

China's role in the international order

In the past six months, specifically from December 2025 to May 2026, the top leaders of all the other permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) have visited China.

In December 2025, French President Emmanuel Macron paid a three-day state visit to China, accompanied by over 30 French business leaders. Then from January 28 to 31, 2026, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer visited China, also accompanied by a large group of business leaders. Last month, from May 13-15, U.S. President Donald Trump visited China. He was accompanied by key government officials, and a high-profile delegation of over a dozen American CEOs. Russian President Vladimir Putin also paid a state visit to China from May 19-20. He was accompanied by a 39-member delegation including five deputy prime ministers, eight federal ministers, and the heads of Russia's Central Bank and major state corporations. Such intensive, high-level diplomatic engagements in a single country have drawn wide attention. As observed by Professor Rajan Kumar from Jawaharlal Nehru University, such incidents are "extremely rare" and "underline China's emergence as a central hub of global diplomacy".

Indeed, facing an increasingly fluid, turbulent and challenging international order, these visits are telling examples of China's unique role in mediating between world leaders. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, an independent foreign policy of peace has been established as its diplomatic principle, where China seeks, not bloc confrontations, but global partnership, ensuring decisions are made on their own merits, and that the UN plays an essential role in international relations. China endorses multilateralism, non-aggression, and the resolution of global disputes through dialogue rather than military means, which gives it a special advantage in the efforts



Qin Jie
Consul General of the People's Republic of China in Mumbai

to tackle complex issues flaring up across the world, together with the other permanent members of the UNSC. During the meetings, China's President Xi Jinping emphasised the importance to uphold the UN-centred international system, and increase communication and coordination for the settlement of disputes.

On the U.S., Russia and the UN President Xi and President Trump have agreed on building a constructive relationship of strategic stability. The framework of 'constructive strategic stability' between the two countries means that they will uphold positive stability with cooperation as the mainstay; healthy stability with competition within proper limits; constant stability with manageable differences; and lasting stability with expectable peace.

When it comes to the Taiwan question, the One China principle and China's reunification should be unequivocally supported. While talking with President Trump, President Xi stressed that the Taiwan question is the most important issue in China-U.S. relations. "Taiwan independence" and cross-strait peace are as irreconcilable as fire and water. Safeguarding peace across the Taiwan Strait is the biggest common denominator between China and the U.S.

In the meeting with President Putin, President Xi noted that 2026 marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the China-Russia strategic partnership of coordination and the 25th anniversary of the signing of the China-Russia Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation. Guided by the core principles of non-alliance, non-confrontation, and not targeting any third party, the two states have kept deepening mutual trust and strategic coordination.

Moreover, designed out of the ashes of a global conflict to prevent future world wars, the UN's role should never be weakened. All five permanent

members of the UNSC shoulder great responsibility to maintain world peace, uphold the post-WWII world order, and work to make the global governance system more just and equitable. This requires joint efforts in fighting militarism and fascism.

Trade as necessary for peace Economic and trade cooperation was also a priority of the leaders' visits. While dwelling on deepening economic ties with each of the four countries, President Xi underlined mutual trust as the foundation for steady and sustainable state-to-state relations. In our globalised world, the industrial and supply chains of the countries are deeply interconnected, and exchanges and cooperation between China and other economies are mutually beneficial in nature. In order to build an inclusive economic globalisation that benefits everybody, countries should share responsibilities together, coordinate actions, and work together to make global economic governance fairer, more just and equitable. Joint efforts should be made to address the global industrial restructuring. As China kicks off its 15th five-year plan, the country will remain a key contributor to economic growth, open its doors wider and share opportunities with the rest of the world. No matter how developed China becomes, it will never be a threat to other countries.

While a few voices in the media have expressed concerns that such chemistry would squeeze the room for India's role in the international arena, such worries are ill-grounded. China and India are both large economies with strategic autonomy. Both countries should focus on the goals of national development and revitalisation, and seek common understanding and shelf differences. Efforts should be made to deepen the friendship between our two peoples, and strengthen exchanges in education, culture, tourism, etc.

As China kicks off its 15th five-year plan, the country will remain a key contributor to economic growth, open its doors wider and share opportunities with the rest of the world

A State without an Opposition

Gujarat's voice in the Rajya Sabha will be routed entirely through a single party

STATE OF PLAY

Abhinav Deshpande

On June 21, when Congress leader Shaktisinh Gohil's term in the Rajya Sabha ends, Gujarat will witness something it has not seen since the State's formation in 1960: the absence of any representation from the Opposition of the State in the Upper House.

The vacancy itself is not unusual. But what makes this transition noteworthy is what it reveals about the rapidly changing nature of political competition in Gujarat rather than one party's misfortune in a State that once supplied some of its most influential leaders. This transition is a product of electoral arithmetic rather than a sudden political shift, and a new and consequential chapter in the story of Gujarat where the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been quietly rewriting its democratic architecture for three decades. Gujarat has been under BJP rule since 1995; such sustained dominance has translated into an overwhelming majority in the State Assembly, which in turn has determined representation in the Rajya Sabha.

No rebel voices

In the 2022 Assembly elections, the BJP won 156 of the 182 seats, marking its strongest performance in the State's electoral history. This outcome came even after the Patidar agitation which had created expectations of a strong anti-incumbency wave. The Congress, which had seen the agitation as a potential opening, failed to convert sentiments into votes. No party crossed the 18-seat threshold required to claim official Op-



position status. The Congress ended up with just 17 seats and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) won five seats. Today, Gujarat's 182-member Assembly has 162 BJP legislators, 12 Congress MLAs, four from the AAP, and one from the Samajwadi Party. The combined Opposition, fragmented and below the recognition threshold, thus cannot nominate a single Rajya Sabha candidate.

The seat vacated by Mr. Gohil will go to the BJP, as will the other three seats which are to be vacant at the same time. Mr. Gohil, in his term at the Upper House, filed a breach of privilege notice against Union Minister Piyush Goyal for allegedly violating rules of procedure; challenged amendments to cooperative bank governance; and raised Gujarat's unresolved concerns from the Opposition benches. But now, all 11 Rajya Sabha seats from Gujarat will belong to one party, completing its sweep of the State's Upper House representation.

A Congress leader from the State opined that the party failed to establish a coherent narrative capable of competing with the BJP's vision of governance and identity, but argued that the ruling party's "arrogance" is reflected in its belief that there is effectively no Congress left. He went on to add, "what does Gujarat gain from a weakened or absent Opposition? Who will speak for the farmers of Gujarat, and who will raise the

voice of ordinary citizens if there is no strong countervailing force in the system?"

When Mr. Gohil walks out, the only Opposition voice left in Parliament from Gujarat will be Geniben Thakor, the MP from Banaskantha who in 2024 ended a 10-year Lok Sabha drought for the Opposition by winning one of 26 seats. One Lok Sabha MP. Zero Rajya Sabha MPs. This is the Opposition in Gujarat today.

Fight to be the Opposition

In this vacuum, the AAP harbours ambitions of displacing the Congress as the principal Opposition force in the State. With five Assembly seats and a 12.91% vote share in 2022, the AAP has positioned itself as the inheritor of the anti-BJP vote that the grand old party has steadily held.

Yet the AAP's Gujarat story remains aspirational. Its single-digit MLA count is a fraction of what is needed to mount a legislative challenge. The Congress retains 12 MLAs and the institutional weight of a party that has governed the State for decades. The two are now locked in a peculiar sub-competition, not for power, but for the right to be recognised as the Opposition, while the BJP governs without meaningful scrutiny from any quarter. This internal contest has, if anything, only deepened the ruling party's structural advantage.

The BJP's dominance in Gujarat is a political fact, but the absence of an Opposition raises difficult questions. What does it mean when a major State's voice in the Upper House is routed entirely through a single party, with no effective counterweight from within? The answers extend beyond partisan loyalties.

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One in every 3 faculty posts vacant in top technical institutes

While the Education Ministry said recruitments were happening across Centrally Funded Technical Institutes, RTI data show 35.2% of posts remain vacant

DATA POINT

Sambavi Parthasarathy
Nivedha M.

Over 15 lakh students appeared for the high-stakes Joint Entrance Examination this year to secure a seat in the country's premier technical institutions. The competition has always been gruelling, particularly for the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), with roughly 80 students competing for every undergraduate seat in the 23 IITs.

However, data on vacant teaching positions in these institutes, obtained by *The Hindu* through the Right to Information (RTI) Act, raise questions on whether the students who surmount extraordinary challenges to get admitted receive the quality of education they deserve.

The Hindu's request filed under the RTI Act to the Ministry of Education (MoE) in January, seeking details on vacancies in all Central Higher Education Institutions (CHEIs), was forwarded to individual institutions, of which only 79 of the 122 Centrally Funded Technical Institutes (CFTIs) responded. These included 20 IITs, 19 National Institutes of Technology (NITs), 18 Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), 17 Indian Institutes of Information Technology (IIITs), and five Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research (IISERs).

A total of 7,132 of the 20,279 sanctioned faculty positions were vacant in these 79 institutions, which is 35.2%, or roughly one in every three posts. Sixteen institutions had more than 50% of their posts vacant, while another 14 had vacancies exceeding 40%.

Of the 20 IITs, nine reported vacancies exceeding 35% (Chart 2). The share of vacant posts exceeded 50% in IIT Kharagpur. The institute has a sanctioned strength of 1,600 teaching posts – the highest among the 20 IITs; 824 of these remained vacant. 35% of the 11,019

sanctioned posts in all 20 IITs were vacant.

A similar analysis for 19 of the 31 NITs that provided the data shows that four had vacancies exceeding 40% (Chart 3). As per the data, 27.9% of 5,432 posts in these 19 NITs have not been filled. With over 129 of the 187 posts (68%) remaining vacant, NIT Andhra Pradesh accounted for the highest share of vacancies. More than 40% of the sanctioned posts were vacant in NIT Srinagar, NIT Sikkim and NIT Tiruchirappalli, which had the highest with 600 sanctioned posts.

According to a reply given in Parliament by the MoE last year, the sanctioning of faculty posts for NITs and IITs is a dynamic process, subject to periodic review in accordance with institutional requirements and a faculty-to-student ratio of 1:12 for NITs and 1:10 for IITs.

In 18 of the 21 IIMs that provided data, 32.3% of 1,741 sanctioned posts were vacant. Four IIMs reported vacancies exceeding 50% (Chart 4). IIM Mumbai had 59% of its posts vacant, with 77 of 130 vacancies unfilled.

IITs reported the highest percentage of vacancies although their sanctioned posts were relatively low. A total of 665 (53.5%) of the 1,225 posts in 17 of the 25 IITs that provided data were vacant. Vacancies exceeded 50% in eight of them (Chart 5). In five of the seven IISERs that provided data, 276 of the 862 posts were lying vacant.

In another reply to the Lok Sabha earlier this year, the MoE, while not furnishing the number of vacancies, said that "occurrence of vacancies and filling thereof is a continuous process". It further said that all CHEIs were exhorted to fill vacancies in September 2022 and later in October 2025 under a "Mission Mode" recruitment drive. It said that, as of January 24, 2026, a total of 17,878 faculty positions has been filled across all CHEIs under this "Mission Mode".

Nivedha M. interned with *The Hindu*

Faculty crunch

Data for the charts were obtained through requests under the Right to Information Act. The responses were received between January and March, 2026



In Charts 2,3,4 and 5, the length of the bars show the % of posts that are vacant, while the numbers outside the bars show the total sanctioned faculty posts in the respective institutions

Chart 2: Share of vacant posts in 20 of the 23 IITs which provided the data (%)

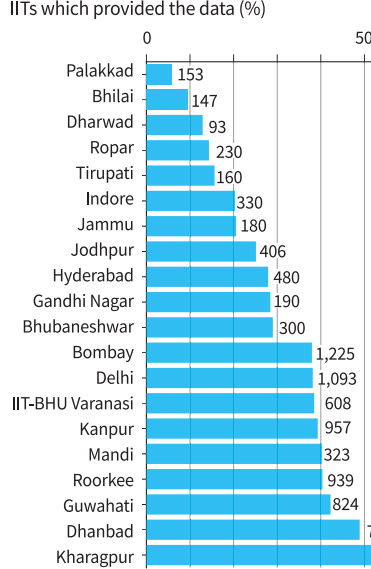


Chart 3: Share of vacant posts in 19 of the 31 NITs which provided the data (in %)

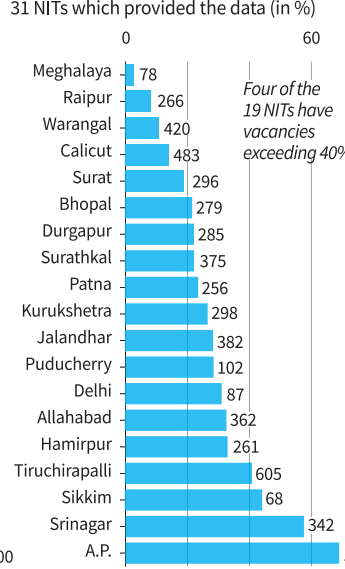


Chart 1: The circles (●) indicate the total number of institutions in the respective categories and the bars (■) show the institutions that provided the data

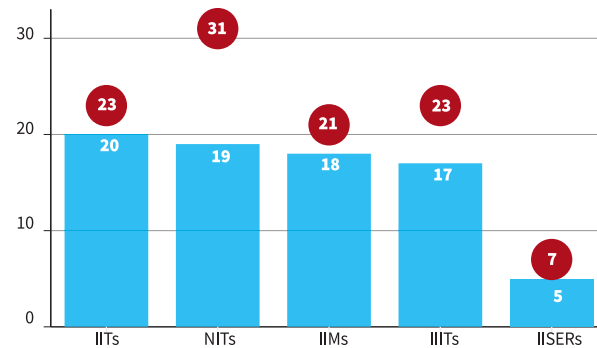


Chart 4: Share of vacant posts in 18 of the 21 IIMs which provided the data (in %)

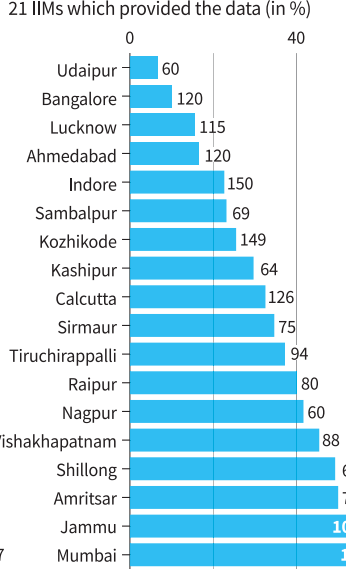


Chart 5: Share of vacant posts in 17 of the 25 IITs which provided data (in %)

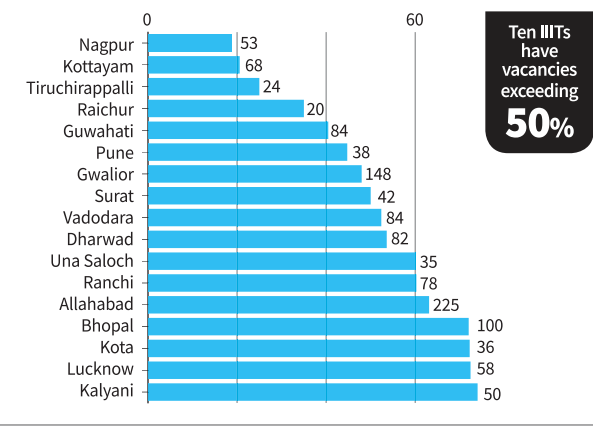
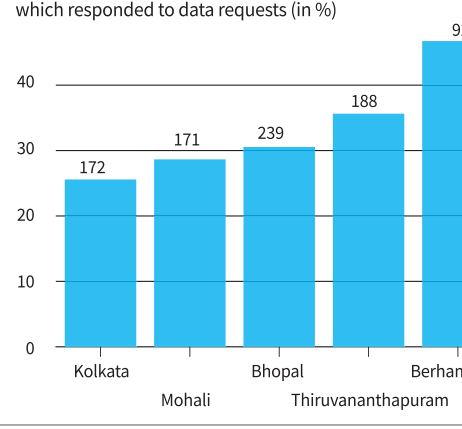


Chart 6: Share of vacant posts in five of the eight IISERs which responded to data requests (in %)



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 10, 1976

Pollution monitoring stations on rivers

Trivandrum, June 9: Monitoring stations are proposed to be set up by the Kerala State Board for Prevention and Control of Water Pollution at representative sites in the major rivers of the State which are subject to massive pollution. Disclosing this in a talk with newsmen here today, Mr. N.S. Bhairavan, Board Chairman, said information gathered by the monitoring stations would help devise suitable control programmes for keeping the rivers clean.

Mr. Bhairavan said the Board would be keeping a constant watch on the quality of the effluents discharged by the industries to ensure that they always conformed to the prescribed standards. There would be regular inspection of effluent treatment installations to see that they were maintained and operated efficiently. Regular sampling and analysis of the effluents would also be done.

Mr. Bhairavan said the Board was determined to be in full and effective control of water pollution problems in the State in two years at the most. He said most of the industries had responded to the Board's directions promptly and in a big way and achieved substantial progress in implementing a time-bound programme which, when completed, would render their effluents harmless. Gwalior Rayons (Calicut) had developed a new method for reducing the colour of the effluent using calcium hypochlorite. The Cochin division of FACT had, as an immediate measure, started neutralising the effluent, the sulphuric acid which was causing havoc to the paddy crop on the sides of the Chitrapuzha river and to the fish of the river.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 10, 1926

Heat wave in Delhi

Delhi, June 9: Delhi is in the grip of a heat wave. Early strong sun, oppressive heat and dusty wind are the order of the day. Khas khaska tatti and electric fan are poor methods of bringing down the temperature. The extent of heat is so very great that asphalt layer of road showed marks of softening in Chandni Chowk. These conditions have, as usual, the direct effect on health of infants and children. A higher mortality is reported amongst them during the last few days, and a few deaths are reported among the grown up.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Compensation for families of employees killed in plant blast

1.72 in ₹ crore. Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan announced compensation for the families of each regular employee killed in the Vizag Steel Plant explosion. Contract staff families will receive ₹45.75 lakh each, while severely injured workers get ₹10 lakh. PTI

FPI investment in G-secs under FAR after tax exemption

8,794 in ₹ crore. Foreign portfolio investors have invested in government securities under the Fully Accessible Route after the government exempted them from income tax on interest income and capital gains arising from these bonds. PTI

Record high number of engineering student enrollments in T.N.

3.02 in lakh. This is the highest recorded number of students enrolled in Tamil Nadu Engineering Admissions 2026, according to the Directorate of Technical Education. This surpasses the previous record of 3,01,026 set in 2025. PTI

People displaced by powerful earthquake in Philippines

32,000 A 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck southern Philippines on Monday. Waves up to 1.4 metres above tide level were measured in the Philippines, while smaller waves washed ashore in Indonesia, Palau and southern Japan. AP

Number of people killed in the cholera outbreak in Nigeria

74 More than 7,850 people have been infected in a cholera outbreak that began in early May in Nigeria's northeastern Borno state. Médecins Sans Frontières said infections are rising sharply each day across 14 local government areas. REUTERS
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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A new phase in India-Nepal relations

Nepal PM indicated that the boundary dispute is not one-sided and should be resolved through diplomatic channels; his remarks, amid objections over trade and pilgrimage routes and shifting political tone in Kathmandu, suggest a cautious move towards a more rational approach in India-Nepal relations

WORLD INSIGHT

K.V. Rajan
Atul K. Thakur

Nepal Prime Minister Balendra Shah "Balen" limited his intervention in a parliamentary discussion on the boundary dispute between India and Nepal over Kalapani, Lipulekh, and Limpiyadhura (areas claimed by both countries) on May 31 to a few minutes. He seemed to suggest that the issue was not one-sided.

"What surprised me after becoming Prime Minister is that it is not only India that is accused of encroaching Nepalese land. In some places, Nepal may also be occupying territory claimed by India. Both countries should examine the facts objectively and resolve the matter amicably as friends."

This was predictably greeted with a storm of protests within and outside Nepal's Parliament, despite the Prime Minister's reiteration that Nepal and India were working towards resolving the boundary issue through diplomatic channels.

Border dispute response

Nepal has also objected to the resumption of India-China trade through the Lipulekh Pass. Mr. Shah shared that the diplomatic note sent by Nepal on this matter received a positive response from India, and both sides have agreed to address the issue through dialogue. Earlier, Nepal's Foreign Ministry reiterated its commitment to resolving the boundary issue through diplomatic means. The statement came after India rejected Nepal's objection to the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra route through Lipulekh Pass, describing Kathmandu's territorial claim as 'unjustified' and "influenced by 'unilateral artificial enlargement'."

However, the latest developments suggest a more rational approach, which hopefully discards the possibility of the dispute becoming a lasting bilateral irritant and signals a fresh beginning. It is



GETTY IMAGES

still early days, and the new government's thoughts in Kathmandu on resetting relations with India are not yet clear.

Shifting political tone

What is already clear is that Nepal's governance is firmly in the hands of a young generation with its eye on the future rather than the past, determined to free the country from the chains of corruption, nepotism, and ideology – and to prioritise social and economic issues.

Objections raised over trade and religious tourism through areas claimed by Nepal, the postponement of the Indian Foreign Secretary's visit to Nepal to discuss the Prime Minister's India visit and the disinclination of Mr. Shah to break protocol to receive India's Foreign Secretary, all reflect an emerging stance that India will be treated on par with other countries, rather than being given the easy access to top leadership it has traditionally enjoyed under the much-discussed "special relationship." These may have injected jarring notes in the trajectory of ties, but India appears to have taken them in stride.

Nepalese observers have questioned the wisdom of ignoring India's crucial importance to Nepal's present and future well-being. Likely, the bilateral ambience will not be held prisoner to protocol or to

assertions of irrational nationalism or *de facto* inequality.

Diplomatic path ahead

The sobering thought is that discussions between diplomats and experts may not yield a solution, and the fact that despite both sides emphasising economic cooperation as the core of bilateral ties, the boundary issue cannot be pushed to the back burner indefinitely.

Based on publicly available information, British-era data will be self-contradictory, as British India updated its maps with more recent technology compared to the East India days. The suggestion by Mr. Shah that China and the U.K. may also need to be consulted for a long-term solution may, however, create further complications and delays.

The Chinese position, taken by President Xi Jinping, was that Nepal should sort out the border issue with India. This remains the most rational advice, and it is hoped that both China and Nepal will adhere to this position.

What is important is to avoid an unending period of so called diplomatic and expert-level discussions which will permit the dispute to become a major irritant, given the positions taken by Nepal (which has even printed its version of the disputed map on its currency notes) and

India (which has followed the boundary delineation it inherited from the British in 1947 and has serious security interests in maintaining the *status quo*).

