the dominant national political trend, state and central governments have frequently been at ideological odds, resulting in lower per capita central spending — barely half the national average. Even development institutions like NABARD lend more to economically advanced states, owing to commercial viability, deepening Bihar’s capital deficit. Agriculture suffers from low Total

Factor Productivity (TFP) and poor labour mobility. Though the sector contributes only a quarter of GSDP, it employs four-fifths of the workforce, making per capita agricultural GDP barely one-tenth of Punjab’s. Bihar’s credit-deposit ratio of 34, against 75 for India as a whole, reflects chronic under-lending to local enterprises. Capital raised in Bihar finances growth in better-off states, perpetuating a vicious cycle. Small industries, accounting for 90 per cent of Bihar’s manufacturing, remain trapped in a low-equilibrium of inefficiency and small scale — fearing loss of incentives and subsidies if they expand, and thus missing out on economies of scale.

Weak entrepreneurial culture and dependence on the mai-baap sarkar further stifle innovation. Migration has become socially normalised, and caste remains an enduring fault line. While visible improvements — roads, electricity, law and order — are evident, “invisible” institutional reforms, industrialisation, and job creation remain elusive.

## Bihar’s Economic Revolution

**Unlocking agriculture’s latent potential:** Bihar’s transitional climatic zone supports a diverse cropping pattern of wet and dry crops. Fertile soil, water availability, and hardworking labour should have made it a basket case of agricultural success. Yet, with an average landholding of only 0.4 hectares, per capita agricultural income stands at a mere ₹7,000. Microfinance access for the 91 per cent of small and marginal farmers remains weak, and public expenditure on agricultural research — critical for yield improvement and scientific cropping — has declined. Still, Bihar’s agricultural growth rate — 4.5–5 per cent annually over the past decade — outpaces the national average, and production of major crops such as maize, rice, and wheat has increased. This has been achieved largely through better roads and power supply, not through focused efforts specific to revitalising the sector. With concerted policy action, Bihar could replicate Madhya Pradesh’s mission-mode success: near-saturation levels of irrigation, ensuring certified seeds and fertilisers, strengthening market linkages, providing assured power supply, and capacity-building for farmers.

**Reviving industry:** Bihar has only 3,500 factories — of which 2,900 are operational — employing an average of 40 workers per unit, far below the national average of 77. Average annual wages are ₹1.2 lakh, less than half the national mean. Unsurprisingly,

industrial development here is often seen as a bridge too far. Yet opportunities exist. Bihar enjoys proximity to eastern and northern markets, access to mineral-rich neighbours and eastern ports (Kolkata and Haldia), and a large pool of low-cost labour. Pockets of industrial activity such as Dalmianagar (cement and paper), Barauni (petrochemicals), and Patna (light manufacturing) endure even today. Despite the creation of Jharkhand, mineral-specific plans are required for proper exploitation of the mica reserves of Munger, Gaya, and Nawada to turn them into another Giridih, or Rohtas’ dolomite belt, or the bauxite and salt production potential of Munger. Cottage industries — sericulture, vermiculture, glasswork, pottery, and Bihar’s famed Madhubani paintings — can absorb surplus rural labour.

While the sugar mills of South Bihar closed down, the remaining eleven, mostly in West Champaran and Gopalganj, contribute 3.5 per cent of India’s production. Their revival under the *Ganna Vikas Yojana* through incentives and subsidies for high-yielding seeds, and the mills’ diversification into ethanol, bio-fertilisers, and electricity, show early promise.

**The promise of agro-based industries:** With a comparative advantage of low-cost labour and abundant production, agro-industries in Bihar have grown 16.4 per cent annually over the last decade — five times the national rate. Bihar ranks fourth in vegetable and eighth in fruit production, is a top-five mushroom producer, and egg and fisheries output have also increased. Besides the famous makhana and litchi, the mangoes and bananas of Muzaffarpur and Darbhanga also have export potential. Chillies and tobacco are important cash crops on the banks of the Ganges. The state’s dairy cooperative COMFED has turned ‘Sudha’ into one of East India’s most recognised brands — through efficient collection networks, chilling centres, diversified products, quality branding, and capacity-building with NDDB and IIM-A. Bihar, the fourth-largest producer of jute, can capitalise on the global shift away from plastics. Bamboo cultivation, aided by its reclassification as grass and Bihar’s suitable climate, can increase green cover and double farmer incomes.

Agro-processing clusters with cold chains, logistics, and farm-to-market linkages can transform Bihar from India’s granary into its “green factory”, adding value and creating jobs.

Please read the complete article online at <https://www.dailypioneer.com>

# From labour reform to EoDB 2.0: The structural shift India needs for growth



RAJIV KUMAR



SAMRIDHI PRAKASH

India’s decision to implement the long-pending labour codes deserves appreciation. For decades, the country’s entrepreneurs have operated under a maze of 29 overlapping and often contradictory labour laws. Consolidating them into four streamlined labour codes is more than an administrative exercise; it is a long-awaited structural reform that simplifies compliance, increases the probability of enforcement, and creates a more predictable environment for doing business. A simpler legal framework is always easier to follow and easier for the state to enforce, making this a foundational step towards improving India’s ease of doing business.

## Falling Private Investments in India

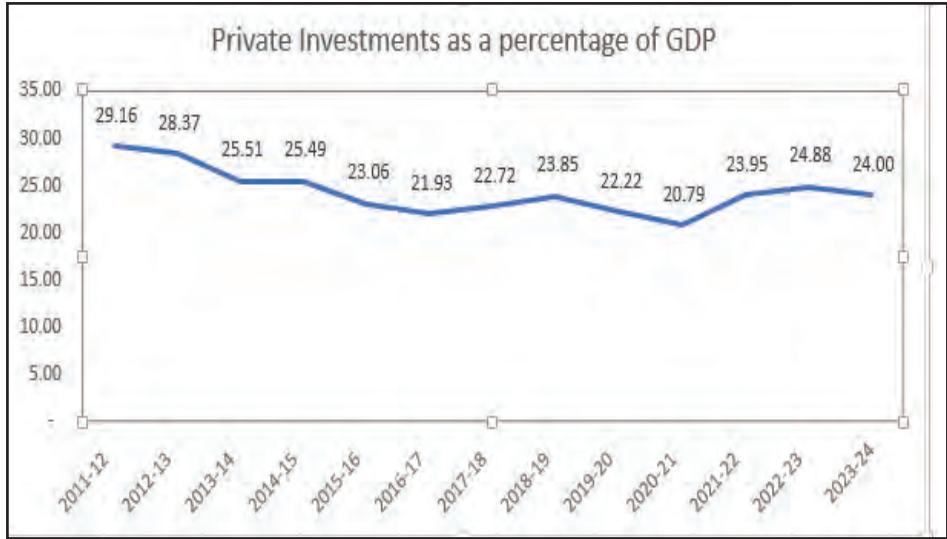
This reform also comes at a critical time. Private consumption today accounts for almost 60 per cent of India’s GDP, but investment — particularly private investment — remains much lower and has not recovered to the levels needed to drive a sustained growth cycle. Private investment as a share of GDP has declined over the past decade.

## Investments Flowing Abroad

The picture becomes even clearer when one looks at foreign investment flows. Net FDI (FDI inflows minus outflows) has been falling, driven by both decreasing inflows and rising outflows. This trend implies that even Indian firms are increasingly choosing to invest abroad rather than expand domestically. Why is that so? Domestic regulatory conditions appear to be the most important determinant of these investment decisions.

## Why Macroeconomic Policy Has Failed

Importantly, this decline in investment cannot be attributed to weaknesses in macroeconomic policy. Fiscal policy has been supportive: corporate tax rates were reduced, GST rates have been rationalised, and taxpayers earning up to ₹12 lakh annually have received relief. This has led corporate profits to reach all-time highs in recent years. Monetary policy has been accommodative



for years, ensuring liquidity and low borrowing costs. But these tools have mainly boosted consumption, not private investment. Investment responds more to regulatory clarity, reduction in compliance burdens, and predictability in doing business. This is why the labour codes represent a step in the right direction but only the first step. If India wants to revive private investment and unlock the next cycle of high growth, it must go further.

## What is Needed

Deregulation, decriminalisation of minor business offences, and a decisive reduction in regulatory complexity are essential. Entrepreneurs should be spending their energy building businesses, creating jobs, innovating, and scaling — not navigating compliance paperwork.

Simplifying the regulatory architecture and focusing on strong enforcement of a smaller number of well-designed laws will not only increase compliance but also stimulate entrepreneurial drive. It will encourage firms to expand operations, take risks, and invest in capacity without fearing excessive compliance burdens. These reforms directly contribute to competitiveness and, more importantly, to investor confidence.