What might be a better option would be for both countries to draw inspiration and ideas from (a) their centuries-old continuum of multifaceted linkages, (b) the open border tradition which has been in existence over more than 1,700 km and was followed even in the disputed area before the India-China war in 1962, and (c) the strong, mutually trusting institutional relationship between the Indian and Nepalese Army which could facilitate and come in useful to sustain a mutually acceptable practical solution.

This, however, will require a shift in mindset on both sides: a determination not to permit differences on boundary delineation to cloud a unique relationship, and a recognition that the so-called encroachment of territory is a mutual phenomenon that is not a result of aggressive territorial assertion and need not be a cause for mutual tension.

The changes in Nepal and the Prime Minister's statement offer an opportunity that India, too, should respect and seize. The last Indian Prime Minister who had the vision and courage to step beyond conventional diplomatic approaches to such problems with Nepal was Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Prime Minister Narendra Modi appears to have not only vision and courage but also the necessary political self-confidence in selling difficult policies and decisions to the nation, overriding the usual bureaucratic and inevitable nationalistic political posturing. Rabi Lamichhane, President of Nepal's ruling Rastriya Swatantra Party and Nepal's Foreign Affairs Minister Shishir Khanal visited India recently to engage in political and diplomatic meetings. The timing of their visits was crucially important

It is time for India and Nepal to move towards a more enlightened bilateral relationship to build a model sustainable partnership.

(K. V. Rajan is former Indian Ambassador to Nepal and Atul K. Thakur is a policy professional. Views are personal.)

THE GIST

The boundary dispute over Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura continues to strain India-Nepal ties, with both sides maintaining competing territorial claims and relying on historical maps and inherited boundary lines.

Recent developments reflect shifting diplomatic signals, with both countries emphasising dialogue and expert-level engagement, though differences over trade routes, protocol, and sovereignty remain unresolved.

Inclusion without abolition in China's hukou system

Hukou reform pushes inclusion of migrants in public services while retaining structural controls

Anand P. Krishnan

China's State Council, on May 22, issued guidelines to 'promote basic public services at people's place of residence', regardless of hukou, or residence registration status. These guidelines direct local governments – more specifically, megacity administrations – to improve and enhance their delivery measures in the domains of education, public rental housing, social and medical insurance, and a range of social assistance measures for the entire resident population within their administrative jurisdictions.

Hukou reforms since 2014

Hukou is an instrument of social control by the ruling party-state, originating in the 1950s, that distinguishes people as belonging to rural and urban areas based on the official registration of their place of residence. In the Mao era, the system was intended to limit internal migration and

manage resource allocation under the prioritisation of rural development. The economic reforms after 1978 loosened restrictions to allow labour mobility to industrial regions and urban centres, while retaining the institution of Hukou. It functions as an internal passport, as access to social services and government provisions is tied to residential registration. From 2014 onwards, the government has been pushing incremental reforms to the system to align with national urbanisation plans and gradually equalise social benefits for migrants and locals, beginning with the conversion of rural to urban hukous in smaller cities. While nationwide implementation has progressed gradually, megacities have remained outside the purview until now.

The May 22 guidelines build on the decisions of the Third Plenum of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2024, which directed the removal of restrictions on access to social insurance at the place of

employment. This was further reiterated in a five-year people-centered urbanisation action plan instituted by the State Council in July 2024 to raise the permanent urban residents from 66.16% (932.67 million) in 2023 to nearly 70% (estimated around 987 million) by 2029.

According to China's National Bureau of Statistics, at the end of 2025, the country's 'floating population' (*liudong renkou*) or rural migrants, stood at around 358 million, making up 25% of the population. Along with demographic concerns, the Central government is also guided by the economic imperative of increasing domestic consumption and hastening efforts to create a national unified market with the free flow of capital and talent. This also intersects with efforts to incentivise the mobility of young talent into frontier regions such as Xinjiang to support regional development.

The party-state, over the last three years, has widely promoted the concept of 'investing in people'. Now included in the

new 15th Five-Year Plan, the concept is a new development orientation to raise knowledge and skills to transform 'human resources into human capital' and move from 'a demographic dividend' to a 'talent dividend'. People-centred urbanisation, through the inclusion of long-term residents by relaxing household registration rules, is a crucial component of this framework.

Another driver is the growth of flexible and new forms of employment – shorthand for gig and platform workers – who are over 200 million, out of the country's total 740 million workforce.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the Central government, in conjunction with the official trade union, has sought to create a comprehensive national policy framework covering labour protection and political supervision. Taken together with frequent cases of labour discontent, the party-state views gig and platform workers as a key labour constituency that needs to be regulated and politically incorporated.

Persisting structural issues

Interestingly, the word *hukou* itself is only mentioned once in the latest guidelines. Since 2014, with the onset of reforms, efforts have been made to replace it with concepts like "permanent resident population" (*changzhu renkou*) and "place of actual residence" (*changzhu di*) to build inclusivity. However, structural constraints continue to constrain the reform measures.

Local governments bear responsibility for delivering welfare and public services, with financing largely dependent on fiscal transfers from the Central government. The real estate sector remains unstable, thus affecting city governments' budgets. While the Central government has indicated resource transfers and compensations to migrant-receiving cities, there are no commitments to new spending. The guidelines do not address or show a clear intent to resolve structural gaps. For instance, differing social insurance standards between well-off coastal cities and inland provinces (migrant-sending regions) mean that migrant workers' monthly contributions are at higher rates, but they receive lower benefits. Similarly, migrants who receive medical treatment in major cities but are enrolled in poorer regions will still receive lower reimbursements and face lower coverage limits. Further, the guidelines do not compel employers in the gig economy to strictly enroll workers in welfare schemes. In all, much room is left for the use of discretion by local administrations.

This recalibration only goes to show that the *hukou* system continues to remain in place and that there are no significant changes to the *status quo* for migrant labour. (Anand P. Krishnan is a Fellow at the Centre of Excellence for Himalayan Studies, Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence, Delhi NCR, and Assistant Editor of the journal, China Report)

BUILDING BLOCKS

How Babbage automated calculations with simple machines

Slow, error-prone calculations by hand were unavoidable in the early 19th century, yet even small mistakes could ruin the designs for buildings and the journeys of ships; Charles Babbage's ingenious machines were much more accurate, faster, and revolutionary

Vasudevan Mukunth

Modern computing is often effortless. You pick up a calculator or open the calculator app on your phone, and you are on your way in seconds. But getting here took humans several centuries from when they first tried to speed up computing. One particularly important passage in this history involved the English mathematician Charles Babbage, who found a way to speed up calculations using the movement of simple machines, creating the first ancestors of the modern computer.

What motivated Babbage?

If you had to calculate something in the early 19th century, you had to do it entirely by hand. Entire governments, navigators, astronomers, and engineers – all depended on complicated mathematical tables produced by teams of clerks, known at the time as ‘computers’, who worked slowly and often made mistakes.

In 1821, Babbage was frustrated and reportedly said he wished calculations could happen “by steam”. Babbage went on to develop the difference engine, a large mechanical calculator designed to compute mathematical tables using a method called finite differences.

The machine consisted of columns of brass wheels, each engraved with the digits from 0 to 9. The wheels physically added value as they were rotated using a hand crank and gears. The machine considerably reduced the number of mistakes. The difference engine was thus a specialised calculator that was fast and efficient at one class of problems.

What were mathematical tables?

The mathematical table was a pre-computed table of numbers that experts could refer to repeatedly in their practice. For instance, before digital calculators, an engineer would often convert multiplication into an addition problem using logarithms. So 247×83 could be solved by looking up the logarithms of both numbers, adding them, then converting back to the inverse value.

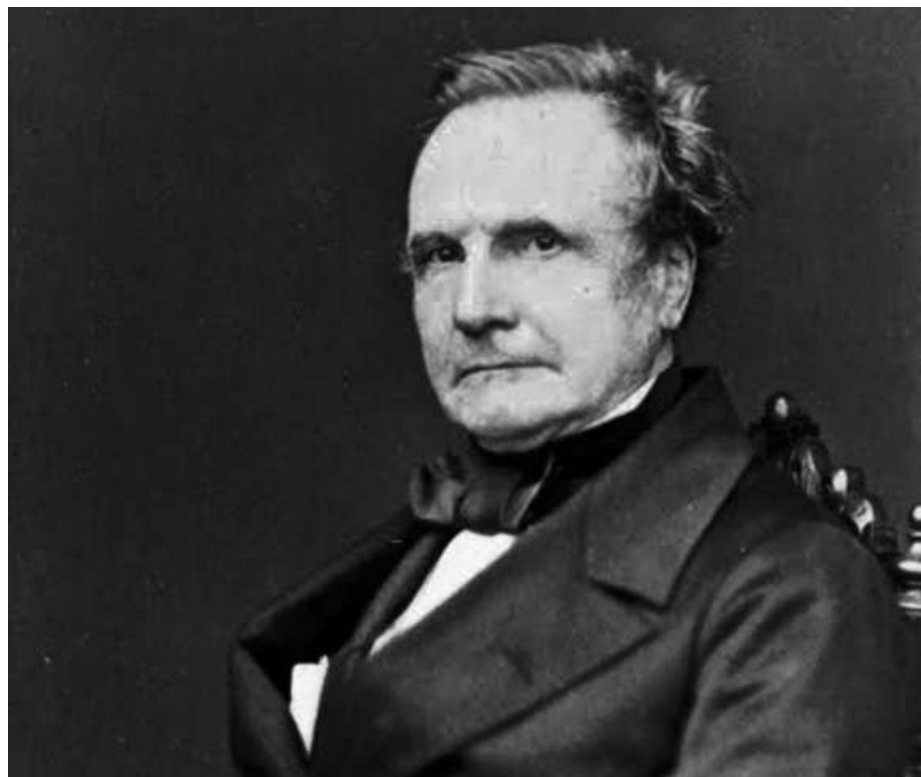
Similarly, the tables also provided the values of trigonometric functions (used in architecture and civil engineering), astronomical tables (to predict the positions of celestial bodies), actuarial tables (for insurance and taxation), and polynomial tables (values of complicated functions used in science).

The tables often repeatedly evaluated the values of common functions at regular intervals. For example, if $f(x) = x^3$, then the tables would provide the values of $f(x)$ at $x = 1, 2, 3, 4, \dots$, i.e. 1, 8, 27, 64, Similarly, a table would show the values of a trigonometric sine function for every tenth of a degree: $10^\circ, 10.1^\circ, 10.2^\circ, \dots$ corresponding to 0.1736, 0.1754, 0.1771,

Aside from computers making mistakes during the calculation itself, inaccuracies also crept up during copying and typesetting. And a single mistake could be ruinous.

What is the method of finite differences?

The method of finite differences simplifies many of these operations to simpler



Charles Babbage.

problems, which the difference engine could then automate.

Say a table needs to evaluate the function $f(x) = x^2$. So for $x = 1, 2, 3, \dots$, $f(x) = 1, 4, 9, \dots$. Now look at the differences between successive values: $3 (4 - 1), 5 (9 - 4), 7 (16 - 9), 9 (25 - 16), \dots$. Then look at the second differences, i.e., the difference between the differences: $2 (5 - 3), 2 (7 - 5), 2 (9 - 7), \dots$

That the second difference is a constant implies the whole table can be generated using just addition.

The difference engine started with three numbers loaded into separate columns of wheels: the starting value, 1; the first difference, 3; and the second difference, 2. When you crank the wheels, they add the second difference to the first difference: $3 + 2 = 5$, and then the updated first difference to the current value: $1 + 5 = 6$.

At the end of turn 1:
 • Updated first difference: 5
 • Updated value: 4
 And at the end of turn 2:
 • Updated first difference: $5 + 2 = 7$
 • Updated value: $4 + 5 = 9$
 And at the end of turn 3:
 • Updated first difference: $7 + 2 = 9$
 • Updated value: $9 + 7 = 16$
 And so on. Thus the difference engine produced: 1, 4, 9, 16, 25,

How did the wheels ‘do’ all this?

Imagine one vertical column of wheels representing a decimal number: the top wheel displays the thousands, the second wheel the hundreds, the third wheel the tens, and the fourth wheel the ones. Each wheel has the digits 0-9 engraved on its edge.

Suppose the machine stored the number 247. The wheels would be positioned so that the thousands wheel points to 0, the hundreds wheel points to 2, the tens wheel points to 4, and the ones wheel points to 7.

To add numbers, the machine would physically rotate the wheels. Suppose you want to perform the operation $247 + 5$. When cranked the gears, they would turn the ones wheel forward by five positions: 7, 8, 9, 0, 1, 2. Since going from 9 to 0 means crossing a decimal boundary, the

analytical engine has to carry the 1 – which it does using a special mechanism that nudges the tens wheel forward one step: from 4 to 5.
 So the machine displays 252.

What happened to the difference engine?

Babbage never finished building a full-scale version of his Difference Engine No. 1. In 1991, the Science Museum in London built a machine it dubbed ‘Difference Engine No. 2’ based on Babbage’s drawings in 1846-1849. It weighed five tonnes, contained 8,000 parts, and worked correctly, vindicating Babbage’s intuition.

That said, the reasons work on Difference Engine No. 1 stalled are pertinent. Foremost, Babbage fell out with his chief engineer Joseph Clement over Clement’s compensation and who owned the tools and drawings. The government also cut off funding in 1842, by when Babbage had spent more than GBP 17,000, because it believed there was no end in sight to his expenses and because, from 1834 onwards, Babbage had been paying more attention to a new device called the analytical engine.

What is the analytical engine?

It was conceived as a general purpose programmable machine – the direct ancestor of the modern computer. It had four components: the mill (like the modern CPU), which performed basic mathematical operations like addition and subtraction; the store (memory), capable of holding up to 1,000 numbers each 50 digits long on wheels; the reader (input), consisting of punched cards then used in Jacquard looms of the textile industry; and the printer (output), a mechanism to automatically stamp the results out on metal plates.

The analytical engine was not just advanced for its time: it was practically revolutionary because it was (i) programmable – it could receive instructions and solve different problems – and (ii) it had conditional branching, meaning it could make logical decisions like “do A if B”. It could also repeat particular steps.

What did the punched cards do?

In a Jacquard loom, users would punch holes into cards to control the weaving pattern. One specific pattern of holes which threads to raise or lower, for example. So if Babbage wanted to calculate $(7 + 5) \times 3$, he would load the numbers into the store – as in the difference engine – and then place cards in the machine with these instructions:

- Put 7 in storage location A
- Put 5 in storage location B
- Put 3 in storage location C

Then, another sequence of punched cards would instruct the mill:

- Add A and B
- Store result in D

Then the machine would compute:
 $7 + 5 = 12$
 Now $D = 12$.

Yet another set of punched cards might say:

- Multiply D by C
- Store result in E

So the analytical engine would compute:

$12 \times 3 = 36$

A final card would say ‘Print E’, so the engine would stamp out:

36

The same analytical engine could solve a different problem; Babbage just had to change the order of the punched cards.

More advanced sequences of cards could also instruct the analytical engine to repeat some operation multiple times (looping) and execute conditional branching. For example, to perform division by repeated subtraction, the analytical engine would have to subtract the divisor from the number, and repeat that operation if the result is positive or stop if the result is negative.

(Aside: The German-American inventor Herman Hollerith also used punched cards to automate the U.S. Census in the 1890s and founded the company that was a piece of what would become IBM. However, there is no evidence he was inspired by Babbage’s choice.)

What happened to the analytical engine?

All this said, Babbage could not complete a full-scale analytical engine either. Due to his experiences with the Difference Engine No. 1, the analytical engine never attracted any serious funding. In fact, Babbage spent the rest of his life without any state support for his designs.

His efforts were not for nothing, however. His collaborator Ada Lovelace recognised an idea that most of her contemporaries missed: if a machine could manipulate numbers, and if those numbers could represent other data-types like letters, musical notes or images, the analytical engine could effectively be a universal symbol processor. This is like how today Spotify represents music as numbers, Photoshop represents colours as numbers, large language models represent words as numbers, and so on.

Babbage’s designs were the ancestors of modern computers in the same way the first cells are ancestors of modern humans: they were important foundations that proved something was possible but there are also significant differences between them. Babbage helped the world realise that machines could perform different mathematical functions using the same hardware.

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FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

“Welcome back. How was your trip to Goa?”

“Oh, it was so tiresome. I couldn’t believe the amount of.....”

“.....tiresome or tiring?”

“What’s the difference between the two?”

“When you say that something is tiresome, it means that it is annoying, tedious, or troublesome.”

“Annoying or troublesome, eh? Sounds like Sujatha to me!”

“Why do you always pick on Sujatha? Here’s an example with ‘tiresome’.

I find most of David’s jokes tiresome.

“You are not the only one, I can assure you. How about this example?”

I went to the club yesterday and the manager told me that he had misplaced my application form. So I had to go through the tiresome process of filling out another one.

“That’s a good example. My next door neighbour is trying to sell his car. He says that it’s tiresome business.”

“I am sure it is these days. But tell me, what about ‘tiring’? Is it related to ‘tired’?”

“It certainly is. When you say that something is ‘tiring’ it means it is exhausting. For example, being the host of a television programme can be very tiring.”

“My friend asked me to go through his assignment. It was tiring. I can now appreciate the amount of work that teachers have to put in while grading assignments.”

“So, was your trip ‘tiresome’ or ‘tiring’?”

“‘Tiring, I guess. Met a lot of interesting people, though. The people at the hotel were very friendly, specially the waiters.”

“Especially.”

“What?”

“The people were friendly, especially the waiters.”

“What’s the difference between ‘specially’ and ‘especially’?”

“Well, one normally uses the word, ‘specially’ when one has a single purpose in mind.”

“In other words, when something is done for a particular purpose. Is that what you mean?”

“That’s right! You have a single purpose in mind.”

“When do you use ‘especially’ then?”

“It is normally used when you want to mean ‘particularly’. For example, Kodaikanal is crowded, especially during the summer.”

“The students in our class, especially the girls, are very hard working.”

“Girls in general tend to work much harder than boys.”

“I know. The girls in my class are always surfing the Net trying to find new material. Talking about the Net, I came across a search engine called ‘Google’.

Does the word ‘google’ mean anything?...”

“...I don’t know about the word ‘google’, but I came across the word ‘googol’ recently.”

“Googol! What does it mean?”

“I understand it is a term used in mathematics. It means ten to the power of hundred.”

“In other words, a ‘googol’ is ten followed by a hundred zeros?”

“I guess you could say that. Did you know that a nine-year-old boy invented the word. It was coined by the nine year old nephew of a mathematician named Milton Sirota.”

“The word sure sounds like something that a kid would come up with.”

Published in The Hindu on November 28, 2000

THE DAILY QUIZ

The 2026 French Open was a Grand Slam tennis tournament held at the Stade Roland Garros in Paris, France, from May 24 to June 7. A quiz on the tournament

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

Sindhu Nagaraj

QUESTION 1

Let’s start with an easy question. Alexander Zverev defeated which Italian player in five sets for his first major title in his fourth final?

QUESTION 2

Zverev, upon winning the final, became the first German to win a men’s major singles championship since _____ in 1996. Fill in the blank.

QUESTION 3

Starting at the 2026 French Open, the Grand Slams permitted the use of this object, allowing players access to a broader range of performance-related information during competition. What is it?

QUESTION 4

Who among the champions from last year successfully defended their titles?

QUESTION 5

Which male tennis player, who was also the 2015 champion, competed in his 21st and final appearance at Roland-Garros in 2026?



Visual Question:

Identify this player. What is the feat she achieved in this edition?

Questions and Answers in the previous day’s daily quiz:

1. Which nineteenth-century movement preceded Birsa’s uprising and influenced the political climate in Chotanagpur? **Ans: The Sardari Larai (Sardar Movement)**

The Munda uprising led by Birsa Munda at the turn of the twentieth century is popularly known by what term, meaning “Great Tumult”? **Ans: Ulgulan**

What slogan associated with Birsa Munda called for the end of British rule? **Ans: “Abua Raj ete jana, Maharani raj tundu jana” (“Let our rule come, let**

the Queen’s rule go”)

Birsa Munda’s religious teachings led to the emergence of a distinct faith community known by what name? **Ans: Birsait**

Birsa Munda died in Ranchi Jail in 1900. What was the official cause of death recorded by the British authorities? **Ans: Cholera**

Visual: This famous photograph of Birsa Munda was reproduced in which pioneering ethnographic work by Sarat Chandra Roy? **Ans: The Mundas and Their Country (1912)**

Early Birds: K.N. Viswanathan | Jose Jogi | Lalchand Bhutani | Sunil Madhavan | C. Saravanan

Word of the day

Transient:

lasting for only a short time

Synonyms: temporary, brief, passing

Usage: *The delay in bus service was transient*

Pronunciation: [nwstl.live/transient](https://www.nwstl.live/transient)

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ˌtrænzɪənt/

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Scientists find a blood test that predicts lung cancer years early

A new study has zeroed in on a set of 14 blood plasma proteins, called the '14-protein signature', as a strong predictor of being diagnosed with lung cancer years in advance; the team also identified an existing drug that could potentially be used to reduce the risk of developing lung cancer

S. Swaminathan

Lung cancer is one of the more common cancers affecting people worldwide. This is mainly due to smoking and, to a lesser extent, air pollution and occupational exposure. According to the latest World Health Organization estimates, there are about 2.5 million new cases and 1.8 million deaths every year. Prevention offers the ideal solution to this public health problem.

Scientists are currently on the threshold of finding a new way to identify people who may be predisposed to developing lung cancer and protect them proactively. A multinational team, from almost a dozen countries, led by Charles Swanton of the Francis Crick Institute, London, published its findings on an exciting discovery in *Cell* on May 4. The team has zeroed in on a set of 14 blood plasma proteins, which they call the "14-protein signature", as a strong predictor of being diagnosed with lung cancer years in advance.

The team also identified an existing drug that could potentially be used to reduce the risk of developing lung cancer.

Looking in the blood

Blood plasma is the liquid portion of the blood that flows in our body. It contains thousands of proteins that come from every organ and tissue. This entire set of proteins is called the plasma proteome. The large-scale systematic study of the proteome is called proteomics.

Sampling blood plasma is akin to a liquid biopsy. The plasma proteomics profile provides a real-time snapshot of health and disease. If scientists could compare the profiles of people before and after the onset of a disease, they can glean important clues about changes in the plasma proteome as a person goes from well to unwell.

To get such data pertaining to lung cancer, Swanton et al. turned to the U.K. Biobank, an ongoing initiative that tracks the lives of approximately half a million volunteers to find out who falls ill and why. The Biobank is a repository of anonymised biological samples and corresponding health-related information of all these volunteers. It is accessible to scientists around the world to develop diagnostics and therapies for everyone, everywhere.

For a subset of the volunteers, around 10%, the plasma proteomics profiles became available in 2023.

The team used the profiles of about 48,000 volunteers to train a machine-learning model along with patient characteristics, such as age,



Sampling blood plasma is akin to a liquid biopsy. The plasma proteomics profile provides a real-time snapshot of health and disease. ADRIAN SULYOK/UNSPLASH

gender, smoking status, lung cancer diagnosis, etc. This way, the team identified 14 plasma proteins linked to lung cancer.

How a cancer forms

Next, the researchers used the model to predict the incidence of lung cancer diagnoses using the proteomics data of about 12,000 patients whose data had been excluded from the model's training. This set included 75 individuals of lung cancer with a median time to diagnosis of 5.1 years. The model predicted lung cancer diagnosis with a very high sensitivity, successfully identifying more than 75% cases.

The 14-protein signature was also found in eight additional datasets, including one from life-long non-smokers, essentially validating the signature's usefulness.

The scientists also found that the signature was more pronounced when specific inflammatory pathways involving smoking and air pollution were activated. In a previous study, the same team had found that air pollution causes inflammation that awakens dormant mutant lung cells, which eventually become cancer cells.

This detail, together with the observations in the new study, led the team to hypothesise that smoking induces mutations, lung inflammation triggered by environmental cues follows, and this culminates in lung cancer.

The signature was also more distinct in people who developed chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and pulmonary fibrosis.

The CANTOS trial

If future research finds that this is indeed one way that lung cancer develops, scientists can think of treating the inflammation before the cancer takes root. Canakinumab is a drug made by Novartis and which currently has the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's approval to treat inflammatory disorders. Swanton et al. were aware of a previous clinical trial called CANTOS that tested canakinumab's ability to reduce the risk of recurrent cardiac events in patients who had experienced a prior heart attack and were suffering from persistent inflammation. Its effect was modest.

However, Swanton et al., who carried out a retrospective analysis of the trial data, found that 2,300 of the CANTOS participants who received canakinumab happened to display the 14-protein signature – and the risk of lung cancer was down by 50% in this group.

The data suggested that canakinumab could be a potential drug to prevent future lung cancer in those with the 14-protein signature.

Step by step

The 14-protein signature needs to be further validated. It has been derived

from a population of limited diversity, representing the U.K., the U.S., and East Asia. If the signature is found to be relevant in many or even all populations, scientists will then have to develop a diagnostic test to detect all 14 proteins in blood plasma.

Assuming such a test also becomes available, canakinumab will have to be tested in clinical trials for its new purpose. Unfortunately, the CANTOS trial found that canakinumab could have serious side effects. The European Medicine Agency's report concluded that the drug's toxicity could outweigh its benefits.

Canakinumab is also prohibitively expensive. Treatments usually involve multiple doses over long periods of time. In the U.S., it costs \$73,000 for a year. It is neither registered nor commercially available in India, and it would be imperative to explore inexpensive alternatives with similar function and with more acceptable safety profiles.

Ultimately, if we manage to tick all these boxes, the diagnostics and the drug would be of great benefit for individuals at risk of lung cancer worldwide. The work of Swanton et al. is a step in this direction.

(S. Swaminathan is a retired professor of biology from BITS Pilani-Hyderabad and a former scientist, International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, New Delhi. ssn225@gmail.com)

THE GIST

The 14-protein signature has been derived from a population of limited diversity, representing the U.K., the U.S., and East Asia

While promising, it still needs to be further validated

If the signature is found to be relevant in many or even all populations, scientists will then have to develop a diagnostic test to detect all 14 proteins in blood plasma

BIG SHOT



Preventive measures: A drone view of farmers planting rice seedlings in a paddy field in Cirebon regency in West Java province, Indonesia, on June 3. The Indonesian government has urged farmers to immediately replant their plots, responding to the erratic forces of weather for a possible prolonged dry spell linked to El Nino. REUTERS

WHAT IS IT?

A black hole's elusive wind

Vasudevan Mukunth

For more than 50 years, astronomers have suspected that Sagittarius A*, the supermassive black hole at the centre of the Milky Way, was blowing a wind of hot gas into space. However, they couldn't find evidence of it. This has now changed if the results of a new study, using the ALMA telescope in Chile, are to be believed.

By combining five years of data from ALMA, researchers from Northwestern University, U.S., have reported a large cone-shaped clearing in the dense molecular gas surrounding the black hole. This clearing is at least 3.2 lightyears long and opens at a 45-degree angle, as if the black hole is 'blowing' away cold gas that would otherwise fall into it.

According to the study, the finding is the first definitive evidence of a "presently active" wind from Sagittarius A*. By blowing away the gas, the wind keeps too many stars from forming, which would deplete the gas and prevent future star formation. If too many stars explode when they die, they could also blow away the remaining gas, nixing the galaxy's ability to evolve.

When the black hole pulls on some gas, it swirls around instead of falling straight in. As it accelerates, the gas particles are heated by friction as the gravity pressurises them. Eventually the gas becomes a plasma burning millions of degrees hot. As per the study, just 1 g of this gas can release



An image depicting evidence of a wind blowing away from Sagittarius A*, the Milky Way's supermassive black hole. NASA

enough energy to push away 100 kg of nearby gas. The pushed gas makes up the wind.

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the hindu businessline.

WEDNESDAY - JUNE 10, 2026

Timely support

Aviation fuel relief for airlines, a welcome move

In a timely move to shield airlines from soaring fuel costs and protect state-owned oil marketing companies (OMCs) from mounting losses, the Union Cabinet last week announced a ₹10,000-crore Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) Price Stabilisation Fund.



The initiative, the latest in a series of policy interventions by the government, will enable airlines to purchase ATF at a fixed price, thereby reducing their exposure to volatility. It also addresses the under-recovery challenge faced by OMCs by providing them interest-free advances through the Demands for Grants of the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas. Continuing tensions in West Asia have kept jet fuel prices elevated. Airlines across the world are under stress. The International Air Transport Association estimates that average jet fuel prices will be 70 per cent higher year-on-year, adding nearly \$100 billion to the industry's fuel bill globally. The airline lobby group has also cut its profit outlook for 2026, projecting net margins to decline from 4.2 per cent to 2 per cent.

Indian carriers are not immune to these price shocks. In fact, given high taxation and airport charges, they may be even more exposed to business risks than many of their global peers. Aircraft lease rentals and a significant portion of maintenance expenses are denominated in US dollars, and the current weakness of the rupee is exerting additional pressure on airline finances. While domestic carriers have raised fares and introduced fuel surcharges, these measures are insufficient to offset rising costs. Air India and IndiGo have suspended operations on some domestic and international routes, underscoring the difficult operating environment. In this context, the government's move to insulate airlines from steep fuel price increases is welcome. Participation in the scheme is voluntary and will help ease immediate cost pressures for carriers that opt in. From the government's perspective, it will also help preserve regional air connectivity. Oil companies, already incurring losses on the sale of petrol, diesel and LPG, stand to benefit as well. They will receive interest-free advances from the government to compensate for losses incurred from selling ATF below actual cost. While announcing the scheme, the government said that ATF price stabilisation support would remain in force for 36 months, subject to annual review or until the advance amount is fully recovered or settled, whichever is earlier.

Yet a few questions remain unanswered. Is the ₹10,000-crore support adequate? How long will it last under current market conditions? The ATF price assumptions used in designing the scheme have not been disclosed. Indian carriers have signalled their ambitions through massive aircraft orders and expanding route networks. The one-time price stabilisation fund provides much-needed short-term relief. But if Indian aviation is to sustain its growth trajectory and compete effectively on the global stage, further policy measures will be required.

POCKET

RAVIKANTH



ANANTH KRISHNAN

Dozens of humanoid robots stand motionless in a row on the sprawling factory floor of Lingyi iTech. In one corner of this modern facility on the outskirts of Beijing, engineers take notes as robots march single-file and perform other tasks, from screwing bolts onto circuit boards to stretching to demonstrate their agility.

Lingyi emerged as a lynchpin in the Chinese supply chain over the past three decades. It is a major precision manufacturer that supplies components made in its factories in China and around the world (including one in Sriperumbudur outside Chennai), to companies like Foxconn that assemble them into iPhones, laptops, and a range of other electronics.

In the company's journey from basic electronics manufacturing to robotics is the story of two China shocks. Starting out making components for cheap Chinese electronics that flooded the globe, it then moved up the value chain, emerging as a key cog in China's push to dominate more advanced industries. The second China shock, now underway, is seeing Chinese Electric Vehicles (EVs), solar panels, and batteries decimate Western manufacturing, which is unable to compete with cost made possible not only by state support but huge investments in R&D.

Lingyi is not done there. As is the case with other Chinese firms in this space, the company is pivoting rapidly from components for EVs and advanced electronics to an industry that many in China believe will be at the heart of the next phase of advanced industrial manufacturing — robotics.

The firm's Vice President Philip Yang tells me the Beijing factory went online this April. By the end of next year, it will be making 20,000 robots annually. It has the capacity to scale up to manufacturing 100,000 units by 2028 and 500,000 a year by 2030.

And this is just one of the company's five such facilities in China.

Lingyi sits in the middle of a robotics cluster that Beijing is building in its southern Yizhuang district. It is a hub and spokes model. At the centre is the state-supported Humanoid Robot Innovation Centre. The talent pool comes from Beijing's research universities such as Peking University and Tsinghua, that are, by many metrics, fast closing the gap on the world's best research institutions when it comes to robotics and AI.

Yang believes much of the demand for humanoid robots will come from within China itself, with state policy already paving the way for use of humanoid robots in manufacturing, hazardous industrial environments, and in healthcare. With China facing a shortage of personnel for elderly care in a rapidly



REUTERS

The next China shock

WORRISOME. The country's robotics push is backed by an already established supply chain and an industrial policy aimed at making the world more dependent on China

ageing society, policymakers see humanoid robots filling the void.

This robotics push will certainly be felt beyond China's borders, and it may well be the next China shock. Lingyi alone will be making more than two million robots a year by 2030, if the demand meets its forecasts.

It remains to be seen how, as with EVs and solar panels, others can compete with an already established supply chain, and an industrial policy that is aimed at making the world more dependent on China, and China less dependent on the world.

The global response is not going to be straightforward. Indeed, there is already rising concern, especially in Europe, on the impact of China's advanced manufacturing on European firms that have long dominated this space. Whether EVs or solar panels, Europe is looking at a 30-40 per cent cost disadvantage. Closing the door, however, may constrain Europe's ability to adopt industries of the future. Therein lies the dilemma.

WHERE INDIA STANDS

India is wrestling with similar questions, especially with the continuing surge in imports from China over the past decade. If in the public imagination,

There is already rising concern, especially in Europe, on the impact of China's advanced manufacturing on European firms that have long dominated this space

cellphones, toys and cheap goods are what India is buying, these account for a very small share of the basket. It is advanced machinery, electronics, solar components and lithium batteries that India is buying in huge quantities. In 2025, India's imports grew to a record \$130 billion, out of two-way trade of \$155 billion. India accounts for only 3 per cent of China's foreign trade, but as much as 10 per cent of China's total trade surplus.

In 2014, Delhi's idea was to rope in Chinese firms under "Make in India" to manufacture in India, rather than sell to India. India laid out the red carpet for Chinese companies, including through proposals to set up dedicated manufacturing clusters in Gujarat and Maharashtra.

If Delhi's instincts were correct, neither cluster eventually took off, and as relations soured, so did India's appetite for investment.

Investment policy turned 180-degrees in early 2020, when at the start of the pandemic (and before the Ladakh tensions), India issued Press Note 3, requiring approval for all investments from countries sharing a land border with India. Investment dried up overnight.

On March 10, the Cabinet amended PN3, allowing investors with non-controlling beneficial ownership from land border countries up to 10 per cent under the automatic route. Clearance would be expedited for investments in manufacturing in capital goods, electronic capital goods, electronic components, polysilicon and ingot-wafers.

The broader context to the easing, however, is hard to miss — the harsh

dual reality of decreasing FDI and increasing reliance on Chinese manufacturing.

The hope now appears to be to engage China just as, decades ago, China engaged Japan to bring in technology through JVs, integrate into global supply chains, move up the manufacturing ladder, and ultimately reduce reliance on imports.

Chinese firms still retain the appetite to go to India, which is seen as the biggest remaining untapped large overseas market. However, this is an appetite that has been significantly diminished after what Chinese firms see as five years of scrutiny and restrictions.

COOPERATION AGREEMENTS

An even bigger problem is Beijing's increasing wariness at allowing firms in strategic sectors to get into cooperation agreements abroad, with an eye on ensuring technology in critical sectors such as batteries and robotics stays in China. The reach of export controls is widening beyond critical minerals. Last year, restrictions were imposed on exporting some types of EV batteries. That followed battery maker Gotion coming under fire in China for announcing a deal in India that involved some transfer of technology.

More recently, automaker Chery, on June 8, issued a statement to deny it would transfer any EV technology to Tata Motors under a cooperation agreement, following a social media uproar in China over the deal. Indeed, China understands more than most what is to be gained from absorbing technology through investment, and what it stands to lose if India succeeds in doing the same.

Health report: children doing better, adults less so

NFHS-6 shows rising NCD burden, and possibly a systemic lack in dealing with it. The survey has data gaps

Urvashi Prasad

The National Family Health Survey-6 is the most comprehensive picture of India's health in four years. And if you read only the government's press release, you would conclude that India's health story is largely one of progress. That reading is not wrong. It is incomplete.

The gains are genuine and significant. Institutional deliveries have risen to 90.6 per cent. Antenatal care coverage is at 95.9 per cent. Stunting in children under five has declined substantially from 35.5 per cent to 29.3 per cent. Breastfeeding within one hour of birth has improved by more than eight percentage points. Hypertension has declined nationally among both women and men. These reflect years of sustained investment in maternal and child health — and they are working. The question NFHS-6 forces is what happens to that woman after she safely delivers and turns 35.

NFHS-6 records a sharp and accelerating rise in NCD (non-communicable disease) risk factors among working-age adults. Nearly one in three women aged 15-49 is now overweight or obese — up from one

in four in NFHS-5. In urban areas, the figure reaches 42.8 per cent. Among men, the rise is from 22.9 per cent to 27.3 per cent. High blood sugar in men has risen from 15.6 per cent to 20.9 per cent in four years. In women, from 13.5 per cent to 17.8 per cent.

These are not marginal increases — they represent millions moving into metabolic risk for cardiovascular disease, diabetes, kidney disease, and cancer, in a health system still primarily organised around maternal care. The NSO's health survey, published in April, showed cardiovascular disease nearly tripling over seven years — NFHS-6 shows the conditions producing that outcome. India also carries both ends of the nutrition burden simultaneously. While obesity climbs, 19.7 per cent of women aged 15-49 remain underweight.

THE RURAL SURPRISE

NFHS-6 demolishes the assumption that NCDs are an urban, middle-class problem. Rural women's obesity stands at 25.5 per cent. Rural men's high blood sugar is at 19.7 per cent — barely below the urban figure of 23.9 per cent. The convergence is happening fast, in primary health centres without NCD protocols, districts without dietitians, communities without the financial



DIABETES CASES. On the rise

cushion to absorb a chronic illness diagnosis.

Buried in the delivery data is a figure that demands attention: caesarean sections have risen from 21.5 per cent to 27.2 per cent nationally — and to 40.5 per cent in urban areas. More than half of all births in private facilities are now delivered by C-section. India is not just medicalising birth; it is over-medicalising it, at cost to families and without evidence of commensurate health gains. NFHS-6's most significant omission is anaemia. In NFHS-5, 57 per cent of women aged 15-49 were anaemic. So were 67 per cent of children. The government launched the Anaemia Mukh Bharat programme in 2018. By

NFHS-5, anaemia had risen — from 53 per cent in NFHS-4 to 57 per cent — despite the programme's existence.

NFHS-6 does not measure anaemia. The official reason is methodological: reliability concerns about the haemoglobinometer used in previous rounds. A survey that functions as a government accountability tool has removed the indicator on which the government was most visibly failing. We do not know whether 57 per cent has become 60 per cent or fallen to 50 per cent. However, a robust ICMR survey has been promised.

India built its health system around two priorities: infectious disease and maternal and child health. What NFHS-6 also confirms — in its NCD data, in its C-section surge, in its anaemia silence, in what it measures and what it does not — is that the architecture has not kept pace with the disease burden shifting beneath it.

The gains are real. The system NFHS-6 reveals as inadequate for what comes next is just as real. A survey that celebrates the former without honestly reckoning with the latter is not a health report. It is a press release.

The writer is Senior Fellow, Pahlé India Foundation and Ex-Director NITI Aayog

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

India-US trade deal

Apropos 'India, US trade deal only after Section 301 probe is concluded' (June 9), the US has not been completely fair in either dealing with India or in negotiating on trade deal all along. The latest US salvo is the expected additional tariff under Section 301, which is archaic and does not have any relevance for the current times. Forced labour is a malady of the industrial past of many many countries, including the US. Trump has announced the 301 investigations only after the US Supreme Court has struck down his

abnormal and varying across the board tariffs imposed on most of the US trade partners. As Trump is completely transactional in his dealings with nations, India should also adopt the same mode of negotiations and root for a trade deal with 100 per cent protection for vulnerable sectors of the Indian economy.

Kosaraju Chandramouli
Hyderabad

Raising deposits

With reference to 'Mind the gap' (June 9), the rising C-D ratios of

banks are likely to create asset-liability mismatches since banks will be forced to seal the gap through high-cost market borrowings which may drain profits ultimately. Equally, the overall investor sentiment presently is subdued due to high market volatility in all the segments — equity, debt, bullion, mutual funds and angel investments. For banks, sourcing of low-cost deposits may not be easy, due to falling depositor interest in banking channels owing to low rates of interest, mounting cybercrimes,

major bank frauds, large scale diversion of depositor money to nurture dishonest promoter groups by some co-operative and private banks, etc. Apart from offering higher interest rates on deposits, banks should aim to make the best use of the recent regulatory incentives provided to garner NRI deposits and FPI investments, to supplement their treasury income.

Sitaram Popuri
Bangaluru

Disinvestment proceeds

This refers to 'Divestment mop-up in

2 months of FY 27 tops FY 25 collection' (June 9). Disinvestment is a vital capital receipt of the government. It is imperative that it uses the proceeds for productive investments and creation of assets. In other words, it should not use them for meeting the revenue expenditure, which can exacerbate the situation of inflation in the economy. Also, the government should endeavour to recover loans given to States and Union Territories and use them productively.

S Ramakrishnasayee
Chennai

Breathing space for RBI

A rate hike in the next cycle looks highly likely

Himadri Bhattacharya

As widely expected, the Monetary Policy Committee took a unanimous decision to keep the policy rate unchanged at 5.25 per cent. The MPC also voted in favour of continuation of the neutral stance.

The coordinated measures announced by the government and the RBI on the very same day to attract more foreign capital drew significant attention.

The RBI has lowered its GDP projections for FY27 to 6.6 per cent from 6.9 per cent due to the headwinds emanating from the Iran war. The possibility of below normal monsoon and El Nino conditions also weighed on its mind.

While the RBI's assessment may be realistic for the short run, there are gathering concerns surrounding the country's long-term growth story.

The country is not yet a big or even a visible player in the new-age major technology areas such as microchip manufacturing, electric vehicles and AI. At the same time, the growth of AI now poses a threat to India's services sector, dampening investment and exports.

These features have negative implications for the country's current account as well as capital account inflows by way of FDI and FPI.

INFLATION WORRIES

CPI inflation for 2026-27 has been projected at 5.1 per cent. Core inflation is projected at 4.7 per cent for 2026-27 – a rise by a full percentage point vis-à-vis 2024-25.

Apart from the fact that the projected CPI inflation for 2026-27 is half a percentage point higher than the April meeting's projection, headline inflation is expected to be very close to the upper limit of the 4+/- 2 per cent band in Q3, with a softening in the next quarter, though.

According to RBI's bi-monthly household inflation expectation survey, the inflation expectations for the next three months and one year edged up by 80 basis points and 50 basis points.

These developments would call for a tightening of the policy rate in a pre-emptive manner under the inflation-targeting framework. However, 'the MPC felt it would be prudent to wait for greater clarity to emerge'.

So a hike in policy rate would be a near certainty in the MPC's net meeting in early August.



RBI. Staying the course GETTY IMAGES

Given the country's high dependence on imported crude oil, LPG and fertilizers, on the one hand, and on short-term debt and portfolio flows for funding its current account deficit and for reserves growth, on the other, the standard metrics such as import cover etc. do not apply to it. Instead, for the sake of practicality, the adequacy of only the foreign currency assets (FCA), net of forward selling commitments should be assessed by applying the Modified Greenspan Guidotti (MGG) rule.

Net FCA as on March 31, 2026 was \$450 billion and short-term external debt (by residual maturity) was about \$330 billion. The coverage of FCA in relation to the current account deficit combined with short-term external debt, applying the MGG rule on this date was only a little over 100 per cent, which does not indicate a very comfortable situation.

The co-ordinated measures of the government and the RBI will likely spur financial capital inflows. Two of them, namely concessional forex swap to be provided till September 30, 2026 to incentivise ECBs by PSUs, and a similar facility for bearing the full hedging cost to be provided till September 30, 2026 to AD banks for raising fresh 3-5-year FCNR (B) deposits are quasi-fiscal in nature, which central banks are well-advised to avoid. However, given the trend of robust income growth of the RBI in recent years, it should be possible for it to absorb the cost of doing so.

One hopes that the forward legs of the swaps are recognised and periodically revalued and a full disclosure is made in this regard in its annual audited financial statements. One also hopes that the RBI adheres to the end date of September 30, 2026 for these facilities, as announced, and no extension thereof is allowed.

The writer is a former central banker and a consultant to the IMF. (Through The Billion Press)

Semiconductor: Energy questions

The chip industry requires huge, uninterrupted power and water supply. India's energy and chip policies need to be in sync

CAPITAL IDEAS.



RICHA MISHRA

India has achieved a massive total power capacity of over 446 gigawatts, but this may not be enough to anchor its semiconductor ambitions, as semiconductor fabrication demands a level of grid perfection, environmental stability, and resource volume that the current infrastructure may not be structurally equipped to deliver seamlessly.

It is evident that the semiconductor and the energy policies are intrinsically linked to national energy objectives. It is natural for semiconductor and energy policies to overlap, considering a standard 300mm chip factory draws hundreds of megawatts of power.

The other side is power delivery. India's power delivery network leaves much to be desired as transmission losses stand at 20-22 per cent.

A standard silicon fabrication plant requires 99.9999 per cent power uptime (known as the "six nines" standard), according to information available. In advanced manufacturing, a voltage micro-fluctuation lasting even a fraction of a milli second can lead to entire batches of multi-million dollar silicon wafers becoming completely useless.

Despite India becoming a power-surplus nation, its regional distribution grids remain vulnerable to unpredictable voltage sags, surges, and frequency fluctuations. Consequently, mega-projects require highly expensive, industrial-grade backup systems and massive dedicated substations to ensure operational stability. Global tech companies want environmentally friendly supply chains. India wants to use green energy for its new chip factories, but this creates a major problem:

The gap: Solar and wind power are unpredictable. Chip factories must run non-stop, 24/7/365.