## EoDB 2.0

Crucially, the next wave of reforms must come from the states. The Economic Survey 2024–25 explicitly argues that the next phase of ease of doing business (“EoDB 2.0”) must be led by state governments. A significant portion

of the compliance burden — including inspections, approvals, certifications, and procedural requirements — originates at the state level.

The Survey also recommends a three-step process for states to systematically review regulations for their cost-effectiveness.

The steps include:

1. Identifying areas for deregulation,
2. Thoughtfully comparing regulations with those of other states and countries, and
3. Estimating the cost of each regulation on individual enterprises.

If India is to truly raise its investment rate, states must adopt a philosophy of regulatory pruning by retaining only those laws that support industrial growth and removing those that hinder it. Such pruning would require wide stakeholder discussions, but the benefits would far outweigh the costs.

These are precisely the types of changes repeatedly described as structural reforms — reforms that change the rules of the game, not just the fiscal or monetary signals within the existing system. Structural reforms reshape incentives, reduce friction, and create a business ecosystem where both domestic and foreign investors feel confident about making long-term commitments. *Viksit Bharat 2047* will require private players to lead the way while the government acts as an enabler and facilitator.

Rajiv Kumar, former NITI Aayog Vice-Chairman and Chairman of the Pahlé India Foundation, is a prominent economist focused on economic reforms. Samridhi Prakash is a Research Associate at the Pahlé India Foundation

dailypioneer  
@RajivKumar1  
in/rajiv-kumar-b5a56275/?originaSubdomain=in

# When the desert falls silent: saving rajasthan’s folk music



SOURYABRATA MOHAPATRA



BHASWATI SARMA

The Thar Desert is often captured in photographs — endless dunes, blazing sun, and silhouettes of camels. But the deeper soul of this landscape lives elsewhere: in the voices of the Manganiyars, Langas, Bhopas, Mirasis, and Jogis who have sung its history for centuries. Their music, carried across sand and generations, is not just art — it is Rajasthan’s memory system, emotional vocabulary, and cultural shield. Yet today, these custodians of history stand at a heartbreaking crossroads.

Rajasthani folk music is a living archive. The Manganiyars’ resonant voices, the Langas’ sindhi sarangi and algoza, and the Bhopa-Bhopi’s storytelling with the sacred phad make the Thar a musical civilisation. Their songs preserve romance, war, devotion, migration, and everyday survival. But what happens when the singers themselves are pushed into silence?

## A Tradition That Walks, Works, and Waits

One moment at a recent workshop at IIT Jodhpur captured the crisis with unsettling clarity. Three Bhopa artists — Bablu, his brother Sitaram, and their mother Bhawari Devi — performed with deep devotion, turning the auditorium into a travelling temple. Their phad came alive with stories of Pabuji, as if the scroll itself breathed.

After the performance, we casually asked, “Have you visited IIT Jodhpur before?”

Their reply stunned the room: they had been here before — not as artists, but as construction labourers. How can custodians of a centuries-old sacred art be forced into such work? Why does admiration not translate into livelihood? The truth is stark.

Extreme heat, landlessness, and unstable incomes push families like Subhash’s from Churu to migrate — often with their children — to Uttar Pradesh for manual labour, not performances. Their instruments gather dust, their songs fall silent, and their children drift from the traditions that shaped them. Climate change deepens this erosion: fewer fairs, erratic seasons, and shrinking temple gatherings have reduced performance opportunities. Folk music, once woven into the rhythm of rural life, now struggles for bare survival. The *Manganiyars* and *Langas* are internationally cel-

ebrated; many have performed across Europe, collaborated on global fusion albums, and appeared in documentaries. Yet their daily lives back home often remain unchanged. Why does applause abroad not protect them from poverty at home?

The reasons are familiar:

1. Intermediaries absorb most profits, leaving artists with only a small share.
2. International tours are irregular, creating unstable incomes.
3. Artists lack contract awareness, making them vulnerable to unfair terms.
4. There is no social security or pension, even for legendary performers.
5. Caste identity continues to restrict mobility despite artistic brilliance.
6. Royalties rarely reach the musicians, even after successful recordings.

Is it fair that an artist who fills concert halls abroad returns to a village life marked by uncertainty? Can a musical tradition survive when the people who carry it cannot secure a dignified livelihood?