The cost: India cannot store enough green energy yet. Building enough massive, expensive battery storage to



GUARANTEES. Chip makers need long-term deals for power, water supplies GETTY IMAGES

run a factory purely on renewables is currently impossible. If this was not enough, there are issues of high tariff and cost competitiveness.

Semiconductor manufacturing is heavily capital-intensive, and energy costs make up a massive slice of operational overheads. Electricity is one of the biggest costs for these factories. However, power prices in India change too often because factories pay higher rates to help cover cheaper power for farmers.

To compete with countries such as Taiwan, factories need long-term deals that guarantee cheap electricity. Power tariff structures across States can vary due to State regulatory commissions' rules, or cross-subsidy surcharges (where industrial users pay higher rates to subsidise agricultural sectors).

WATER NEEDS

Then there is massive water burden as producing ultra-pure water is intensely energy-demanding.

To transform standard municipal or river water into the zero-contaminant UPW required to wash silicon wafers, it must pass through extensive multi-stage reverse osmosis, deionisation, and filtration systems. This process consumes vast amounts of electricity on top of the fab's baseline manufacturing load. Power grid problems are a

worldwide phenomenon. So governments need to put in place private-sector-friendly policies that allow companies to bypass the old infrastructure and adopt modern solutions, similar to what happened in the mobile industry.

What is needed is a targeted, local infrastructure strategy that turns big policy goals into seamless, on-the-ground resource delivery. To compete effectively with global hubs such as Taiwan, South Korea, or the US, India must merge its energy and semiconductor policies into a single, synchronised industrial blueprint.

Some players believe, India can fix this by completely separating chip-making hubs from the public power grid. State governments must build independent, heavily protected power corridors for manufacturing hubs like Dholera in Gujarat and Noida in Uttar Pradesh. Chip factories must be built

To compete with global hubs such as Taiwan and South Korea, India must merge its energy and semiconductors policies into a single, synchronised industrial blueprint

right next to their own dedicated power plants. These hubs should mix non-stop nuclear or natural gas power with massive industrial backup batteries to smoothly handle even split-second drops in voltage.

To run non-stop factories on unpredictable green energy, India must update its power market rules. Regulators need to offer rewards to energy developers who mix solar and wind power with water-storage dams and massive battery networks.

Central and State policies must eliminate cross-subsidy surcharges and inter-State transmission fees specifically for semiconductor facilities. This will allow chip factories to buy cheap, green energy directly from anywhere in the country via long-term, fixed-tariff VPPAs.

The Centre recognises that building a self-sufficient chip industry is time consuming. It is actively using international partnerships to protect its supply chains from energy and material shortages by going for global agreements like the Minerals Security Partnership (MSP) and the US-India Critical Minerals Cooperation Framework ensuring long-term access to essential raw materials like gallium, indium, and rare earth elements.

These materials are vital for advanced chips, solar panels, and wind turbines. Forming joint ventures with foreign tech leaders targets the deployment of energy-efficient tools. This directly lowers the massive amounts of baseline electricity and water needed to manufacture silicon wafers.

The policy framework for semiconductor players sourcing energy in India operates as a dual-tiered system governed by Central mandates and executed via State-level policies. The India Semiconductor Mission's (ISM) aim is to insulate high-tech manufacturing from grid vulnerabilities while lowering operational costs through extensive fiscal relief and renewable integration.

By protecting chip factories from power grid problems and reducing water and energy use, India can build a globally competitive semiconductor industry. It has to be a market driven reform.

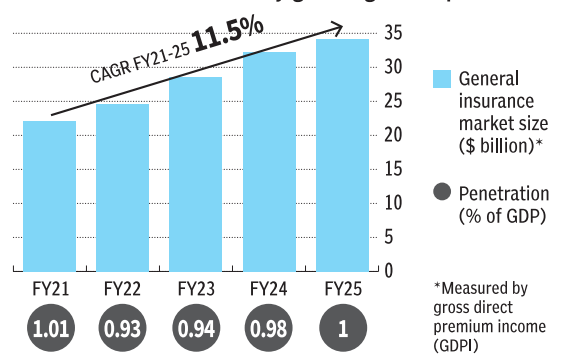
STATISTALK.

Compiled by Vasupradha Sandeep, intern | Graphic KS Gunasekar

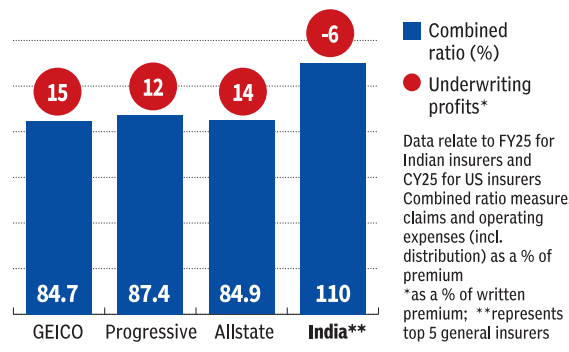
A strong case for D2C in India's general insurance

Despite the growth in India's general insurance industry, it has not translated into healthy underwriting profitability, according to Praxis Global Alliance's recent report. The industry has suffered from persistently high combined ratios (ratio of claims and operating expenses to premium) — a result of its reliance on intermediaries, often resulting in high distribution costs and low customer retention. On the other hand, evidence from Direct-to-Consumer (D2C) focused US insurers indicates stronger underwriting performance and better ROEs, suggesting the path forward for Indian insurers.

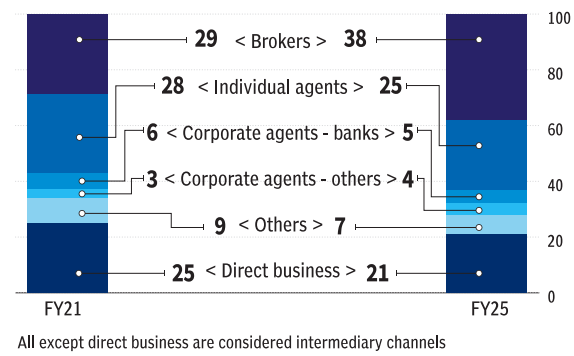
General insurance industry growing at the pace of GDP



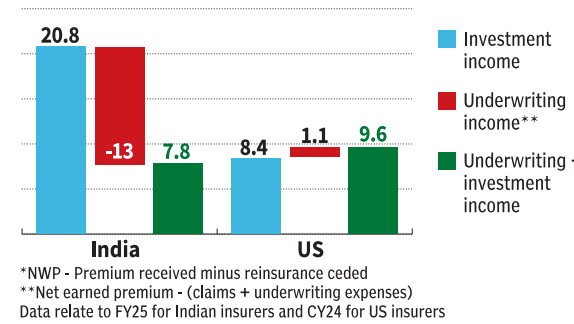
D2C focused players' strong underwriting performance



Intermediaries dominate distribution



Investment income overcompensates underwriting losses



On businessline.in

Need to improve India's meta-economic factors

From agriculture to education, the gaps in design, governance and implementation need to be addressed, Subodh Mathur

Free bus travel for women: Looking beyond the price tag

Kerala's initiative will not only lead to economic gains for women but will also empower them with more 'me time', point out Ashmy Tom and Kavitha Nambiar

Enabling big ideas for Bihar

The State must actively 'hunt' for investments, especially in labour-intensive sectors, says Manvendra Prasad

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

June 10, 2006

Maharashtra eases fuel rate hike

The price increases of Rs 4 on petrol and Rs 2 on diesel announced on Monday will be eased by Re 1 and 75 paise respectively in Maharashtra as it has decided to forgo the increased sales tax from the hikes, said Mr Murlid Deora, Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas.

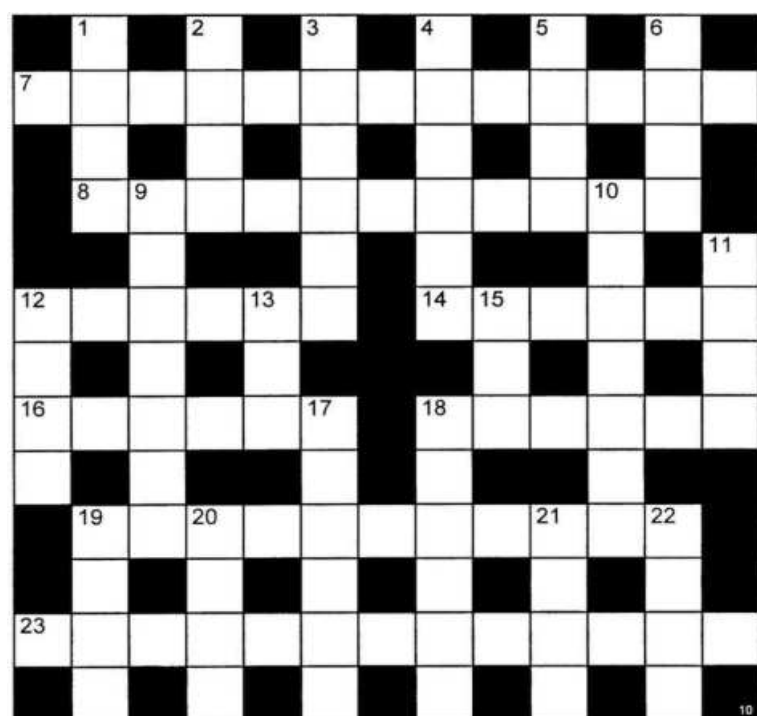
Panel to study textile ind contract employment offer

A high-level panel formed by the Centre to look into labour law flexibility is likely to take up an offer made by the domestic textile industry guaranteeing a minimum 150 days of work a year to contract employees. A meeting of the new sub-group formed under a Group of Ministers on the sector is expected to meet sometime later this month.

BSE poised to launch trading in corporate bonds

The BSE, which was chosen by the SEBI to create a platform for trading in corporate bonds, is ready with the system, according to Mr Rajnikant Patel, Managing Director and CEO of BSE. "We are ready with software and applications. Subject to regulatory clearance, we can launch the trading platform next month," he said, speaking to newsmen.

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2698



EASY

ACROSS

- Assembles on playing pitch (5,3,5)
- The plant queen-of-the-meadows (6-5)
- A pair (6)
- Arranged like spokes (6)
- Sand-trap (golf) (6)
- Convent under abbey (6)
- Those banished, living abroad (11)
- Optical enlargement (13)

DOWN

- Date tree (4)
- Table-shaped hill (4)
- Move hand over affectionately (6)
- Minor (6)
- Put papers away (4)
- Scheme (4)
- When night and day are equal (7)
- Interesting incident (7)
- Manoeuvre used in game (4)
- Solid six-sided figure (4)
- Sheltered side (3)
- Ventilate (3)
- Give validity to (6)
- Royal son (6)
- Formal test, in short (4)
- Pale red (4)
- Ballerina's short skirt (4)
- Demonstrate (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- Goes into battle to skate round the rest of the runners (5,3,5)
- Plant grown from seed we mow at random (6-5)
- Two might clue short opus like this (6)
- Sort of tyre laid with a right to return it (6)
- Ship's fuel compartment may be a hazard (6)
- Convent under abbey or one maybe to pry about (6)
- They live abroad or exist - are apt to change, though (11)
- Enlargement due to magic, if nation turns to it (13)

DOWN

- Producer of coconuts is a handy thing to have in front (4)
- Sort of hill looks the same when switching halves (4)
- Man in boat has an attack of apoplexy (6)
- It's not so important to see about Stevenson initially (6)
- A dossier about life (4)
- A place to build to put it on the map (4)
- Almost horsey beast of burden appears twice a year (7)
- Incident in play by Poe dies out (7)
- A game manoeuvre by Palestinians at start of Yom Kippur (4)
- Lump of sugar to multiply by itself, and again (4)
- Shelter the fish that turns up (3)
- The appearance of the song we breathe (3)
- Approve and sanction it in the fray anyhow (6)
- One of the first rank involved in pincer movement (6)
- What pupil sits in Essex - a major entry (4)
- Make a serrated edge on a huntsman's coat (4)
- Half-tuck taken twice if it's to skirt a dancer (4)
- How's the tail-ender come first in a theatrical production? (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2697

ACROSS 1. Accentuates 7. Thrusts 9. Fuel 11. Drive 12. Moment 14. Detrimental 18. Twinge 20. Eject 22. Meet 23. Tombola 24. Flower vases
DOWN 2. Carbine 3. Test 4. Exude 5. Study 6. Plots 8. Steerage 10. Moonbeam 13. Imp 15. Anemone 16. Stamp 17. Steak 19. Ideal 21. Star

The Indian EXPRESS
~ FOUNDED BY ~
RAMNATH GOENKA
IN 1932
BECAUSE THE TRUTH
INVOLVES US ALL

Milestone in history, long road to future

INDIA'S own words "sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas" is the animating spirit for the Narendra Modi government that crosses a historic milestone today — Modi is now the longest continuously serving elected Prime Minister India has known. "Sabka vishwas" is especially resonant. It frames both the achievement and the challenge. After all, a three-term prime ministership would not be possible without public trust that is sustained and renewed over 12 years and counting. That, too, in an environment brimming with rising aspirations and shifting engagements, impatient choices accelerated by disruptive technologies. But "sabka vishwas" is also a reminder of an unfinished journey, a challenge yet to be fully met. Be it finding a language to address the restlessness of the young, which has come to the fore in recent weeks because of a compromised examination system, or showing them the light of opportunity as headwinds batter the economy, or breaking a longer silence to assuage minority insecurities — a government that has made room for itself to reach out and do things that may even defy its own political script, needs to make the circle of trust more encompassing.

In many ways, the Modi government broke with a past that had congealed into the status quo and reaped the benefits. It put in place an architecture of welfare benefits that harnesses new technologies to streamline delivery, designed social safety nets — from health insurance to foodgrains — that have ensured stability even in times of great disruption like Covid-19. On the world stage, it has navigated a new, confident course for India in a time of war and flux and Trump tariffs. Politically, at home, it has shifted the centre of gravity to the right, while implementing its "core" commitments, from building the Ram temple to scrapping Article 370, to finding new flashpoints like "ghuspaithiya (illegal immigrant)" to keep the momentum going. Tired old favourites have been relegated, across sectors, from freeing the Padma awardees of darbaris — and there are many crowding that line — to the fading of old personnel and priorities. Twelve years on, however, it may be time for a reset. A politics of polarisation is rising, and the new elites nurse a permanent sense of grievance and, more disquietingly, a winner-takes-all policy. The government needs to send a message that it is open to talent, and that it will resist the reflex to label and domesticate it.

The crumbling of Opposition parties, one after another, in the BJP-dominant system, also speaks of shrinking spaces. Many of these parties — including the TMC — are beset by internal weaknesses. They are unable to withstand confrontation with an organised and fleet-footed adversary. And yet, a government that has won three terms must know that it will be judged not just by what it says and does, but also by whether or not it is listening. The government must talk to the people, of course, but it must also talk with their representatives across the aisle. Not to lure them across, but to engage them in conversation that helps redeem its pledge of sabka vishwas, as Nehru had put it, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially.

Mind investor sensitivities please

OVER THE last few years there has been a flight of capital from India. Foreign portfolio investors took out \$14.6 billion from the equity markets in 2024-25, \$19.6 billion in 2025-26, and have so far this year withdrawn close to \$15.8 billion. Alongside, there has been a sharp decline in net foreign direct investments (FDI). While gross FDI flows have risen from \$80.6 billion in 2024-25 to \$94.5 billion in 2025-26, net FDI flows stood at just \$7.7 billion last year, up from an even lower \$1 billion the year before. The collapse in net FDI can be traced to higher repatriation and outward investments by Indian firms. Several explanations have been put forth to explain the trends in FDI flows and investor preferences for other jurisdictions. One explanation revolves around Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs).

India's BIT 2016 model has been criticised on grounds such as "narrow definitions" and "procedural barriers" like the five-year exhaustion of local remedies before initiating international arbitration (Rethinking India's Bilateral Investment Treaties, RIS Discussion Paper). Prior to the 2016 model, India had signed 83 BITs, of which 74 were ratified. Subsequently, termination notices were sent to 68 countries/regions till March 2023 with requests to renegotiate based on the new framework. However, since then, treaties have been signed with a few countries. The central government is now remodelling its BITs framework — in the Union budget 2025-26, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman proposed that the current model BIT be "revamped and made more investor-friendly". As per a report in this paper, the key principles on which this centres are a minimum two-year period for local remedies prior to accessing international arbitration, no most-favoured nation clause, and an exclusion of tax-related provisions.

At this critical juncture, the need to attract foreign capital cannot be emphasised enough. Legal certainty must be provided and existing frameworks should be simplified as procedural barriers will only dampen investor enthusiasm. An approach more mindful of investor sensitivities is called for.

Truth on aliens is out there — handle with care

THE MARTIANS invaded Earth in 1938, but most people weren't worried. The scale of the panic created by one of history's most famous hoaxes — Orson Welles's radio dramatisation of H G Wells's novel *The War of the Worlds*, partly presented as if it were a real news report of an alien invasion — has been exaggerated. Such a trick might be even tougher to pull off in today's connected world and atomised media environment. But it's also a world of fake news, deepfakes and old-fashioned mischief. If one were to call up an orange man and introduce oneself as a little green man, one may be able to negotiate a tariff exemption for Mars.

It stands to reason, then, that the International Academy of Astronautics's updated guidance for researchers on how to deal with potential signals from extraterrestrial civilisations has been extra careful compared to the 2010 iteration. Information should be handled with "extreme care", and "best practices and tools in science communication should be employed" to convey it to non-specialist audiences. It's cautious about social-media engagement, recognising the danger of researchers being trolled.

What policies might alien societies have for such an eventual-ity? It's impossible to tell — anthropomorphising what could be radically different forms of life would be a misguided effort. But perhaps, after taking a look at humanity in all its chaos, they'll echo one part of IAA guidelines: "Handle with extreme care."

In age of AI, Pope returns to older concern: Technology, wealth, inequality



RAJA MANDALA
BY C RAJA MOHAN

ARTIFICIAL intelligence (AI) begins to transform economies, an old argument from the industrial age is returning in a new form. A Pope, a socialist senator, a populist president, and a Silicon Valley mogul are all grappling with the same question: Who should own the wealth that AI is generating?

The issue has come into sharp policy focus as President Donald Trump plans to meet America's leading AI firms at the White House to discuss an idea that would once have seemed unthinkable — giving the American public a financial stake in the companies that are profiting most from the AI revolution.

Last week, Bernie Sanders, the lone socialist in the US Senate, proposed an American AI sovereign wealth fund financed by a one-time transfer of 50 per cent of shares from the largest AI companies. Late last month, Pope Leo XIV devoted the first encyclical of his pontificate to the ethical and social challenges posed by the unfolding AI revolution.

These are different men with contradictory ideologies shaping their worldviews. But they are revisiting one of the oldest ques-

tions of modern politics: Who benefits from technological change — capital or labour? How do we balance the creation of massive wealth by new technologies with the imperatives of economic and social equity?

It is fitting that a Pope named Leo should raise this old question about the new technological revolution. In 1891, Pope Leo XIII issued the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, in an important religious response to the rise of modern capitalism. Europe was then facing the full consequences of the Industrial Revolution. Factories had created immense wealth, but they had also produced social dislocation, inequality, and labour unrest. Socialist ideas that had gained ground since the mid-19th century were now acquiring a radical character.

Rejecting both unrestrained capitalism and revolutionary socialism, Leo XIII defended the dignity of labour, workers' right to organise, and capital's moral obligations. His encyclical became one of the foundations of modern Catholic social teaching.

One hundred and thirty-five years later, Leo XIV has deliberately invoked that legacy. His encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas*, treats the AI revolution with the same ethical concern that Leo XIII accorded the industrial age. If the 19th century witnessed deepening tensions between capital and labour, the 21st, Leo XIV argues, confronts a new challenge: The relationship between human beings and the intelligent machines that threaten to take over their work.

Al without restraint, Leo XIV argues, could concentrate wealth and power in the hands of a few corpor-

Leo XIV returns to the concerns of Leo XIII. Technology creates wealth, but it also creates inequality. Politics has always been about managing the tension between the two

ations, widen inequality, and leave behind those who lack access to the new economy. The danger, in his view, is not merely technological but social — the exclusion of millions from the prosperity generated by the new machines.

These concerns are resonating in an America already anxious about the impact of AI on jobs. Major technology firms are cutting thousands of positions even as they pour billions of dollars into AI. Surveys suggest that many Americans fear that AI will shrink employment opportunities and deepen inequality. The American mood is grim: Workers are worried, and that anxiety is beginning to shape public debate.

It is interesting that some of the industry's leaders have moved in a similar direction to Sanders. OpenAI chief Sam Altman, who met Sanders last week, has been making the case for sharing the benefits of AI-generated prosperity. He has spoken of voluntary sharing of a percentage of stock, through which citizens might share in the wealth created by AI. The disagreement with Sanders is less about principle than about how far and how fast public ownership should go.

Trump says he is not opposed to Sanders's proposal. His populist political coalition has long overlapped with that of Sanders. Trump has said his administration is examining ways in which Americans might become "partners" in the AI boom. The mechanism under discussion is similar to Altman's ideas.

Not everyone in the US is impressed. Many tech giants are unenthusiastic. The Wall Street Journal has pilloried Trump for

pursuing the idea of the US government taking a stake in US tech companies. "Not long ago, it would have been hard to imagine a Republican president demanding government ownership in a private company, but here we are." Many liberal American economists, too, recoil at the thought of the US government extorting money or shares from US corporations.

But a potential convergence and accommodation might be the AI story of the moment — the acknowledgement that the current revolution is too consequential to be left to the markets alone. The first and second industrial revolutions did not produce a social compact between capital and labour overnight. Decades of conflict gave rise to the Western welfare state.

The AI revolution may demand another such adjustment. The debate is no longer only about regulating AI for safety and international security. It is also about the distribution of wealth and power in the age of intelligent machines.

In that sense, Leo XIV returns to the concerns of Leo XIII. Technology creates wealth, but it also creates inequality. Politics has always been about managing the tension between the two. The story of AI may only be the latest chapter in modern society's enduring struggle: Finding a sustainable balance between the interests of capital and society.

The writer is a contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express. He is also a distinguished professor at the Motwani Jadaeva Institute of American Studies, Jindal Global University, and holds the Korea Foundation Chair at the Council for Strategic and Defence Research, Delhi

4,399 days, the long arc of leadership



M VENKAIAH NAIDU

INDEPENDENT INDIA has seen 15 prime ministers from Jawaharlal Nehru to Narendra Damodardas Modi. They served the country in different socio-political and economic scenarios, addressing a variety of challenges to the best of their abilities. The saga of the present incumbent tells a unique story.

Today, on June 10, Narendra Modi became the elected PM with the longest continuous tenure — 4,399 days in office, surpassing Nehru's record. He has three more years to go in his term. The achievement is significant because it comes in an era of unprecedented political competition, coalition dynamics, 24-hour media scrutiny, and the rise of social media-driven public discourse.