Despite climate stress, economic hardship, and social barriers, the music of the Thar refuses to die. A Manganiyar’s kaafi can still silence a gathering, a Langa’s soulful jogiya can still move listeners to tears, and a Bhopa’s night-long recital before the phad can still transform a commons into a sacred space. These artists sing not for income, but because it is their inheritance and responsibility; they are desert archivists — storytellers, priests, historians, and moral guides — reminding us that heritage survives through people, not institutions.

Yet even the strongest traditions need support. If India truly values its intangible heritage, admiration alone is insufficient. These musicians need sustained, structural backing: more performance platforms; fair, transparent payments; pensions and insurance; digital and financial literacy; stronger documentation; and integration of folk music into education. Without this, the songs of the Thar may fade — not from irrelevance, but from our neglect. Rajasthan’s folk music carries history and dignity; it has endured droughts, caste barriers, poverty, and now climate change, but it cannot endure indifference. The question remains: will the desert’s music become a museum artefact, or will we help it thrive as a living tradition? The future of the Thar’s music depends on the choices we make now, and preserving it is not merely cultural duty — it is a moral one.

Bhaswati Sarma is a Professor of Practice in Performing Arts, IIT Jodhpur and Souryabrata Mohapatra is an Assistant Professor of Economics, IIT Jodhpur

dailypioneer  
@dailypioneer  
in/dailypioneer



## PAISANOMICS

WHERE EVERY RUPEE TELLS A BIGGER STORY



**Vivek Kaul**

mirrorfeedback@timesofindia.com

# Eight investing lessons from Gautam Gambhir

**For instance, the coach loves bits and pieces players; in investing, like in Test cricket, you need specialists**

**O**n social media, heroes and villains are made almost every week. After India lost yet another Test series – this time to South Africa – it was the turn of Gautam Gambhir, the head coach of the Indian men's cricket team, to face the backlash. Yet, beyond the noise, his situation offers a surprisingly rich set of investing lessons.

First, one of the reasons being offered for Gambhir's disastrous run in Test cricket has been too much chopping, changing, and moving around of the playing eleven. This lesson applies to investing as well: Investors who perpetually keep buying and selling stocks or mutual funds, rarely make much money.

As Arthur Levitt writes in *Take on the Street*: "[Warren Buffett] likes to point that any broker who recommended buying and holding Berkshire Hathaway stock from 1965 to now would have made his clients fabulously wealthy... But any broker who did that would have



IMAGE: AI

starved to death." Indeed, the more frequently investors buy and sell stocks or mutual funds, the more money brokers and agents make.

Second, even as Gambhir and the current management repeatedly stress the importance of domestic cricket, consistent first-class performers continue to be overlooked. Quite a few of those who have made it are ones Gambhir has played with as a coach in the Indian Premier League (IPL).

In investing terms this

would mean ignoring the past performance of a mutual fund. Indeed, looking at long-term past performance is a good way to know how a mutual fund scheme has done across different kinds of investing cycles, and whether it's long-term performer or a recent fluke. This still doesn't guarantee decent future returns but is a good way to keep making informed investing decisions.

Third, Gambhir is said to have a fascination for players who have

done well recently in the IPL. The investing and money equivalent of this would be investors and individuals who keep falling for the latest fad in town – crypto, futures and options, real money games, silver, forex trading – and burn their fingers doing so.

Fourth, a major reason being offered for the disastrous performance is Gambhir's love for playing bits and pieces players – who are neither specialist batters nor bowlers.

In investing, like in Test cricket, you need specialists. You need to have an investing portfolio, which is spread across specialist asset classes, like stocks, mutual funds, gold and fixed deposits. Expecting one asset class to do the heavy lifting isn't going to work well all the time.

Fifth, Gambhir is good at offering convenient explanations. For instance, the team's Test defeats have been attributed to a transition period after the retirement of several cricketing greats, rather than flaws in his strategies.

The investing equivalent of this is money managers always having an explanation for everything. As John Allen Paulos writes in

*A Mathematician Plays the Stock Market*: "Because so much information is available – business pages, companies' annual reports, earnings expectations... online sites, and

commentary – something insightful sounding can always be said." Of course, in most cases, it doesn't really mean much.

Sixth, in October 2024, Gambhir said: "We want to be that team which can score 400 in a day and bat for two days to salvage a draw." Now, this sounds very profound, nonetheless, it's impossible to execute.

Take the case of how England have been playing Test cricket lately. They try to score runs at a fast pace, so as to give their bowlers a lot of time to bowl the opposition out.

Now, in the process of playing this high risk cricket, they also tend to get out pretty quickly, and lose matches. And the mental makeup of having to score runs quickly doesn't really allow them to bat for two days to save a match.

The investing equivalent would be to want to build a high-risk portfolio that generates high returns and at the same time want to fully ensure that the money invested is not lost under any circumstances. High return on investment and full return of investment are not goals that can be achieved at the same time, all the time.

Seventh, Gambhir's strategies in Test cricket aren't yielding results, so a change is overdue. Yet, he appears caught in the sunk cost fallacy – persisting with failing strategies much like investors who, after making a bad investment, pour in more money in a futile attempt to save it.

Eighth, there is a lesson that those who run Indian cricket can learn from Gambhir's fiasco. They can diversify and get a new coach for Test cricket. Like smart investors, the Indian cricket team can't afford to bet all its eggs on one coach.

*Vivek Kaul is an economic commentator and a writer*

## AROUND THE BEND

ON BECOMING A BETTER MOTORIST



**Shubhabrata Marmar**

mirrorfeedback@timesofindia.com

# Passion uplifts and transforms

**You can live well flirting with a thing you are passionate about but never immersing yourself in it**

**T**his couple was sitting peacefully on the sidelines smiling away. They were enjoying themselves, and there was a sense of immense, peaceful joy.

She might be the aunty buying veggies, while he would be holding the bag. There are a few stereotypes you might object to, but I am using the cliché purely to reinforce how normal they were. In motorcycle gear, they stood out. I wanted to know more. It was a normal enough story with a twist. Married for a few decades, and happy to be together. And riding motorcycles for almost all of that time.

He is the rider. She was brought up in her father's motorcycle sidecar

and now rides pillion. Thousands of kilometres later, they have crisscrossed the country. They represent what passion does to your life. Uplifts, guides and ever so slowly, transforms.

I was at MotoVerse, an annual motorcycle festival that takes place in Goa. This couple was one among the many people I had the privilege of having long conversations with. The golden thread that connects all of them? They love motorcycles, enjoy riding them and came together to explore and share their passion.

Every day, I would return to the hotel exhausted and thrilled. The sheer emotion that powered all of

those conversations left me feeling spent. Not exhausted, but like you feel after you overeat because the food was so terrific. And then wish you had the capacity to eat some more.

I am telling you this is because I have been fortunate enough to find something I am deeply enthusiastic about – motorcycles, very early on. I am privileged that I can make a living off them too.

The marriage of career and passion is the greatest thing ever. The truth is that I met enthusiastic motorcyclists who were accountants, software engineers, salespeople and marketing managers. Many might be better at those things than

riding motorcycles too.

But their competence gave them the chance to really indulge their passion. And that gave them the drive to do more in their careers too, I suspect. I believe you can live well flirting with a thing you are passionate about but never immersing yourself.

A good existence at best, as this couple reminded me: To live. To really, really live, you must do more. You must put effort into finding that passion and then put energy into exploring and nurturing it.

As the lady told me, "I do ride motorcycles sometimes around town. But sitting behind him gives me a lot more happiness. So that's