Born to parents of modest means, Modi worked as a tea vendor in Vadnagar, Gujarat, assisting his father. To travel from there to the PM's office in South Block in the national capital is an extraordinary achievement.

His was a journey of self-realisation, of understanding Bharat, the people and their problems, envisioning the destiny of our country as "Swamin Bharat" and striving for the realisation of this vision. His mind was primarily shaped by his early association with the RSS. For most of his life, he quietly went about discharging the duties assigned by the RSS, Jana Sangh and BJP at various levels. In the process, he acquired immense organisational abilities, clarity of thought, courage to dream of India's destiny and the ability to rise to the occasion when the call of duty knocked at his door.

At 51, Modi became the youngest Chief Minister of Gujarat. He demonstrated his abilities from day one, unleashing and channelising the entrepreneurial abilities and energies of the people of Gujarat. His 13-year, unbroken tenure as CM was eventful in several ways. The Gujarat model that emerged during his tenure captured the imagination of the people of the country. The people of Bharat yearned for a leader who could deliver. They found such a leader in Modi.

Modi led the NDA to victory in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. For the first time, the BJP secured a majority on its own. I am glad to have been one of the senior leaders of the BJP who strongly pitched for Modi as PM. Modi repeated this stellar performance in

PM Modi does not believe in stereotypes. The abrogation of Article 370, abolition of triple talaq, introduction of GST reforms against much opposition, 33 per cent reservation for women in Parliament and state assemblies are clear pointers

the next two elections in a row.

PM Modi believes that Bharat's transformation can't be realised without the people's participation. Swachh Bharat was made into a people's movement with the construction of over 12 crore individual household toilets; over 4 crore houses were built for the poor; over 57 crore bank accounts opened under JAM; Rs 45 lakh crore transferred to beneficiaries under DBT; LPG connections for over 10 crore women toiling in kitchens inhaling smoke. Over 24,000 crore digital transactions through UPI made our country the global leader in real-time digital payments; 80 crore people got food support during the Covid-19 pandemic and continue to get it. Modi's philosophy is "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas".

PM Modi pioneered human resource development with a massive expansion in educational and health institutions. IITs, IIMs, and AIIMS have increased manifold across the country. Ayushman Bharat is the world's largest publicly funded health programme.

PM Modi does not believe in stereotypes. Appeasement is not the right option. The abrogation of Article 370, abolition of triple talaq, introduction of GST reforms against much opposition, 33 per cent reservation for women in Parliament and state assemblies are clear pointers.

Modi has left an indelible impression on internal and national security. Left-wing extremism is almost wiped out. Surgical strikes and Operation Sindoor taught effective lessons to those casting an evil eye on us. Our foreign policy is no different. PM Modi made it clear that it will only be aligned with national interests and not individual countries. The voice of Bharat now matters at all global dialogue tables.

I observed PM Narendra Modi's thought processes and work for a few months after he assumed office in 2014, in order to assess his mission. I then publicly stated that MODI stands for "Making of Developed India". After these 12 years, I have no hesitation in rechristening MODI as the "Man of Destiny for India". That destiny is Swamin Bharat. Bharat is safe and secure in his hands. I wish Narendra Damodardas Bharat Modi all the best in his endeavours.

The writer is the former Vice President of India

My generation understands technology, not privacy



VANSHIKA VERMA

OUR PARENTS taught us not to trust strangers. Not to answer every question they asked. Not to give away our school's name, our address or family details casually. Not to let someone into the house if they could not account for themselves. That wisdom passed through generations, shaped by a simple instinct: Certain information, once given away, cannot be taken back.

I thought about that wisdom recently in a room full of people who would have agreed completely with it and then gone right back to scrolling. A friend of mine had just bought a smart ring. The recommendation came from his gym trainer. It tracked sleep, heart rate, recovery scores, activity levels, and stress indicators through skin temperature. Every morning, he checked his data, adjusted his training accordingly, and discussed the numbers with his trainer. Everyone in the room wanted one. So did I. A device that could optimise your life felt efficient, aspirational, and extremely cool. But when I asked where the data went, the room was silent for some seconds, then went indifferent. One friend wanted to know, "Who is going to look at my sleep data?" Another checked whether the ring came in different colours. My friend assumed the information stayed on the app.

My generation cannot simply be described as ignorant. We are educated, digitally fluent, and fully aware that privacy exists as both a concept and a right. But knowing privacy exists and knowing how to practice it as a dynamic right are two different things. The strangers our parents warned us about are no longer behind the gate. They sit behind a permission screen, a cloud server or an app that promises to make life easier. They do not knock. They simply wait for us to click "agree".

The data we give away is not trivial. Every OTP, KYC submission, Aadhaar-linked verification and food-delivery profile becomes part of an intimate portrait of who we are. India is not without a legal response: The Supreme Court has recognised privacy as a fundamental right, and the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, and the Rules framed under it, now establish a framework around consent, notice, and user rights. But what is the use of privacy being a fundamental right if we treat it as an irritation?

We need to explore models where children are taught from a young age that data privacy principles must be practised before they learn how to be online. Legislatures, policymakers, institutions, parents, and users share this responsibility.

Privacy has a serious image problem. It is often described as something technical, legal, or distant, when in reality it is deeply personal. Making it feel as important as it truly is will require curriculum, conversation, media literacy, and a greater willingness from companies to be accountable for the systems they build, presenting them in a transparent and understandable manner to the very generations their marketing seeks to attract.

The challenge is not learning how to use technology. It is learning how to live with it, to grow alongside it rather than simply surrender to it, to enjoy its benefits while understanding its costs, and to ask better questions before we click "agree".

The writer is a final-year B.A. LL.B. student at Symbiosis Law School, Noida

40 YEARS AGO

June 10, 1986



Punjab-Haryana row

IN SPITE of best efforts by the Centre, both at political as well as official level, there could be no settlement between the chief ministers of Punjab and Haryana on various issues connected with the territorial transfer on June 21. The Central leadership was keen that both the States should come to some settlement before the Venkatarajah Commission gives its report on June 10. The Congress (I) vice-president, Arjun Singh, had been holding talks with the Chief Ministers of the two States, Bansi Lal of Haryana and Surjit Singh Barnala of Punjab. The Congress (I) vice-president, Mr Arjun Singh, had been holding talks with the Chief Ministers of the two States.

Chavan, Hegde meet tomorrow

THE CHIEF Ministers of Maharashtra and Karnataka will meet in Bangalore in an attempt to defuse the situation in the disputed border areas rocked by violence for the past nine days resulting in the loss of six lives besides injuries to scores of others. The meeting between the Chief Ministers comes after hectic political consultations in the past few days between the senior leaders of different political parties in Bombay, Bangalore and Delhi.

Revolt brewing

A REVOLT is brewing in the Haryana Congress (I) ranks over what is considered a rather raw deal handed out to the state on

12 held for spying

THE TAMIL Nadu police arrested about a dozen people on charges of spying. The arrested persons included some foreigners also who were masquerading as Sri Lankan militants. The police are investigating the involvement of a number of local people in the spying activities, on the confession of the arrested persons.



Modi milestone is affirmation of strength and openness of Indian democracy



NITISH KUMAR

IN A democracy as large and competitive as India's, public trust is hard to earn and even harder to sustain. Yet, despite constant political contestation and intense public scrutiny, Narendra Modi has continued to enjoy the confidence of the people. By becoming India's longest continuously serving elected prime minister, he has set a new benchmark in democratic politics. Although we come from different parts of India, PM Modi and I belong to a generation whose political consciousness was shaped by the Emergency. We witnessed first-hand the assault on democratic freedoms and participated in the movement that sought to restore them. That struggle was not merely a political event but a formative experience that shaped our understanding of public life and democratic values.

For decades, there was a perception that the highest offices were reserved for a privileged few or those born into influential political families. PM Modi's journey has challenged that notion. Rising from humble beginnings to occupy the highest elected office, he has become a source of inspiration for millions of young Indians, especially those from modest backgrounds. His story reinforces the belief that in a vibrant democracy, determination, hard work, and ability can overcome barriers of birth and circumstance. This milestone is also a powerful affirmation of the strength and openness of Indian democracy.

As a follower of Dr Ram Manohar Lohia, Loknayak Jayaprakash Narayan and many other great socialist leaders, I have always viewed politics as a means to ensure the welfare of the people. Helping people rise above poverty and live a life of dignity should be the highest priority of any political leader. In this respect, PM Modi has an impressive record. With his sharp focus on poverty eradication, the NDA government has helped bring 25 crore people out of poverty. Toilets, bank accounts, houses, gas connections, tap water, health insurance coverage and many other basic necessities have reached crores of

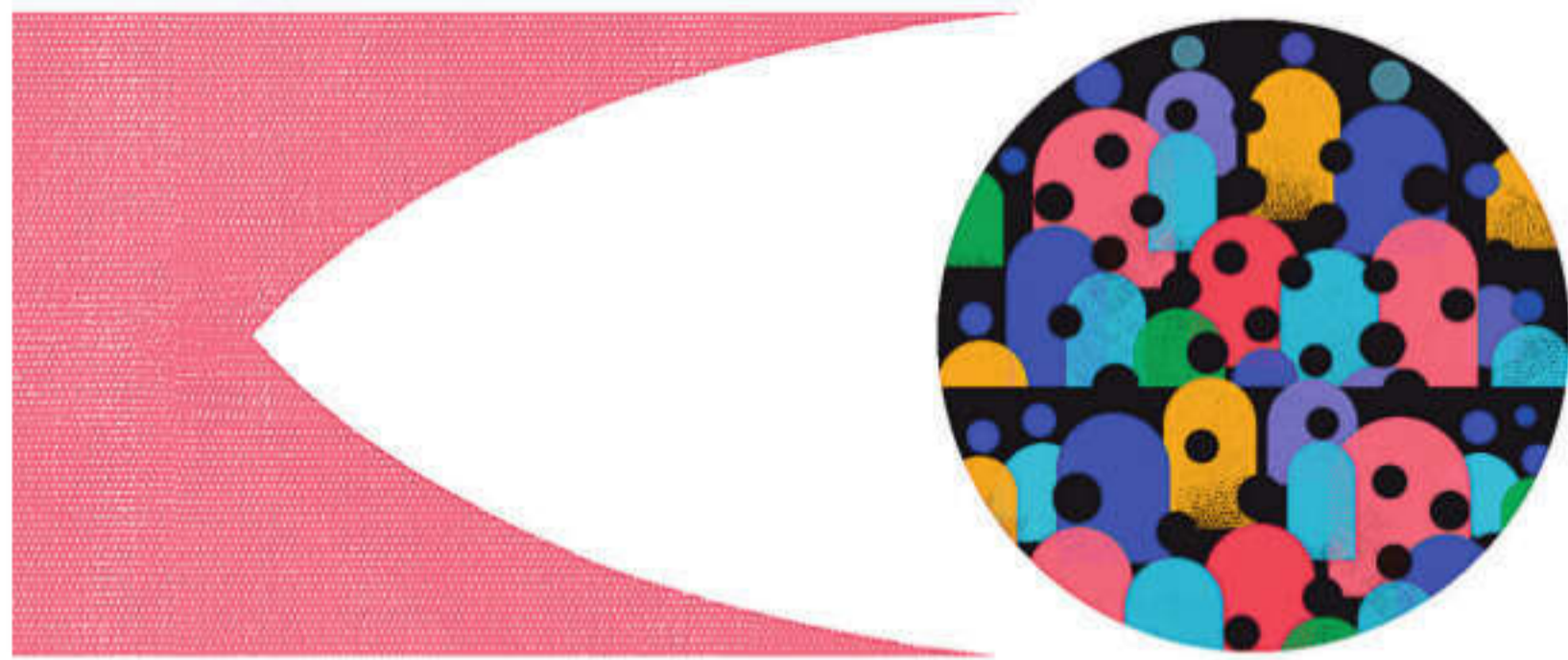


ILLUSTRATION: C.R. SASIKUMAR

people. Large sections of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, backward classes, extremely backward classes, women, poor families and first-generation beneficiaries of development programmes have now begun to see themselves as active participants in India's growth story. Youth have found new entrepreneurship opportunities through special schemes. Bringing these groups into the mainstream of national development has been the most important catalyst in ensuring social justice.

I have also seen the emphasis PM Modi has placed on women's welfare and dignity. Many of his schemes have directly benefited women and reduced hardships in their daily lives. It has been my experience in Bihar that when women are at the centre of development efforts, society progresses faster. Little wonder that the successes of our Jeevika experiment in Bihar are now spoken about globally.

Having served as chief minister for many years, I know the challenges associated with ensuring that benefits reach the intended beneficiary. Good intentions alone are not enough. Effective implementation is important. I have also seen how the ability to convert policy decisions into results requires constant monitoring, reforms, administrative focus and attention to detail. A defining feature of PM Modi's leadership has been his emphasis on ensuring that governance translates into tangible outcomes for citizens. He has consistently focused on efficiency, transparency and accountability. Through the extensive use of technology, direct benefit transfers and robust moni-

toring mechanisms, the gap between policy formulation and implementation has been significantly reduced. As government benefits reach people more effectively and with fewer leakages, public trust in institutions is strengthened. This trust is further reinforced by the PM's continuous engagement with citizens, helping foster a stronger connection between the government and the people.

PM Modi's political trajectory includes a long and successful stint as CM of Gujarat. In fact, he will soon complete 25 years of continuous service at the helm of an elected government. This experience at the state and national levels has given him a deep understanding of the needs of states. His tenure as PM has been marked by a strong commitment to cooperative federalism. During my tenure as CM, I personally experienced his support for the development of Bihar, irrespective of political circumstances. I am especially inclined to mention the stupendous support that Bihar got during the 2024-25 and 2025-26 budgets, including the establishment of the Makhana Board and the power plant in Bhagalpur, and funds for management of floods and a host of infrastructure projects.

PM Modi has great respect for the unique culture and traditions of Bihar. He has showcased Bihar's heritage on the global stage by gifting makhana, Madhubani paintings and other products from the state to international dignitaries. He ensured that Jannayak Karpoori Thakur was conferred the Bharat Ratna, a long-pending demand that was unfulfilled for decades. Compared to the decade before 2014, support and investment

from the Centre have increased significantly. The construction of important bridges across the Ganga, the expansion of national highways, the development of airports, and rapid upgrades in railway infrastructure are helping drive Bihar's growth. Particularly commendable is the transformation taking place in railway infrastructure, something that has always been close to my heart. The introduction of new trains, such as Vande Bharat, has improved the ease of travel. Railway electrification and other modernisation projects have gathered remarkable momentum under PM Modi.

I have always practised and supported zero tolerance for corruption. One of the qualities that endears PM Modi to the people is his firm stance against corruption. It is rare to see leaders who have spent decades in positions of power without a single stain on their integrity. Along with curbing avenues for corruption through institutional reforms, he has also demonstrated the political will to pursue cases against corrupt politicians and officials through the legal process.

A notable aspect of PM Modi's tenure has been the way India has gained greater weight on the global stage. As an Indian, it makes me proud to see our voice being welcomed with respect in matters relating to the economy, climate change, technology, health or cooperation. While maintaining strong relations with different countries and groups, PM Modi has consistently stood for peace and progress. As a result, the world increasingly looks towards our nation with hope as a major driver of global growth in the 21st century.

Having spent many decades in public life, I know that leadership demands continuous effort, relentless hard work and discipline. It requires constant travel, regular engagement with people, detailed review of government work, and, at the same time, the ability to remain connected to a larger vision. PM Modi's tireless energy and dedication have helped him retain the confidence of the people for such a long time. As he becomes the longest continuously serving elected PM of India, it is an occasion to celebrate PM Modi's contribution to public life and wish him many more milestones ahead. I congratulate him on this historic achievement and wish him good health and continued success in serving the nation.

The writer is a Rajya Sabha MP and former chief minister of Bihar

Modi's challenges: Diversity, dissent, delimitation



NEERJA CHOWDHURY

IF THERE is a prime minister that Narendra Modi can be compared with, it is Jawaharlal Nehru," Dr Karan Singh told this writer four years ago. As the country's oldest politician, who has worked with all the PMs of India, Dr Singh conjectured that Narendra Modi "would like to surpass" Jawaharlal Nehru as PM.

On June 10, Modi overtakes Nehru as India's longest continuously serving "elected PM", completing 4,399 days in office, as opposed to Nehru's 4,398 days — counting from 1952, when he was formally elected in the first general election, to May 1964, when he died in office. The ruling dispensation does not count his years as PM from 1947 to 1952, when he was "appointed" under a transitional constitutional arrangement and not through a general election.

Given the dramatically different contexts, it wouldn't be fair to compare India's first PM with its 14th, although both have been mass leaders who brought far-reaching changes.

That India accepted both Nehru and Modi at different times shows the country's own journey. Nehru's appeal lay in his background as a Harrow-Cambridge educated, aristocratic figure who gave up his privileges for the rough and tumble of the freedom struggle. Modi's appeal is in his humble beginnings as a figure who rose up the ranks to the pinnacle of power. That he has retained the trust of a large section of people even after 12 years in power is a formidable achievement.

Nehru laid the foundations of modern, democratic, secular institutions, and tried to make the minorities feel secure in a country wracked by Partition and the exchange of 14 million refugees — while helping craft a liberal Constitution that was to guide the Republic. Modi, who fulfilled the core agenda of his party — the construction of the Ram Temple, the abrogation of Article 370 and the enactment of a ban on triple talaq as part of the exercise to legislate a uniform civil code, which the BJP-ruled states are opting for — is now set to pursue the "1,000-year civilisational project" that his party and its mentor, the RSS, are committed to.

Under Modi, the BJP came to power on its own for the first time in 2014. He widened its base while constantly adding to his appeal, from "Hindu Hriday Samrat" to the protector of the poor and disbursing of social welfare schemes.

Under him, the BJP expanded its footprints in areas where it did not exist, as in the eastern part of India. Today it is firmly in the saddle in Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha, Assam and most of the Northeast, apart from the Hindi heartland and the western part of India. Today, Modi looks invincible. Yet, no other prime minister evokes reactions as sharp and divergent as Modi — whether it is on the Hindu-Muslim question or the hardening BJP-Opposition divide.

As he prepares for a fourth term, three "D"s sum up his challenges: Diversity, dissent, and delimitation. How he handles them will ultimately shape his legacy.

As he overtakes Nehru, and with Hindus having grown more confident in the last decade, will Modi now shift gears and try to win Muslim opinion to his side in a true spirit of "sabka saath, sabka vikas"? His dream of a Viksit Bharat by 2047 can hardly be achieved if 200 million Muslims are alienated. India's diversity not only holds the country together but is an inherent aspect of its democracy.

While democracy in India has devolved, with power moving to communities that were once on the margins, there is a parallel process underway, which has brought institutions like the media, judiciary, and Parliament under pressure.

Dissent is about holding a government to account. But it is also about generating new ideas, breaking new ground, and finding a new way of doing things. It is about the young being unafraid to speak their mind. That can only happen if questions are asked all the time. This is what leads to creativity — it alone can make India compete on the world scene.

Delimitation will follow the current Census exercise. Unless handled right, this "D" word has the potential to divide India along north-south lines. Today, there is also a political divide on those lines, with the ruling BJP in power in the North and Congress and regional parties in the South.

Modi is the helmsman of a nation of 1.4 billion, most of whom are under 35. They are politically assertive, as seen in Tamil Nadu, where actor C Joseph Vijay became chief minister. It has led to the unprecedented digital phenomenon of the Cockroach Janta Party; its offline impact may be limited, but it is a wake-up call to the established parties to take note of what young India is saying.

Few people are catapulted to power by historical forces to shape the destiny of their nations. Modi is one of them. So was Nehru. Applaud him or criticise him, Narendra Modi is not done yet — he can still spring surprises. History, for him, is a work in progress.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express, and has covered the last 11 Lok Sabha elections. She is the author of How Prime Ministers Decide

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dignified marriage

A COUPLE living separately for 15 years clearly indicates that the marital relationship has ceased to exist in substance, even if it continues legally on paper ("In law, need to write a new marriage story", *IE*, June 9). Prolonged litigation and the forced continuation of such marriages often lead to emotional distress, financial burdens, and social complications for both parties. While the Supreme Court can grant relief by invoking its constitutional powers, ordinary courts do not possess the same authority. There is a strong need to amend the Hindu Marriage Act to include irrevocable breakdown of marriage as an independent ground for divorce.

Bal Govind, Noida

THE SC has rightly observed that it is unfair to force a couple to remain married when the marriage has effectively been dead for years ("In law, need to write a new marriage story", *IE*, June 9). The Court has advocated a provision under which couples may separate if a marriage has irretrievably broken down and there is no reasonable prospect of reconciliation. Any such legislation must also safeguard women's rights relating to maintenance, property, residence, and child custody.

Veda Chidanand, Bengaluru

French Open win

ZVEREV'S CASE illustrates a pattern that Indian tennis would do well to observe ("When the Grand Slam crown isn't enough", *IE*, June 9). Domestic talent that consistently reaches the highest levels of international competition often continues to face perception gaps that results alone cannot bridge. For India, the lesson is that developing elite players takes sustained investment. Reaching the quarterfinals or semifinals of a Grand Slam should be seen as a significant national achievement, not a footnote to someone else's victory.

Prajesh Paramasivan, Neelambur



MANAV SACHDEVA

MORE THAN 100 days into the conflict in West Asia, the dominant assumption is that Iran remains the main obstacle to regional peace. Yet the events of the recent past suggest a more uncomfortable possibility. The greatest obstacle to an off-ramp may not be Tehran at all, but Benjamin Netanyahu. The conventional narrative portrays him as a leader seeking ever-greater security guarantees before accepting peace. But, his "eternal war" approach may not be the pathway to peace; it may be the mechanism by which peace is indefinitely deferred. A genuine settlement would reopen questions that war postpones. It would bring renewed attention to accountability, coalition instability, and the legal challenges that have shadowed Netanyahu's premiership for years.

This is not unique to Israel. History is filled with leaders who discovered that the end of conflict posed greater risks to their political future than its continuation. But the consequences today extend far beyond Israel's borders. The Palestinian, Lebanese, Iranian, and Gulf Arab populations alike find themselves trapped within a conflict whose continuation threatens lives and livelihoods. The world economy is reeling, and India, too, is not insulated from the economic fallout.

The irony is that the US may ac-

His story reinforces the belief that in a vibrant democracy, determination, hard work, and ability can overcome barriers of birth and circumstance

There is a barrier to peace — and it is not Iran

tually have a plausible off-ramp. Donald Trump, despite his reputation as a disruptor, is temperamentally well-suited to declaring victory and moving on. The substance matters less than the narrative. A diplomatic arrangement that caps enrichment, reduces tensions in the Gulf, and lowers the risk of direct confrontation could easily be presented as a triumph. Maritime guarantees could be framed as evidence of American strength. Whether such claims would fully reflect reality is beside the point. Political narratives are rarely judged by their precision.