IMAGE: AI

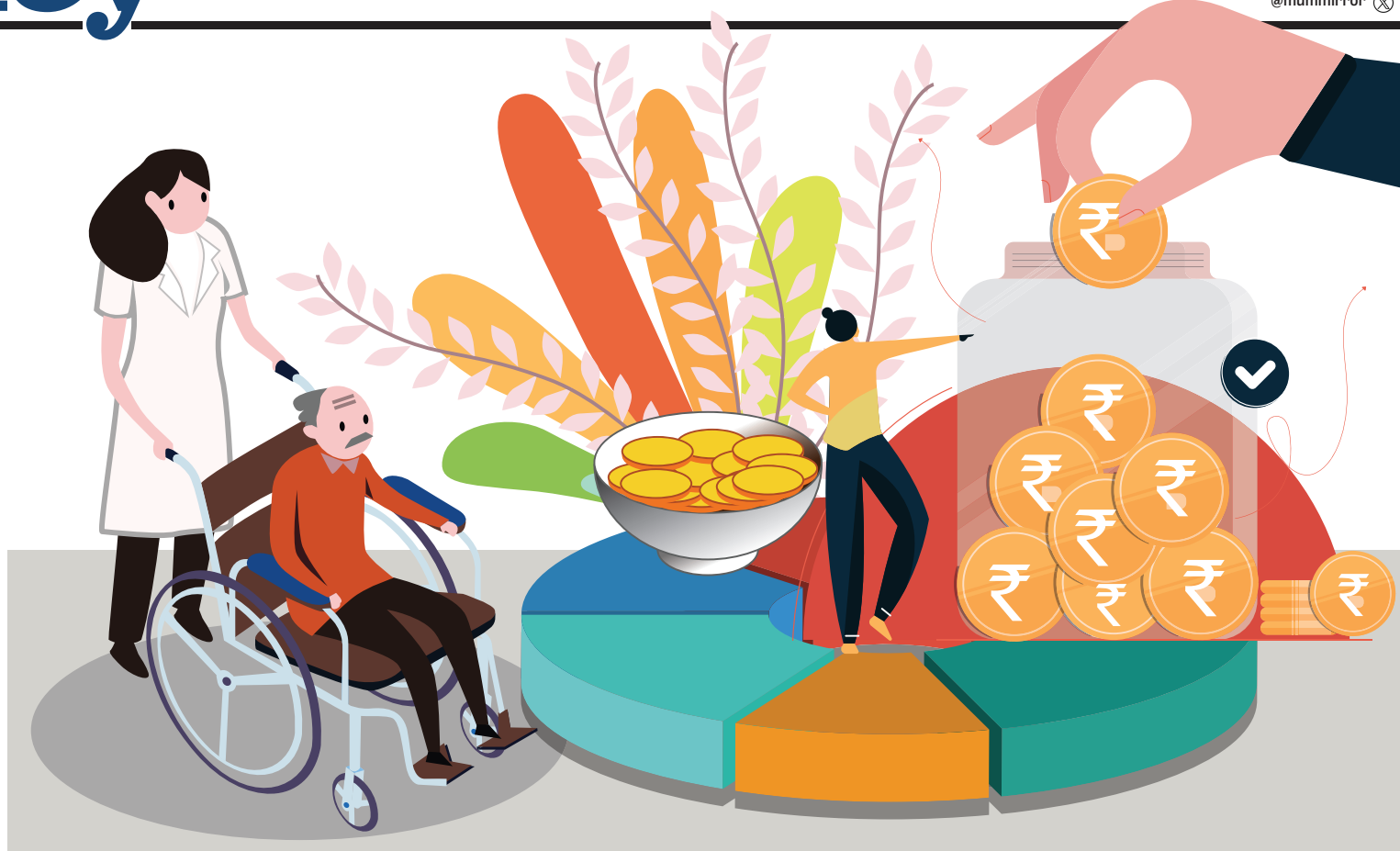
how we choose to do this. I am excited to be here right now, and even more thrilled about the ride home to Mumbai with him."

Her smile as she said this could have lit up the planet.

*An automotive expert, Shubhabrata Marmar decodes modern Indian motoring*



**They face unique financial pressures, from recurring medical expenses to long-term care needs, making structured financial planning essential for their security**