A limited US-Iran accommodation may serve both their interests. But for Netanyahu, it would reduce the centrality of the Iranian threat in his politics, constraining Israel's freedom of military action. It would weaken the claim that permanent emergency is the only viable framework for the region. This is why the concept of the spoiler matters. Spoilers fear the consequences of peace more than those of continued conflict.

They do not necessarily oppose negotiations. Instead, they introduce new conditions, expand objectives, question timing, or create new realities that make compromise harder. The spoiler does not need to defeat peace. It merely needs to ensure that peace never quite arrives.

There was a reason successive US

administrations approached direct confrontation with Iran cautiously. Iran is not Iraq or Libya. It sits at the centre of a web of maritime routes, energy corridors and proxy networks that extend far beyond its borders. The Strait of Hormuz remains one of the most consequential chokepoints in the world economy. Escalation rarely remains local. Once the hornet's nest is disturbed, nobody controls the direction of the swarm. Each round of escalation creates pressure for another.

Yet the incentives facing key actors increasingly point in the opposite direction. Political careers and coalitions depend on conflict. In such an environment, peace becomes a threat. The path forward requires more than just diplomacy. It needs the incentives that make perpetual conflict politically useful to be changed. Escalation must become costlier than restraint, and political survival must be separated from permanent crisis. That is a difficult task. It offers no breakthrough and no guarantee of success. And it begins by acknowledging an uncomfortable possibility: The principal obstacle to peace may no longer be the side everyone assumes. Sometimes, the greatest barrier to an off-ramp is not the adversary across the table, but the ally standing beside you. And with friends like these, who needs enemies?

The writer is a diplomat and former UN aid worker

A limited US-Iran accommodation may serve both their interests. But for Netanyahu, it would reduce the centrality of the Iranian threat in his politics



NEERAJ BUNKAR AND DHEERAJ RAYALU TADI

PEDDI OPENS with Boman Irani, who, over the next three hours, will try to unravel a story buried in the depths of India's sporting saga. What follows is the grand introduction of the film's eponymous protagonist, accompanied by heaps of praise that border on religious fervour. This formulaic opening marks *Peddi*, a fresh addition to the growing line of caste-conscious Telugu cinema. The story revolves around Peddi and the hardships that shape him into a crossover athlete for the larger benefit of his community.

The film falls into a familiar trap of message-driven Telugu cinema: It shines a light

on social issues but ultimately weakens the very cause it seeks to champion. Its foundational idea is the treatment of Peddi's community, whose characteristics are loosely based on generic representations of Dalit and tribal communities. Telugu "social change" films often capitalise on sympathy generated through depictions of poverty and ostracism while avoiding any specific social identity. This prevents the film from engaging with caste oppression in concrete terms.

As the narrative unfolds, a familiar figure emerges: The Herculean hero destined to save his community through seemingly supernatural abilities despite generations of deprivation affecting nutrition, education, and social opportunity. The feudal ghost of Telugu cinema remains intact. The saviour narrative survives; only the identity of the saviour has changed. Social justice once

again becomes dependent on an exceptional individual rather than a collective struggle.

Sports cinema has repeatedly shown how athletic achievement can challenge social barriers. Figures such as Muhammad Ali, Jackie Robinson, and Palwankar Baloo transformed sport into a site of resistance. Yet, *Peddi* uses the protagonist's athletic range primarily to elevate him into a larger-than-life figure. As a result, it becomes difficult to invest emotionally in his journey.

The film's understanding of marginal-

'Peddi' uses the protagonist's athletic range primarily to elevate him into a larger-than-life figure. As a result, it becomes difficult to invest emotionally in his journey

ised identities also remains limited. Criticism rightly emerged over Janhvi Kapoor's character being framed largely through a sexualised lens and the justification of Peddi's non-consensual behaviour as a rustic form of romance. Instead of challenging stereotypes, it reinforces the notion that marginalised people require (re)finement by supposedly more "civilised" social groups.

Equally troubling is the "labour as training" arc borrowed from classic sports dramas. Peddi's labour-intensive tasks — already associated with his social identity — are later (re)framed as athletic training, while "upper-caste" wrestlers undergo no comparable process. In another context, such scenes might symbolise discipline or humility. Here, however, they risk normalising unequal treatment and reducing structural exploitation to character-building.

As individuals from marginalised communities, we strongly support marginalised heroes. The film's greatest weakness is its inability to translate genuine emotions to the audience. Even as filmmakers recognise the importance and commercial value of marginalised storytelling, many narratives remain trapped within feudal structures. What resonates is not the invincible hero but the vulnerable one whose life is constantly at risk for even the smallest act of rebellion. *Peddi* is a well-intentioned step forward in storytelling of the marginalised, but it ultimately undermines its own message through misogyny, an overpowered protagonist, and a hollow understanding of social justice.

Bunkar is a researcher specialising in caste and cinema, and Tadi is a researcher with interests in psychology, caste, cinema, and philosophy

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

• DEMOGRAPHY

Across world, why fewer people are having children

From India to Sweden to Japan, fertility rates are falling irrespective of economic and social conditions. A look at the factors driving this



RISHIKA SINGH

A FINANCIAL INCENTIVE of Rs 30,000 for a couple upon the birth of their third child. More state-funded IVF attempts for first-time parents. A plan to orient around 300,000 units of public housing towards households raising children.

These are just some of the many policies introduced by governments across the world in recent years to encourage child-bearing. Last month, Andhra Pradesh became one of the first Indian states to announce payments for having more than two children. Sweden and Japan have also proposed various solutions to the common concern of demographic decline.

In some ways, the transition has been expected. Many societies see smaller population increases over time, owing to improvements in health, education and economic indicators. But the pace and scope of this transition are unexpected.

Rapid TFR decline

Among the most important figures in population growth is the total fertility rate, or TFR. It is the average number of children that a woman is expected to bear in her lifetime. A "replacement rate" of 2.1, that is, an average of two children per woman to replace the mother and father, is considered ideal to ensure population stability.

As of 2023, in over two-thirds of the total global population, TFRs were below 2.1.

From a global average of 5.3 in the early 1960s, TFR stood at 2.2 in 2024 — just above the replacement rate. In this period, the TFR in India declined from 5.9 to 2 — just below the replacement rate. Announcements like Andhra's mark a reversal from a few generations ago, when the population boom was among the biggest crises for the nation and family planning policies were introduced.

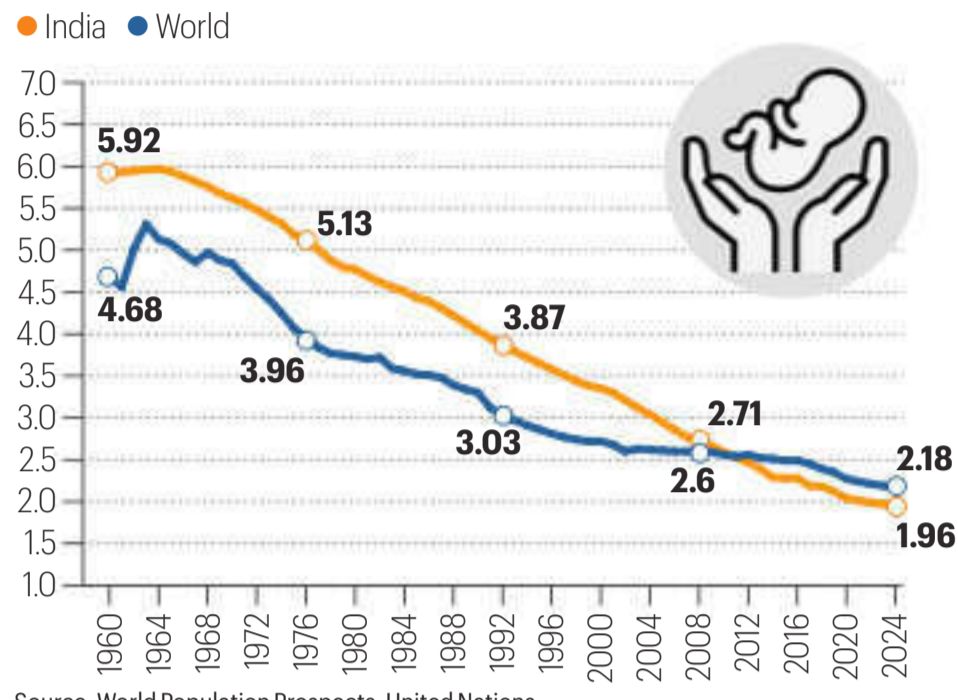
Moradhvaj Dhakad, a scientist and Marie Curie Research Fellow at the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research in Rostock, Germany, told *The Indian Express*: "The decline has happened much faster than UN projections from around a decade ago, which expected TFR to fall to under 2.1 between 2030 and 2035, but India achieved this level around 2020."

Many drivers

According to the demographic transition theory, as societies move from low economic growth and education levels to prosperity,

• Fertility rates in freefall

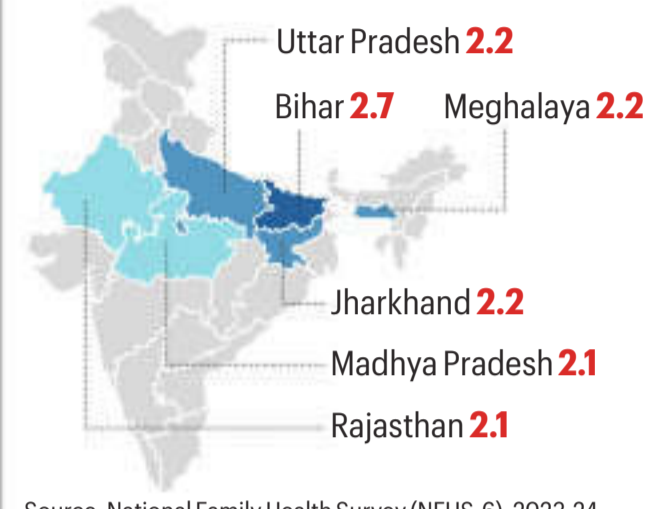
The total fertility rate (TFR), the average number of children that a woman is expected to bear in her lifetime, has declined across the world and in India.



Source: World Population Prospects, United Nations

• In most states, fertility below replacement level

The map shows the only states with TFR at or above 'replacement level' (2.1 children per woman). This is the level needed to maintain a stable population



Source: National Family Health Survey (NFHS-6), 2023-24

both birth and death rates fall, with little overall change in population as a result. But the widespread shift in just a few decades has prompted the search for other factors.

Income is often a starting point. Martin Kolk, an Associate Professor at the Stockholm University Demography Unit and Department of Sociology, told *The Indian Express* that in the past, people with smaller incomes had more children in many countries. "It now appears that in more and more contexts, people with higher incomes are actually having more children, including rich East Asian societies such as Japan (TFR 1.1) and South Korea (TFR 0.7, among the lowest globally). It's the richest individuals who have more children, but in middle-income countries, you often see the reverse pattern still," he said.

Dhakad also chalked this up to urbanisation, which has raised living costs. Women's increased educational attainments, participation in the workforce and ability to make reproductive decisions also matter. In sub-Saharan Africa, with TFRs as high as 4 and 5, high levels of teen pregnancies have been attributed to limited use of contraception, low education levels and early marriages.

The endurance of traditional gender roles means that women end up shouldering domestic responsibilities in addition to working towards their career aspirations, and many then choose not to have children, or have fewer children. While India has a low share of women in the workforce, strides in health and education could have played a role, Dhakad said.

"Government population control cam-



paigns such as *hum do, hamaare do* further spread family planning messaging even among the less educated groups, and in rural areas. Moreover, it has been found that development is the best contraception... Parents realise that they do not need to have more children to ensure their survival into adulthood," he said.

Still, these factors do not tell the whole story of countries such as Sweden (with a TFR of 1.4), which are rich and have substantial state support for women after childbirth, alongside men making larger contributions to domestic responsibilities.

Kolk said these policies have helped prevent an even steeper decline in TFR: "In the Nordics, fertility has decreased from high to moderate levels and in southern Europe, it has fallen from low to very low levels. In these different contexts, the explanation is likely related to pro-family policy." "But if we want to understand why fertility is falling in basically all countries from 2010 and 2015 to 2025 — both in systems with more and less generous family policy — cultural reasons are probably more important... people prioritise childbearing less," he said.

Australian demographer Peter McDonald has argued that two major trends can be traced back to the second half of the 20th century. The first was a rise in social liberalism, marked by individuals re-examining social norms, choosing what suited them and focusing on individual aspirations. The other was the withdrawal of the welfare state in many Western economies. One byproduct of these trends was that having children was no longer a mandate for living a good life.

Preparing for the transition

By 2050, the proportion of elderly persons in India is expected to increase to 20.8% of population, that is around 34.7 crore.

This would necessitate the need to invest in healthcare, social support and care infrastructure.

• POLITICS

Can a political party use cockroach as symbol? What EC rules say

Damini Nath
New Delhi, June 9

EVER SINCE Chief Justice of India Surya Kant's "cockroach" remark, the image of the insect has come to be used by those protesting against the statement as well as the satirical Cockroach Janta Party (CJP).

CJP is not a political party but a "youth pressure group", according to its founder Abhijeet Dipke. Dipke has not ruled out applying for registration as a political party with the Election Commission (EC) in the future, but for now, the group has an online presence and held its first protest at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on June 6.

Even if the CJP, or any other group for that matter, were to register as a party and apply for the cockroach as its election symbol, the EC is unlikely to allot it. Here's why.

What do the rules say?

The EC allots election symbols to parties

and independent candidates as per the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968. According to the Order, the recognised national and state parties' candidates are allotted the reserved symbol of their respective parties — for instance, the lotus for the BJP, or the raised hand for the Congress. For unrecognised parties, which are registered parties that have not met the electoral performance criteria for the national or state party tag, or independent candidates, the EC allots symbols from a list of "free symbols". These candidates and unrecognised parties can request for their choice of symbol from the list, but they are not assured of getting the same.

What kinds of symbols are allowed?

In the list of free symbols, which the EC revises from time to time, images include fruits, vegetables, household appliances, farm equipment, sports equipment, etc. The latest list, published by the EC in May 2025,

Picking a poll symbol

The EC allots symbols from a list of "free symbols" for either registered parties that haven't met electoral performance criteria for the national or state party tag or independent candidates.

The latest list, published in May 2025, has 184 symbols, including air-conditioner, balloon, doorbell, dustbin, frying pan, jackfruit and grapes.

has 184 symbols, including AC, balloon, doorbell, dustbin, frying pan, jackfruit and grapes. Some household items such as immersion rod, latch, mixer, toothbrush, and TV remote are also on the list. Also present are a variety of fruits and vegetables as well as other food, including cake and toffees.

The EC list also says that certain symbols can be allotted freely except in certain states and Union Territories. For instance, the apple can be allotted to a party "in all States and Union Territories except in the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, Kerala & Karnataka".

This is because in the states mentioned above, the symbol has already been allotted to a recognised state party. This means two different recognised parties in two different states can have the same election symbol: there is no rule against it, and these parties are unlikely to contest against each other.

Can a creature be an election symbol?

Following representations from animal welfare activists in the 1990s, the Election Commission stopped allotting animals as election symbols.

Former Union Minister and founder of People for Animals (PFA) Maneka Gandhi wrote in a post on the PFA website that for the 1989 Tamil Nadu Assembly election, the AIADMK faction led by J Jayalalitha was allotted the rooster as its symbol. She claimed that thousands of roosters were tied to the top of fast-moving vehicles during the election campaigning, leading to many of these birds dying.

The Bahujan Samaj Party, which was formed prior to the ban, still retains its election symbol, the elephant, making it one of the few exceptions. With the EC's prevailing stand against allotting animals as election symbols, the cockroach symbol is unlikely to be granted if anyone seeks the same, EC officials said.

• TELECOM

In HC relief for Airtel and Vi, the lengthy row over spectrum charge

Soumyarendra Barik
New Delhi, June 9

IN A major financial and regulatory reprieve for telecom operators Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea (Vi), the Bombay High Court Monday struck down the Centre's one-time spectrum charge demand estimated at more than Rs 24,000 crore. The court also set aside all consequential actions taken by the government based on the disputed demands. "The respondent (Centre) has not been able to justify the said decisions and its action of levying one-time spectrum charge retrospectively upon the petitioners," the court said in its order. However, the broader legal battle over the charge remains pending before the Supreme Court. Here is what to know.

How airwaves are governed in India

Devices such as phones require signals to connect. These signals are carried on airwaves, which must be sent at designated frequencies to avoid interference.

The Union government owns all publicly available assets within the country, which includes airwaves. These airwaves are called spectrum, which is subdivided into bands of varying frequencies. The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) under the Ministry of Communications regularly auctions these airwaves to private companies.

The current dispute traces its origins to the telecom

licensing regime of the 1990s. Under the National Telecom Policy (NTP) of 1994, private operators such as Airtel and Idea Cellular were granted licences to offer mobile services, paying a fixed licence fee as well as separate charges for the use of spectrum. However, the policy was overhauled in 1999 after the government found that the original framework had failed to generate the expected growth in the sector.

Under NTP-99, operators were allowed to migrate to a revenue-sharing model under which licence fees and spectrum-related payments were linked to a share of their revenues rather than fixed annual charges.

Over the following years, the government and the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) introduced a series of changes governing the allocation of additional spectrum. Operators that received bandwidth beyond the initial allocation had to pay higher revenue-share-based spectrum charges. Industry bodies accepted this framework and withdrew several legal challenges, while successive policy documents and committee reports largely favoured recurring spectrum usage charges rather than upfront one-time levies.

The debate shifted in 2008, when the DoT began exploring the idea of imposing a one-time charge on spectrum holdings beyond 6.2 megahertz (MHz). A panel recommended an upfront payment mechanism for excess spectrum, and in 2010, the TRAI formally recommended a one-time spectrum charge for holdings above the threshold. The move gained momentum after the Supreme Court's 2012 judgment in the 2G spectrum case intensified scrutiny on spectrum allocation and pricing.

In November 2012, the Union Cabinet approved the levy of one-time spectrum charges on existing operators, including retrospective charges on spectrum held beyond 6.2 MHz from July 2008 onwards. The DoT subsequently issued demand notices to operators such as Airtel and Vodafone Idea, prompting them to approach the Bombay High Court in January 2013.

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Change in policy

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years, the government and the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) introduced a series of changes governing the allocation of additional spectrum. Operators that received bandwidth beyond the initial allocation had to pay higher revenue-share-based spectrum charges. Industry bodies accepted this framework and withdrew several legal challenges, while successive policy documents and committee reports largely favoured recurring spectrum usage charges rather than upfront one-time levies.

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Monthly, not weekly shots: New obesity drug promises easier weight management

weight loss but convenience. Current blockbuster obesity drugs require weekly injections. Pfizer's candidate aims to reduce that burden; patients would initially receive weekly doses before transitioning to a single injection every month. For people managing obesity as a chronic condition, that would ultimately mean 12 injections a year instead of 52. In a mid-stage clinical study, patients without diabetes lost up to 12.3% of their body weight. Importantly, those who switched to monthly dosing continued to lose weight rather than hitting a plateau.

"However, we should not compare the percentage of weight loss. Less frequent dosing has the potential to improve treatment persistence, which is a major determinant of long-term success in obesity management," says Dr Anoop Misra, Chairman at Fortis CDOS Hospital for Diabetes and Allied Sciences and former professor, AIIMS, Delhi. He spoke to Rinku Ghosh about the new treatment.

Pfizer's berobanatide is being

positioned as a once-monthly GLP-1 therapy. How is this significant from a patient adherence and treatment-compliance perspective?

Berobanatide is currently transitioning into a robust global phase 3 development programme, which consists of 10 planned or ongoing late-stage clinical trials. It is expected to be available for patients around late 2028 to mid-2029. The drug has been engineered to remain in blood circulation much longer than conventional GLP-1 therapies, allowing sustained activation of GLP-1 receptors throughout the month. From an Indian perspective, a once-monthly GLP-1 injection is important because long-term adherence remains a major challenge. Less frequent dosing may reduce treatment fatigue, improve convenience and help patients remain on therapy for longer periods.

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The drug showed up to 12.3% weight loss. How should clinicians interpret these results in comparison with established therapies such as

Wegovy, Zepbound and Mounjaro? Clinicians should avoid direct comparisons across trials. The reported weight loss is clinically meaningful and encouraging for monthly therapy. However, semaglutide (Wegovy) and especially tirzepatide (Zepbound, Mounjaro) have demonstrated substantial weight reductions in larger and longer studies. At present, berobanatide appears promising, but its major differentiating feature may be monthly administration rather than weight-loss efficacy.

The side-effect profile appears broadly comparable to existing GLP-1 drugs. What will experts be looking for in late-stage trials before judging its clinical value? Experts will focus on the durability of weight loss, long-term safety, gastrointestinal side effects, discontinuation rates, and cardiovascular and kidney benefits. They will also examine whether the extended drug exposure over an entire month leads to any unique safety concerns. In that way,

it may undergo similar scrutiny as once-a-month insulin.

Could less frequent dosing improve long-term outcomes for people living with obesity, or are efficacy and side effects likely to be deciding factors? Less frequent dosing has the potential to improve treatment persistence, which is a major determinant of long-term success in obesity management. However, efficacy and tolerability will continue to be the most important factors. A monthly injection is attractive, but patients and clinicians will ultimately prioritise how much weight is lost, how well it is maintained, and whether side effects remain manageable. Other long term data (especially cardiac) are clearly needed to address these concerns.

GLP-1 drugs are seen as long-term treatments for a chronic disease. How might a monthly injection change the way obesity is managed in routine clinical practice?

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OPINION

The
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OUR TAKE

India's politics in the last 12 years

Opposition parties have found it difficult to match Modi's appeal, BJP's relentless groundwork and identity politics

If the political landscape of India in 2026 is vastly different from that of 2014, a large chunk of the credit for this must go to Narendra Modi. Through the course of his three tenures — the third is ongoing and he has just become India's longest serving elected Prime Minister — Modi has rewritten the grammar of electoral politics, expanded the Bharatiya Janata Party's reach to communities and regions once thought impossible, and used a combination of welfarism, Hindutva, and personal popularity to corner the Opposition. But there's a bigger picture: India's political topography today isn't just dominated by the BJP but also markedly different from the past in three significant ways.

Before 2014, there was a kernel of truth when the Opposition termed the BJP as a Hindi belt party of upper-castes. Despite a smattering of leaders from marginalised castes, the party repeatedly stumbled in culturally heterogeneous regions and among castes and communities who were not culturally wedded to caste. Leveraging Modi's own credentials as a backward class leader, the BJP has pushed to marry Hindu nationalism with caste politics, using iconography, mythology, welfare outreach and identity politics to appeal to lower castes, especially in provinces such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. It has turned Hindutva into an ideologically nimble vehicle to make inroads into states that were lukewarm to the initial 90s push, such as Bengal or Odisha. The result is that today, the BJP rules a far more culturally heterogeneous chunk of India than the Congress or any other Opposition party.