GETTY IMAGES

# Investment planning for people with disabilities

**Abhinav Kaul**  
abhinav.kaul@timesofindia.com

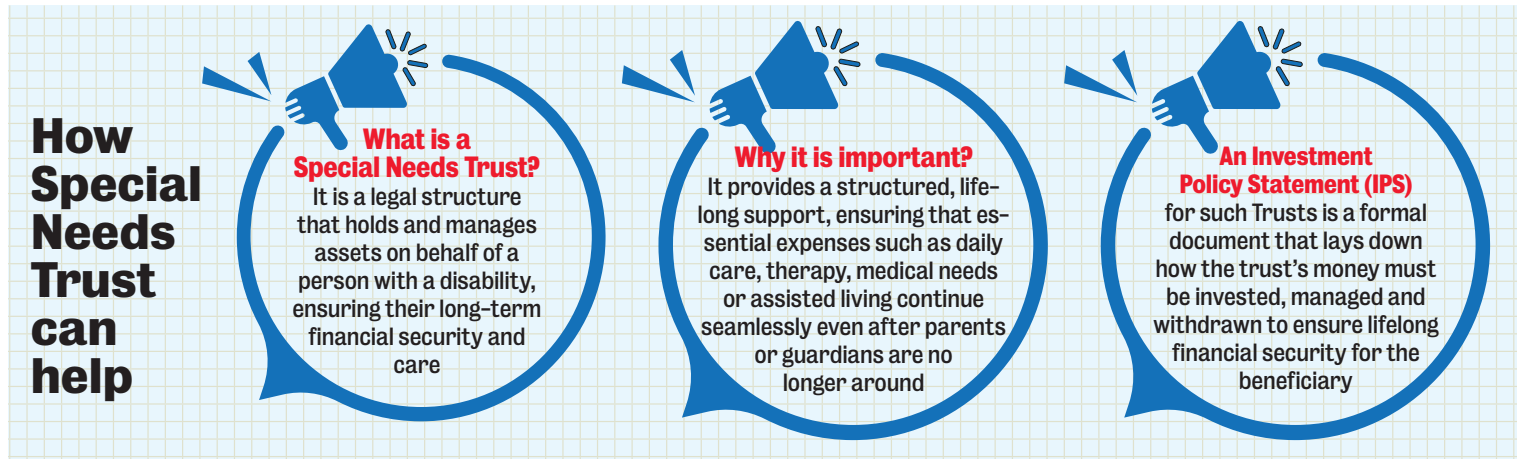
**W**ith the upcoming World Disability Day on 3 December, conversations tend to centre on accessibility, workplace inclusion and infrastructure gaps. But a critical piece of the puzzle often gets overlooked: financial security.

For many people with disabilities, the stakes of financial planning are far higher than they are for most households. Medical inflation consistently outpaces headline inflation, assistive equipment is costly, and unforeseen emergencies can upend daily life with little warning.

While the fundamental principles of investing don't change, the underlying numbers do. The three accounts that follow, from a visually impaired mutual fund distributor, a financial planner living with muscular atrophy, and a banker overseeing digital accessibility projects, illustrate how, for many people with disabilities, financial planning is shaped by distinct day-to-day constraints.

## DISCIPLINED INVESTING

For Piyush Rakhecha, founder of Rakhecha Finserv, visually impaired since birth, planning is not a skill, it is survival. A mutual fund distributor and wealth manager, who manages over ₹140 crore across investment products, Rakhecha applies the same me-



ticulous discipline to his finances that he applies to travel, meetings, or daily routines. "If something isn't planned, it becomes very difficult to manage," he says.

Growing up, he learned investing early when his father opened a demat account for him and asked him to research and buy stocks responsibly. The experience shaped how he thinks: goal-based, structured and long-term. Later at IIM Raipur, he realised many peers invested randomly without strategy, which pushed him to start advising them, and to eventually become a full-time distributor and adviser.

Rakhecha says disability inevitably shapes financial behaviour. Unlike an able-bodied individual, his recurring needs, house help, specialised

travel arrangements, a driver, and accessibility-friendly tools, increase monthly expenses significantly. "The strategy isn't drastically different from others," he explains, "but the amount I invest every month is higher because my cost of living and future expenses will be higher."

He does not pursue outsized risk to compensate. Instead, he invests early, stays consistent, and uses asset allocation like any other disciplined investor. But he urges differently-abled investors to start early and, if needed, take slightly more exposure to mid- and small-cap funds when the horizon is long and the ability to invest more is constrained. Long-term compounding, he believes, remains the most powerful leveller.

## BUFFERS AND RISK

If Rakhecha approaches planning with discipline, Prasad Shetty, founder, S9 Fintech (known as MoneyAnna), a Mumbai-based financial planning and advisory firm, approaches it with cold arithmetic. Living with muscular atrophy, Shetty's monthly expenses can be twice that of an average person. The list is long: a hoist to lift him from wheelchair to bed, specialised bedding, wheelchair batteries and joysticks, transportation modifications, daily and night-time helpers, each item carries a cost, and each item can fail without notice.

"That's why a disabled person needs not just a contingency fund, but a backup fund to that contingency fund," he stresses. While conventional financial advice suggests three to six

months of emergency reserves, Shetty insists on nine to 12 months, plus an additional depreciation fund set aside for equipment breakdowns.

Shetty has been in the equity markets since 2007. Around 40-45% of his portfolio sits in direct equities, mostly large- and mid-caps, while mutual funds, including mid- and small-cap schemes, form the rest. His debt and fixed-income allocation is reserved for emergency and backup funds.

His retirement philosophy is also distinct. If a non-disabled retiree can draw ₹75,000 a month from a ₹1 crore corpus, he recommends pegging a differently-abled person's withdrawal lower and more conservatively.

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 13**