Two, a mix of shrewd strategy, smart tactics, and sheer political popularity has almost sounded the death knell of regional parties that dominated India for almost three decades. From Mamata Banerjee in Bengal and Nitish Kumar in Bihar to Naveen Patnaik in Odisha and Uddhav Thackeray in Maharashtra, regional satraps have fallen by the wayside, finding it difficult to match not just Modi's appeal, but also that of the BJP's central largesse, relentless groundwork, and identity politics, amid allegations of favouritism towards BJP-ruled states, misuse of central agencies, and a fraying federal compact.

And three, the last 12 years have seen increasing marginalisation of Muslims in politics, both in terms of the number of lawmakers — the BJP usually doesn't nominate Muslims as candidates — and electoral heft in states such as Bihar and West Bengal. Unfortunately, this has coincided with many Opposition parties taking the community for granted, evidenced by the fact that even in Muslim-majority districts, parties such as the Trinamool Congress in Bengal or Congress in Bihar have seen a splintering of support in favour of newer entrants or more rooted opponents.

H-IB visa is a measure of American politics

Last year, US President Donald Trump sought to smother the H-IB visa programme by raising its application fees tenfold to \$1,00,000 — more than the median wage for H-IB workers in 2024. As the biggest beneficiary of the programme, India stood to lose the most from Trump's decision.

There have been allegations of H-IB misuse to the detriment of US workers. But it has played a critical role in attracting high-skilled workers to the US. This is exactly why Trump's decision was challenged in the US courts by both state governments and businesses. This week, a US court ruled Trump's enhanced H-IB visa fee illegal. The judgment draws on constitutional proceduralism rather than the overall merits of the H-IB programme. The enhanced fees are seen as a tax, which needs the Congress's ratification, and not just an executive edict. This is very similar to what happened when courts ruled against Trump's tariffs as well.

The ruling offers relief to both employees and employers under the visa programme. This is unambiguously good news. Whether the Trump administration appeals the ruling and gets its way remains to be seen. The Trump administration's political fortunes, rather than legal, seem more important at the moment. In less than six months, the US will hold crucial mid-term elections. These polls, ironically, will be held against the backdrop of the US being bogged down in a foreign war rather than pursuing Trump's isolationist agenda. Things such as effectively guillotining the H-IB programme were aimed at catering to the latter sentiment. Ultimately, it is politics which will decide whether Trump and US remain invested in championing globalisation or not.

From discovery of India to trust in Bharat

Aspirations of and scrutiny by the people have gone up exponentially compared to Nehru's times. Modi's success lies in having measured up to these and sustaining a bond of trust with the people

June 10, 2026, marks a special occasion in the history of India after Independence. On that date Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi surpassed Jawahar Lal Nehru to become the longest continuously serving democratically elected PM of India. Though a historic landmark in itself, PM Modi's being a tenure longer than that of Nehru does not capture the more important dimensions of what may be called the watershed period for India since Independence.

Since May 26, 2014, the course of Indian polity took a decisive turn towards Indian-ness of the kind advocated by Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Patel, Babasaheb BR Ambedkar, Rajendra Prasad, C Rajgopalachari, KM Munshi and several other architects of modern India who had reimagined the ancient Indian culture and civilisation with a deep sense of pride in its heritage and legacies. In the area of economic development,

PM Modi has taken forward the model of Rajaji with inclusivity. Rajaji, as we know, was strongly critical of the "command and control" model of Nehruvian political economy which resulted in "quota, permit and licence raj".

In the sphere of political discourse, despite the historic and scholarly statement by Ambedkar in his concluding address in the Constituent Assembly on November 25, 1949, that elements of parliamentary democracy were to be found in the Buddhist institutions dating back 2,500 years and that those Buddhist institutions would have adopted democratic practices from the then prevalent political institutions, our students and jurists were made to believe that we owed our democracy to western countries. Modi has been asserting on global forums that India is the mother of democracy, referring to the ancient Indian democratic ethos and practices. And the world is waking up to this fact of India being not only the most ancient but also the largest and most vibrant democracy.

The sheer size of India's electorate at nearly 100 crore is a mind-boggling phenomenon for the rest of the world. Incidentally, the size of the electorate is nearly three times the total population of India at the time of Independence. Added to the size is the growing complexity of the electoral dynamics. As many as 744 political parties participated in the 2024 general election

compared to only 53 in the 1951-52 general election. Aspirations of and scrutiny by the people have gone up exponentially compared to Nehru's times. To measure up to such rising expectations and sustain a robust bond of trust with the people is an exceptional success of Modi, whose approval ratings have remained consistently high compared with Nehru who had to witness severe erosion in his stature and popularity during his tenure. During the decades of the 1950s and 1960s, and even up to the 1970s, many democratically elected leaders across the world had long tenures at the helm. The world of the 21st century has witnessed much shorter shelf-life of political leaders. Modi stands as an exception to the global trend.

It is rightly said that no people can become strong and respectable if they lack self-pride. India's has been a great story of civilisational and cultural excellence through many centuries. However, the sense of inferiority instilled by the colonial rulers continued to cast its long shadow even after Independence. Continuation, and even glorification of several colonial practices continued after Independence and an elitist minority was created which perpetuated the ideas and ideals of Thomas Babington Macaulay. English was promoted as the language of power during the decades after Independence. The Nehruvian



To measure up to the rising expectations of, and sustain a robust bond of trust with the people, is an exceptional success of Modi. PH



Ram Nath Kovind

period and its immediate aftermath witnessed a sense of embarrassment among the elite about most things Indian. People speaking and working or expressing themselves in Indian languages were looked down upon as inferior cousins. Cultural practices and symbols rooted in ancient Indian traditions were ignored in favour of ideologies and practices nurtured in alien soils. The lack of organic continuity and growth of Indian traditions had resulted in lack of confidence and innovativeness.

Modi has front-staged Indian languages, systems, symbols, and belief systems. There is a visible pride among the people in being Indian and expressing Indian-ness. This new sense of pride was shared with me by many people from among the Indian diaspora during my visits to several countries. Modi chose a function organised by a leading English language national daily to articulate the need to achieve the goal of mental decolonisation by 2035. In that function held in November 2025, he urged the people of India to undertake a 10-year national pledge to shed the colonial mindset rooted in Macaulay's

legacy. He also made a very emphatic statement that India isn't just an emerging market, it is emerging as a confident new model.

The contrast between India's initial decade since Independence and the last 12 years is highlighted by a major shift. The Nehru years were marked by keenness to seek approval and succour from the West, culturally and economically. The Modi years are marked by the confidence in a robust domestic economy which is able to withstand the most severe global disruptions. The Modi years are also characterised by a strong sense of pride in Indian languages, cultural symbols, values and traditions.

A young but very well-informed boy who happens to be related to us made a statement indicative of his precocity and also of the thinking of his generation. He told me that while I grew up in Nehru's India, he is growing up in Modi's Bharat. The boy also explained to me that his generation is better off for it.

Ram Nath Kovind is former President of India. The views expressed are personal

Raising minimum wages limits workers' choice

After the Karnataka government notified new minimum wages for 83 types of employment late-May, with upto 60% increases in some cases, employer unions have approached the courts challenging the notification. When the Haryana government raised minimum wages in April, neighbouring Uttar Pradesh saw protest by workers in Noida; the UP government immediately raised minimum wages by 21%. It may seem like a win for the underdog, but the Foundation of Economic Development's report on minimum wages shows that such moves are actually an extension of our legacy policy approach to labour — mandate unrealistically high worker "protections" that backfire and hurt workers, especially the most vulnerable ones. This has been a historical hurdle to labour-intensive industrialisation taking off in India.

Imagine a situation where the average worker makes ₹9,000 a month as a farm or construction worker in a small town. An investor can compete with Bangladesh in making T-shirts for the US if they pay workers ₹12,000. The investor would be happy to set up a factory and employ large numbers of workers, all of whom would be thrilled to work at a 30% hike. Sounds great — until you remember that it is illegal to employ workers formally unless you pay them ₹13,500.

Suddenly, the plan seems unprofitable and more factories open in Bangladesh instead. The profit margin for a garment-maker is typically under 5%, and large, legally mandated hikes in labour cost — 30% of the cost — would leave no reason to invest.

The empirical evidence for this mechanism is summarised well in a review paper we cite in our report — "...[in] the most credible evidence, almost all point to negative employment effects [of minimum wage]... the studies that focus on the least-skilled groups provide relatively overwhelming evidence of stronger dis-employment effects for these groups". To compound the situation, India's labour law mandates, especially minimum wages, are very high relative to current

worker wages, and even when compared to other countries. In fact, around half of the workforce cannot be legally employed even if you were to give them a 30% raise over what they are currently earning.

Minimum wage relative to GDP per capita is 50% higher in India compared to China, Vietnam and Bangladesh. It is 1.7 times what the median casual worker is making. In countries where comparable data is available, that number is 0.26-0.6. Other legal mandates such as overtime rates, limits on overtime hours, etc, are also similarly high relative to other countries.

It is easy to see why such mandates backfire — worker productivity has not changed, but workers become more costly to employ. The reality is there are many options other than job creation available to investors — they can automate, become or stay informal, invest in other countries or sectors that do not employ people.

All of these choices are visible in the data. India's capital-intensive sectors are growing significantly faster than labour-intensive ones. This is unusual for a country where people should be the top asset. Also, India's workforce is largely informal — close to 90% is informally employed. Sectors such as IT and financial services have been responsible for much of India's growth, rather than sectors that utilise our low-skilled workers in huge numbers (apparel, footwear, etc).

Your domestic worker enjoys no legal labour protections, but reducing wages is nearly impossible. For most people, the reality is their help will quit and go work somewhere else. What really protects people is the presence of other options, not formal legal mechanisms.

The cruel irony is that our unrealistic labour laws make it easier to mistreat workers. The legal barriers we place actually reduce workers' options, making it easier for whatever low productivity job they are currently stuck in to have more power over them. The woman stuck doing farm labour or selling tea on the roadside would herself much prefer the option to work in a "sweatshop" for ₹12,000 a month, but we have taken away that agency from her.

Ideally, we should respect the will of workers and let them decide whether the terms of a job offered are better than their other options or not. This may be politically difficult, so a viable solution would be to give direct wage subsidies to workers instead of hiking minimum wages further.

We also need to be as flexible as possible to help job creation so that workers can exercise their agency to improve their situation. In particular, we should realise that contexts across the country and even within states are very different. A national wage floor that will satisfy the optics for people in Noida and Bengaluru will almost certainly cut off many jobs in eastern UP.

Good intentions gave rise to minimum wage laws, but for vulnerable workers, they also paved the proverbial "road to hell". We can still choose a different road. For their sake, we should.

Rahul Ahluwalia is founder-director, and Ajit Patwardhan is associate program manager, Foundation for Economic Development. The views expressed are personal



We should respect the will of workers and let them decide whether the terms of a job offered are better than their other options or not. REUTERS

{ ANIL SOOKLAL } HIGH COMMISSIONER OF SOUTH AFRICA TO INDIA

We live in an interconnected, interdependent world today... Now is not the time for war. It's a time for peace. It's a time for dialogue. It's a time for... solutions through diplomatic means



On the need for diplomacy amid war in West Asia



When preventive health check-ups do more harm

Every day, people are exhorted to undergo "preventive" health check-ups. These come in the form of executive check-ups, prevention "camps", and bundled packs which promise more tests for less money. While many tests are good barometers of health and help modify diet and lifestyle, many others are unnecessary. Some, such as the treadmill exercise test, may even be harmful. What is wrong with having a preventive check-up? After all, wouldn't it be better to identify problems before they become serious? The answer to this question rests on two fundamental requirements. First, the ability of the test to identify individuals who are truly at risk of health problems in the future. And second, the availability of proven treatments that will reduce this risk.

Most tests are far less accurate than one imagines. As an example, the treadmill test — a part of preventive health check-ups — is particularly notorious. It misses 30-40% of people who have heart disease and falsely identifies 30-40% of people as having problems. In addition to not serving its purpose, it leads to many individuals being unnecessarily investigated and treated. This results in much anxiety, many needless procedures, and serious complications in some unfortunate people. The false-positives problem is further magnified when the test is used in people without known health issues, as in the case of preventive check-ups.

The second issue stems from the misperception that obtaining more information automatically translates to better health outcomes. Often, the motivation for people to get themselves tested is anchored in the belief that they will get to know if "something is wrong". But even if a test is accurate (which is rarely the case), the information that it provides must lead to actionable knowledge. And the actions should lead to better health. This holds true for tests such as blood sugar, cholesterol and blood pressure measurement. But this is not the case with tests such as the treadmill test. Among those who are identified as having disease by a positive test, studies have failed to show any benefit of treatment, particularly in the absence of symptoms. To complicate matters, many more people end up getting unnecessarily treated, and often suffer the side-effects of such treatment, leading to increased health care costs without improving outcomes. Most physician societies around the world do not recom-

mend the routine use of the test as part of preventive health check-ups.

Tests used for screening the general population for a disease must meet a higher bar than tests used to diagnose the disease in patients with symptoms. First, they have to be accurate — picking out most or all with the disease while keeping false alarms to a minimum. Second, the strategy of treating the people with a "positive" screening test (and not treating the others) should yield a net benefit to society in the long run. This needs robust evidence generated through rigorous research. Some tests such as those for cervical and breast cancer screening are based on strong scientific evidence. However, hard lessons have been learnt when indiscriminate use of testing has been allowed in some other cases. In South Korea, the seemingly innocuous addition of ultrasound screening for thyroid cancer in the early 2000s resulted in a 15-fold rise in detections. Subsequent analyses found that while many more surgeries were performed than before, deaths due to the disease remained unchanged — an ominous sign of over-diagnosis. Many suffered complications, such as vocal cord paralysis, due to unnecessary surgery. Being a small country with good population-level data, South Korea was able to rectify the problem. However, given India's size and population, the magnitude and consequences of inappropriate screening may largely go unnoticed.

The common man also needs to understand the perils of indiscriminate testing. Doctors are, in general, well meaning. But they face intense pressure to be seen as doing something rather than simply providing reassuring advice. Our ability to prevent forward health outcomes is imperfect. Not recommending a test of dubious value should not be conflated with incompetence or, worse, punished as malpractice. A more public endorsement of the importance of scientific evidence and evidence-based policy and practice will go a long way in changing societal opinion. In the meantime, we should update the tests required for annual check-ups and restrict reimbursement to just the ones that have scientific proof of benefit.



Ganesan Karthikeyan

Ganesan Karthikeyan is professor of cardiology, AIIMS-Delhi, and the executive director of the Translational Health Science and Technology Institute, Faridabad. The views expressed are personal

Fixing fertiliser

The urea subsidy cannot be allowed to continue unreformed

Since the National Democratic Alliance government took office over a decade ago, it has made major changes to how its services and subsidies are delivered. Many of them have resulted in greater efficiency and increased fairness. These changes took advantage of new payment mechanisms as well as the vast increase in state capacity enabled by the Aadhaar and Digital Public Infrastructure. It is time now for the last unreformed subsidy, the one for fertiliser, to be addressed. This is because, in the shadow of the urea crisis, the incoherent and expensive structure of how India subsidises fertiliser usage can no longer be ignored. From late April till mid-May, Department of Fertilisers officials flagged the prospect of a 20 per cent spike in the ₹1.7 trillion fertiliser spend estimated in the Union Budget. Two weeks ago, they said it was impossible to predict the bill for this financial year and it might reach as much as ₹3 trillion. Now, that ask is learnt to have shot up further, with the department seeking a 100 per cent increase in budgetary allocation, citing the spike in the price of petrochemicals due to the blocking of the Strait of Hormuz and, therefore, of urea. This would take India's fertiliser subsidy to a fresh high of ₹3.4 trillion in FY27, far beyond the previous peak of ₹2.5 trillion in FY23 after the Russia-Ukraine war broke out.

This level of unpredictability and lack of control on expenditure cannot be allowed to continue. The root cause is that while phosphorus- and potassium-based fertilisers were allowed some degree of price adjustment, the price of urea has never been given the chance to reflect the drift in global prices. Over more than a decade, this has led to a situation where the government is shouldering about 90 per cent of the actual market cost. It was not the point of this subsidy to remove basic market incentives from the agricultural sector; it was to ensure the sector's productivity did not fall to a level where food security is compromised. That problem can be solved equally well in other ways. Leaving aside efficiency, it is also necessary to change the current subsidy architecture for the sake of transparency, fairness, and, not in the least, environmental concerns. Whenever enormous differences creep in between a market price and an administered one, black-marketing and diversion become common. This is certainly the case with urea today. The fact that urea is much cheaper also means that the ratio of fertilisers used by farmers skews towards it, leading to serious soil degradation. Finally, fairness is important: The urea subsidy is overwhelmingly taken up by large wheat and rice farmers, who are concentrated in certain parts of the country. This must be addressed — and a distinction is necessary to provide enough for one's needs rather than keep forking out what one has got used to getting away with, due to extant systemic flaws.

It is past time for India to move to a modern system to support agriculture. This might of course involve making changes to public procurement. But it will also require the government to expend political capital on shifting towards a nutrient-based subsidy regime, one in which benefits are directly transferred to the farmer ploughing the field rather than to the companies that are producing urea. It might be recalled that this was one of the first major attempted thrusts of the original liberalisation programme in 1991, announced in Manmohan Singh's famous speech — but was swiftly reversed because of the political outcry. That, 35 years on, the system is still financially unsustainable is an indictment of successive governments. It falls now to this government, also facing external difficulties not of its own making, to act where others have failed.

Clear and present dangers

Citizens pay the price for municipal negligence

Now that the victims have been counted and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has been galvanised into action following the death of 22 people — including 14 foreign nationals — in a fire that broke out in a “bed & breakfast” (B&B) outfit in south Delhi, the public memory and official zeal will soon wane. But the issue of endemic corruption embedded in serial tragedies like this is unlikely to abate anytime soon. The B&B in question, ironically called Flourish, broke multiple rules with impunity. A licence to operate six rooms was illegally expanded to a 25-room hotel across six floors. The building lacked fire equipment, escapes, alarms, and smoke-detection systems. An illegal restaurant, where the fire originated, operated on the ground floor. How was the serial rule-breaking Flourish allowed to prosper in plain sight of the municipal authorities?

Since then, the MCD has claimed to demolish 82 properties and seal another 43 in just 24 hours. In the first place, this energetic stable door-shutting exercise begs the question as to how all these establishments were allowed to operate. With the owner of the Flourish in police custody and the MCD expanding inspection across the city, the flourishing B&B business, which serves mid-level tourists, will take a hit, but only for a while. In the absence of accountability among the municipal authorities, the breaking of rules is unlikely to stop. B&Bs are only the tip of a perilous iceberg. In 2024, a massive fire in Baby Care New Born Hospital in East Delhi, which suffocated eight newborns, revealed a similar depressing story of corruption. The hospital's operating licence had expired two months previously; it was authorised to operate five beds but had admitted 12 infants; the owner ran an illegal oxygen cylinder-filling business on the same premises and emergency exits and escapes were non-existent. Some months later, three young civil-service aspirants drowned when a sport utility vehicle driving by inadvertently caused floodwater from waterlogged roads to flood the basement in which they were trapped. This bizarre tragedy resulted from multiple acts of omission and commission. The basement, part of an establishment run by Rau's Study Circle, an institute for training people for the civil-services exam, was meant to be used for storage, not as a classroom; the students were trapped because power outages caused the biometric doors to jam; the floods were the result of clogged storm-water drains, which the municipality had neglected to clear ahead of the monsoons.

The state of negligent municipal administration in Delhi reflects the general quality of civic governance everywhere in India. The past decade and a half has been rife with tragedies that reflect the deadly combination of venal businesses colluding with officialdom. In May, a building collapse in Saket, south Delhi, killed six people and revealed multiple violations of building norms. In 2011, a fire in a Kolkata private hospital owned by a well-known business family, resulting in 89 deaths, revealed the same story of violated safety norms. In 2017, a fire in a rooftop restaurant in the upscale Kamala Mills complex in Mumbai exposed similar infringements. Demolition drives and serial arrests after the fact cannot compensate for wilful neglect and corruption, which constantly threaten the safety of the average urban citizen. If the Flourish tragedy offers any message, it is that accelerating urbanisation demands urgent reform of municipal governance.

Unseen lawmakers of India's markets

Institutions exercising public regulatory power must not remain outside meaningful oversight

Imagine a commonly used algorithmic trading strategy suddenly being classified as manipulative. The consequences could be severe: Penalties, suspension, even criminal exposure. If Parliament or the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) were to create such a classification, it would ordinarily involve public consultation, legislative scrutiny, and a transparent law-making process. Yet market infrastructure institutions (MIIs) exercise comparable normative power through their rulebooks, without comparable democratic oversight.

India's securities market has historically operated through a layered regulatory architecture. Parliament enacts the statute; the government frames rules; Sebi issues regulations and subsidiary instructions; and MIIs operationalise the system through their rulebooks. This framework has largely balanced legislative intent, regulatory flexibility, and institutional execution. The proposed Securities Markets Code, 2025 (SMC), however, marks an important conceptual shift. It recognises MIIs as institutions performing public and regulatory functions that actively shape market behaviour through normative instruments.

MIIs are not ordinary private companies or mere transaction platforms. They perform public functions, derive authority from statutes, provide essential market infrastructure, and affect the rights of investors, intermediaries, and issuers. Their instruments determine market access, trade execution and settlement, risk management, surveillance, enforcement, and dispute resolution. They shape market conduct as much as Sebi regulations.

Consider the example of a stock exchange. It typically operates through a layered rulebook comprising rules, byelaws, regulations, and circulars. Together, they create a binding legal regime for market participants.

The rules form the constitutional backbone of the exchange, governing membership, disciplinary powers, and oversight of trading members. They empower the exchange to regulate members, impose penalties, and determine continued access to market infrastructure. Comparable matters, when exercised by Sebi, are governed by parliamentary statutes. If

such matters require legislative treatment when exercised by Sebi, it is difficult to justify leaving analogous powers of MIIs outside comparable scrutiny.

The byelaws constitute the operating code of the market. They define the rights and liabilities of members and constituents, regulate contracts and settlements, and provide for arbitration, defaults, margins, and investor protection. The SMC prescribes, for byelaws, substantially the same procedural safeguards that apply to Sebi regulations.

Regulations and circulars translate this framework into operational requirements. They prescribe compliance obligations, technical standards, codes of conduct, inspections, and consequences for non-compliance. They function much like Sebi's subsidiary instructions. Yet, unlike Sebi's instruments, much of this normative framework remains outside equivalent procedural discipline and legislative scrutiny.

The importance of MII rulebooks has received judicial recognition. In *Rusoday Securities Ltd v. National Stock Exchange of India Ltd. (2021)*, the Supreme Court acknowledged the enforceability of exchange actions, including suspension and expulsion of members, when undertaken in accordance with its byelaws and rules. The decision reinforces that MII rulebooks are binding frameworks carrying public consequences.

Indeed, these instruments may even confer statutory sanctity on transactions notwithstanding inconsistencies with other laws. Clause 46 of the SMC provides that any contract traded on a stock exchange shall be legal and valid if entered into in accordance with the Code and the rules, regulations, or byelaws made thereunder, notwithstanding anything inconsistent contained in any other law. MII rulebooks, therefore, may effectively override conflicting legal restrictions through statutory recognition.

The constitutional dimension is equally significant. These instruments resemble subordinate legislation in both form and effect. Subordinate legislation falls within the discipline of Article 13 when it affects fundamental rights. MII instruments can restrict the right to carry on business under Article 19(1)(g), affect property



M S SAHOO & SUMIT AGRAWAL

Atmanirbharta needs patient capital

India's foreign exchange reserves have fallen by over \$30 billion since February 2026. The rupee has breached 95 to the dollar. The merchandise trade deficit widened to a record \$333 billion in FY26, with the deficit against China alone at \$112 billion. Electronics imports crossed \$116 billion for the first time — yet domestic value addition in electronics remains at a meagre 18-20 per cent. The Prime Minister has urged citizens to curtail gold purchases, limit foreign travel, and reduce petroleum consumption.

Importantly, India's foreign exchange reserves, though substantial, are built significantly through capital-account inflows rather than persistent current-account surpluses. This makes them structurally more fragile than they appear. Strengthening exports and external competitiveness is, therefore, an urgent strategic priority.

These trends reflect a deeper structural vulnerability: India's dependence on imported technologies, components, and capital goods in sectors critical to economic sovereignty. In a world where semiconductors, batteries, telecom equipment, rare earths, and defence supply chains are viewed as strategic assets tied to national resilience and geopolitical leverage, industrialisation is more than an economic agenda. It is an exercise in economic statecraft.

The harder question is how India finances the long, uncertain, and capital-intensive journey of building domestic industrial capabilities.

The capital gap: India has no shortage of private capital. But private capital gravitates towards shorter gestation periods, faster cash flows and near-term returns. Strategic manufacturing sectors — semiconductors, advanced electronics, and green energy — require long-gestation periods, massive upfront investments, sustained R&D with uncertain outcomes, and the ability to compete against heavily state-subsidised global incumbents. No rational private promoter can be expected to absorb the entire early-stage risk alone.

Uday Kotak's observation that India may have “financialised too early” captures this structural reality. Our financial system is sophisticated at pricing risk and allocating capital efficiently. But this very sophistication has created a bias towards sectors where returns are legible. This is precisely why every major industrial power has relied on long-duration strategic capital. China's Government Guidance Funds — with a target capital pool exceeding \$1.5 tril-

lion — have underwritten its dominance in solar, EVs, batteries and 5G. The United States, through the Chips Act and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, has committed hundreds of billions of dollars to semiconductors, AI, and quantum computing. Singapore's Temasek operates as a patient strategic investor aligned with national priorities. If India insists on pure market competition while competing against heavily state-supported ecosystems, the playing field will remain inherently asymmetric.

A capital architecture: India needs a professionally governed development-capital institution — not a subsidy dispenser. Its instruments could include quasi-equity, long-duration convertibles, first-loss capital, blended public-private pools and procurement-linked financing. The goal would be to absorb part of early-stage viability risk until commercial scale emerges. Such capital must remain minority and catalytic, with promoters retaining ownership, control, and execution responsibility. Returns from successful investments could be recycled into future strategic sectors.

India is not unfamiliar with patient capital. Its capabilities in space and nuclear energy, for example, were developed through sustained, long-horizon state investments. What is different today is the institutional form this must take. Earlier models relied on direct state ownership and public-sector execution. The contemporary challenge is to use the state's ability to absorb prolonged risk in partnership with private enterprise — preserving for promoters the responsibilities of innovation, operational efficiency, and market responsiveness. The objective is not to displace markets, but to extend them into sectors where early-stage uncertainty remains too high for conventional finance alone.

India already has a partial precedent in the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund, which has demonstrated the state's ability to mobilise long-term capital alongside sovereign and private investors. Strategic manufacturing, however, involves a different challenge — technology risk, ecosystem creation and prolonged industrial incubation. India may, therefore, eventually require a dedicated National Strategic Manufacturing Investment Fund, distinct from infrastructure-oriented vehicles. India's production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme has delivered impressive results — over ₹2.16 trillion in investments, ₹20 trillion in production, and 1.4 million jobs. But PLI rewards output after capacity



MOHAN SHENOI & DIPAK GUPTA

India's antibiotic overdose crisis



NEHA BHATT

The “wicked problem” of drug-resistant microbes has long alarmed doctors in India and beyond. Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is recognised as one of the world's critical public health threats. It was directly responsible for an estimated 1.27 million deaths globally and contributed to a further 4.95 million deaths in 2019. In the same year, antibiotic-resistant infections accounted for 300,000 deaths in India, including tens of thousands of new-born babies.

The Covid-19 pandemic, and the vulnerabilities it exposed, offered critical lessons in how we can respond to AMR. In *A World of Resistance*, Australian academics and authors Assa Doron and Alex Broom place themselves at “ground zero” of the crisis — India, one of the world's largest consumers of antibiotics and a pharmaceutical powerhouse — to investigate the global antibiotic emergency. The paradox of antibiotics in India is striking, as the very drugs that transformed the country's health, agriculture and development now threaten to undermine them all.

The story begins in 2008, when a Swedish man returned from a trip to India with an infection that was resolutely resistant to antibiotics. The resistance mechanism was identified as NDM-1 (New Delhi metallo-beta-lactamase-1), quickly dubbed India's first “superbug”.

Taking a long view, layered with extensive fieldwork, the authors trace the social and economic forces that have fuelled the rise of antibiotic resistance.

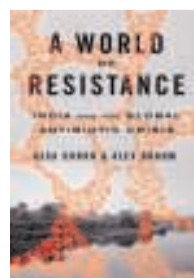
It's a well-oiled nexus: Medicine wholesalers, salesmen and medical representatives have fostered an epidemic of self-medication and the widespread sale of prescription-only drugs over the counter. “...The antibiotic trade isn't just influenced by retailers, customers and the government. The vested interests of the developers and producers are a dominant force. The lobby, propelled by Big Pharma's quest for profit, permeates every layer of the market, from airports and organised chain stores to street stalls and public clinics,” the book observes.

The crisis is deeply tied to India's growing private health care sector, which is prone to prioritising “volume over drug discretion”. Over decades, the culture of over-prescription has cultivated patient

expectations for immediate relief. Similar patterns have been noted across Europe.

What complicates the situation in India is the scale and diversity of the population and frequent movement, with minimal state border control and surveillance to track health-related behaviours. If one doctor refuses to prescribe antibiotics, it is common for a patient to go to another doctor who will.

Compounding the issue is the vast network of informal rural medical practitioners, many of whom lack formal medical training and operate in a murky zone. While they play an important role in delivering health care to underserved regions, the common practice of prescribing and dispensing antibiotics for every ailment forms a worrying link in the chain of AMR.



A World of Resistance: India and the Global Antibiotic Crisis
by Assa Doron and Alex Broom
Published by Harper Collins India
245 pages ₹699

The book unfolds in three sections. The first provides historical context, tracing the arrival of antibiotics in India as it emerged from World War II and colonial rule, and the country's rise as the pharmacy of the world. With government support to produce antibiotics for the domestic and then the foreign market, antibiotics took over every layer of Indian society. From a salve to treat India's high burden of bacterial disease, it became an all-purpose pill.

The second section explores how antibiotic use became embedded in communities and medical institutions, creating a dependence that has deepened over decades, with antibiotics ridiculously easy to access and widely abused. The final section turns to agriculture, the proliferation of factory farming and the widespread use of antibiotics for

growth promotion. Despite global warnings, there is great silence in certain quarters — antibiotics do not find mention in policy documents or national action plans for the poultry or dairy industries, for instance. With growing demand for antibiotic-free products, particularly in overseas markets, the industry has largely responded with lip service, making lofty marketing claims even as systemic problems continue to prevail.

The authors argue that the solution to mitigate the risks of AMR is not to simply restrict access to antibiotics, but to improve culturally relevant health education, redesign policies, and build solidarity. As an introduction to the subject, *A World of Resistance* serves as a useful primer. Readers new to the topic will find it comprehensive and well-researched. Those who have followed developments in AMR, however, may find little that is new. Even so, it is a timely warning about a worsening global crisis.

The reviewer is a journalist and author

interests protected under Article 300A, and impose serious civil consequences. Their normative character can no longer be treated as incidental or contractual.

Clause 148 of the SMC provides that every rule, regulation, byelaw, and subsidiary instruction made or issued under the Code shall be laid before Parliament. However, “regulations” in this context refer to regulations framed by Sebi, not those issued by MIIs. Likewise, “rules” refers to rules framed by the Union government, not rules of MIIs. “Subsidiary instructions” refers only to instruments issued by Sebi. Consequently, only MII byelaws are subject to comparable legislative visibility, while their rules, regulations, and circulars remain outside. This asymmetry creates the possibility of regulatory arbitrage. If parliamentary scrutiny applies only to byelaws, MIIs would naturally have an incentive to rely increasingly on rules, regulations, or circulars to achieve substantially similar outcomes with fewer procedural constraints.

The principal actors in the securities market ecosystem are the government, Sebi, and MIIs. The government is accountable to Parliament. Sebi is a statutory regulator and subject to statutory controls. MIIs, by contrast, are private corporate bodies, exercising significant public and regulatory functions. They possess the least democratic legitimacy among these actors.

The SMC identifies three categories of MIIs, but empowers the government to designate additional institutions as MIIs. Further, access to MII services is effectively compulsory. Securities trading can take place only on the platform of a stock exchange, and securities can be held only in dematerialised form through depositories. When investors and intermediaries are compelled by law to transact through these institutions, the case for legislative scrutiny of MII rulebooks becomes correspondingly stronger.

To be sure, MIIs require operational flexibility and agility to respond to market developments. Excessive legislative control could impair their efficiency. The goal, therefore, is not to restrict delegated norm-making, but to ensure minimum standards of transparency, accountability, and democratic oversight.

The SMC points to a more coherent normative structure. Sebi issues binding norms principally through regulations and subsidiary instructions. Similarly, MIIs may issue byelaws and circulars, which correspond to Sebi regulations and subsidiary instructions. Matters presently contained in MII rules and regulations may then be consolidated into byelaws. This would make the law available in one place, enhancing ease of doing business.

Consequently, the same procedural safeguards, transparency standards, and legislative scrutiny that apply to Sebi's instruments should apply symmetrically to their MII equivalents. The SMC cannot allow these norm-making structures to operate outside constitutional and parliamentary discipline.

The authors are legal practitioners and have worked for Sebi. The views are personal

creation has begun. Patient capital operates earlier — at the stage of ecosystem formation. PLI provides the pull; patient capital provides the push. The two are complements, not alternatives.

The way forward: First, a comprehensive national assessment — led jointly by the NITI Aayog, the Ministry of Finance and relevant sectoral ministries — must map sectors where patient capital is strategically necessary, estimate the likely scale required over the next decade, and design the institutional architecture for deployment.

Second, modern industrialisation requires coordination across financing, trade policy, infrastructure, logistics, skilling, technology and energy systems. India may eventually need the equivalent of a “Chief of Industrial Strategy” — an institutional mechanism capable of integrating these dimensions into a coherent framework.

Third, patient-capital institutions cannot be judged by near-term return on equity. They must be assessed through strategic metrics: Reduction in import dependence, domestic ecosystem creation, export competitiveness, crowding-in of private capital and long-term external-sector resilience.

Fourth, governance safeguards must be exceptionally strong: Transparent eligibility criteria, competitive selection, milestone-linked deployment, independent governance and full public accountability. Overseas patient capital may supplement domestic capital, but must remain capped and tightly governed to avoid contingent sovereign liabilities and moral hazard.

Finally, strategic industrial financing inherently involves failures. Commercial judgement exercised in good faith must be distinguished from malfeasance. Without such distinction, India may create patient-capital institutions on paper that functions merely as conventional development banks in practice.

Atmanirbharta is not about autarky. It is about ensuring India has the industrial capacity to absorb external shocks, negotiate from strength, and compete from a position of resilience. With a \$333 billion trade deficit and semiconductor demand projected to exceed \$110 billion by 2030, the question is not whether India can afford a patient-capital architecture, but whether it can afford to do without one.

The authors are, respectively, director on the board of MCX and MCX Clearing Corporation and former COO of Kotak Bank; and professor of practice at IIT Bombay and former MD & CEO of Kotak Bank. The views are personal



OUR VIEW



Déjà vu? Investors seem ready to invest in visions

SpaceX, OpenAI and Anthropic are set for IPOs at eye-popping valuations. The AI boom they're riding reminds us of past booms and busts, but it's a new test of investor intelligence

Investors have been here before. A transformative technology arrives, valuations detach from earnings and markets start pricing the future today. Capital markets financed booms in railways, dotcoms, social media and crypto plays, only to watch many companies collapse once reality caught up with what former Fed chair Alan Greenspan called 'irrational exuberance.' Investors are now being asked to bankroll a new crop of companies whose sky-high valuations depend less on what they earn today than what they might achieve someday. Think of the interplanetary ambitions of SpaceX or the quest for artificial general intelligence (AGI) at OpenAI and Anthropic.

With initial public offerings (IPOs) lined up in the US, these three American companies are expected to seek \$220-250 billion from investors at large. Their valuations would be eye-poppers: SpaceX worth almost \$1.8 trillion, with OpenAI and Anthropic both looking at \$1 trillion each. A sudden expansion in market capitalization of such magnitude, even if only a fraction of their shares will be free-float, would need a lot by way of business prospects to justify. Big Tech IPOs of the past differed on one key aspect: they had a clear money-spinner to sell. Google's IPO was basically a bet on online advertising and Alibaba's was a wager on e-commerce, while Facebook's was a social-network advertising play. Today's tech trio are long on vision but short on delivery, with their offers pitched disproportionately on the 'vision thing,' a dismissive term popularized by a former US president. Many analysts have billed SpaceX as grossly overvalued. Its merger with xAI, also owned by Elon Musk, has complicated its appeal as a business. Its space arm, famous for reusable rockets and satcom services, aims

to place data centres in orbit to give its AI efforts an edge, but their union left the combine with a net loss of almost \$4.3 billion in the first quarter of 2026 on revenues of \$4.7 billion. As for the other two, Anthropic's reported 'run rate' of \$47 billion in annualized revenue and OpenAI's estimated \$25 billion are impressive, but what they actually log over the year is what matters. They could show hockey-stick upshoots, sure, but that would demand mass adoption of their AI tools by paying customers. Enterprises could lead the way, but they are especially sensitive to failures that can range from cooked-up stuff to rogue action. The risk factors seem limited only by the frontiers AI is yet to reach.

Looking back, network-infra company Cisco became the world's most valuable firm during the 2000 dotcom boom, only to lose 86% of its value over the next two years. There is no saying if the AI frenzy will end the same way—in a bust. Back-up infrastructure is being built at a furious pace; Goldman Sachs projects \$7.6 trillion spent on it till 2031. Whether the build-up will overshoot or prove insufficient is another question. As an industry, AI need not be a bubble, even if inflated stocks undergo selloffs as exuberance runs into reality. Investors who dismissed Amazon and Google for ambitions that seemed too big missed opportunities of a lifetime. The dotcom crash of 2000 did not kill the web, but served as a reality check for a sobered-up internet to emerge; Cisco regained its mojo, even if it took 25 years. If an AI bust does happen, it could re-allot industry assets and resources for survivors to press ahead. Some investment advisors have said that it's better to let the stardust settle and make AI picks once company valuations find an anchor in value generation. For now, this IPO season is a test of investor intelligence.

THEIR VIEW

Why India must align its labour practices with global regulation

The use of labour-related trade barriers is set to rise and labour audits can help defend our exports



ARPITA MUKHERJEE & PUJA MEHRA

are, respectively, professor, and senior fellow (consultant), Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations.

During his India visit last month, US secretary of state Marco Rubio said that an India-US trade agreement was within reach by mid-July. Within days, though, the United States Trade Representative (USTR) sprang a brand-new tariff idea: additional tariffs under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974 for failing to effectively enforce measures to prevent trade in goods that are associated with forced labour and child labour.

The US is keen to demonstrate it can close deals in spite of an unfavourable court ruling. But with the UK's domestic politics looking less conducive for implementing its free trade agreement with India and the EU pact yet to be ratified by its Parliament, the task of Indian negotiators has become tricky.

Labour-standard violations are a problem that trading countries usually address through mechanisms other than tariffs. The EU, for instance, plans to impose a penalty on its large companies through its Corporate Social Due Diligence Directive for failing to identify labour and environmental risks in their supply chains and not having strategies to mitigate these.

Some trade partners set up panels and working groups to discuss these issues. The Trump administration, however, falls back on tariffs to address all sorts of non-trade matters. It helps that India has not been singled out. So,

unless successfully challenged by the affected exporting countries, the lion's share of the burden of America's 301 tariffs will fall on American consumers.

In all, 60 countries have been identified for the imposition of additional tariffs. Several that signed deals with the US to escape its Liberation Day tariffs have not been spared the 301 punishment. The EU and UK could see these tariffs charged at 10%, while India, China and Japan could face a 12.5% rate.

The sweeping nature of the USTR's proposal shows that American companies are failing to monitor their supply chains. It reflects their inefficiencies. New Delhi can challenge the tariffs on at least two grounds.

One, the USTR has identified items as being produced in India by child labour or forced labour in violation of international standards on the basis of research that is outdated by 10-15 years. Indian negotiators can demand to see more recent evidence—from the last three years or so—showing the use of such labour in Indian exports.

Two, it's worth pointing out to US negotiators that many of the commodities identified by the USTR are not being exported at all. A rice miller in Tamil Nadu mentioned in the USTR's proceedings report, for instance, may not be an exporting unit.

But the matter of labour protection will not simply go away. Importing countries' whimsical use of non-trade issues to gain leverage in trade engagements will only rise with increasing geo-economic fragmentation and trade re-alignments. That is also the big-picture takeaway for New Delhi. In its trade negotiations with the UK and EU, India had signalled a willingness to depart from a protectionist approach and open up market access significantly.

It is time to recognize that the predominantly informal nature of work in India and wages often being exploitative or below state-approved minimum levels, especially for migrant and female workers, may come to weaken India's

negotiating position in trade talks.

Countries with large import markets like the EU and US now mark migrant and female labour as key risk categories. A child in a rice field with parents is marked as working in a harsh environment. The similar presence of children in garments work or in the production of sandstone, sugarcane and tea is reported as incidence of child labour.

Trade discussions with countries other than the US may not run into tariff walls, but non-tariff issues will crop up in other markets like the UK and EU too, unless exports strictly adhere to international standards and International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions ratified by India. The country has a strong legal framework aligned with ILO requirements on child labour and forced labour. The new occupational codes make it stronger. Yet, glaring gaps remain in implementation. India has not ratified the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention of 1948 (No. 87).

An ongoing survey by the authors on export supply chains and compliance requirements has found some problems in India's labour laws and their implementation. For example, the Indian Plantation Act of 1951 offers weak protection to contract labourers and is not aligned with international best practices and our new occupational codes.

There's an urgent need for labour audits that will fully map the backward and forward links of the entire value chains of export items. India at the moment has hardly any periodic studies or mechanisms in place to collect data needed to monitor the situation on the ground. That can sometimes make defending our exports in many trade negotiations difficult.

Most exporters haven't even heard of labour audits. Export promotion bodies, agencies and exporters can be asked to ensure that audits are done. To achieve full compliance, export promotion incentives could be linked to labour and environmental audits.

10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

Only buy something that you'd be perfectly happy to hold if the market shut down for 10 years.

WARREN BUFFETT

THEIR VIEW

The Tata Group is at a pivotal point in its story of trust

ARUN MAIRA



is the author of 'Reimagining India's Economy: The Road to a More Equitable Society'

Signs of a deep division within Tata Sons risk diminishing public trust in the venerable Tata Group. A set of Tata Trusts is the majority shareholder of Tata Sons. This holding company's income is chiefly the dividends it receives from profitable operating companies within the group and its financial wealth is built on the stock market value of their shares. Over 65% of Tata Sons' profits then go through those Trusts to philanthropy. This is the simplistic explanation often given for why people trust Tata companies more than others. However, public trust in 'the Tatas' has deeper roots. In large part, it arises from the respect that Tata companies give their workers and the care they take of the communities and environment around their factories.

Disputes within the extended Tata family over control of Tata Sons have caused its present governance problems. J.R.D. Tata, who was chairman of Tata Trusts and Tata Sons for over half a century, was not a direct descendant of Jamsetji Tata, the group's

founder. He was the son of the founder's cousin, Naval Tata, the father of Ratan Tata, who took over as chairman from J.R.D. Tata, was the adopted son of Lady Ratan Tata, the wife of Ratan Tata, Jamsetji Tata's younger son. Cyrus Mistry, who was chairman of Tata Sons briefly after Ratan Tata, was the son of Pallonji Mistry, whose family owns 18% of Tata Sons' shares. Ratan Tata retained his position as chairman of the Trusts during Mistry's tenure, and replaced him with N. Chandrasekaran, the current chairman of Tata Sons. In 2024, Noel Tata succeeded Ratan as chairman of the Trusts. He is Naval Tata's son and Ratan's half-brother, and is married to Cyrus's sister.

Now a dispute appears to have arisen over an extension for Chandrasekaran as chairman of Tata Sons. Noel Tata and the Trusts are reportedly concerned that not enough is being done to turn around the performance of some loss-making companies in which Tata Sons is heavily invested (principally Air India and Tata Digital), while the Trusts need resources for their philanthropic work.

Internal power dynamics within the Trusts and Tata Sons are becoming a distraction from the genesis of the Tata brand. Its appeal can be traced to a fine balance that Tata companies—which are managed by

independent boards accountable to their shareholders—have traditionally maintained between the financial demands of investors and the businesses' wider social responsibilities.

At first, J.R.D. Tata was able to impose Tata's social values on Tata firms because they had management contracts with Tata Industries, a 100% subsidiary of Tata Sons. This gave Tata Industries the right to appoint their CEOs and, through them, require that Tata values are applied in all their functions: integrity in financial transactions; respect for their workers' dignity; and care of society's needs. In 1969, the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act broke up Indian conglomerates. It banned the managing agency system that enabled promoters to control companies even if they were minority shareholders. However, J.R.D. Tata was able to keep Tata companies aligned with group values by virtue of the respect he had among CEOs and board members.

In 1991, when Ratan Tata took over leadership of the group, strong winds of change were blowing across India. The economy was opened to foreign capital. Ratan led the group to seize new opportunities. Tata firms began to raise capital abroad, get listed on foreign stock markets, acquire foreign technology and employ foreign CEOs. The group even acquired some British companies; at one point, it had larger revenues outside India than within. Wall Street's ideas of corporate governance began to change the values of Tata companies; they began to measure their performance by stock market valuations.

Taking Tata Sons public may end up placing shareholders above its core values in the priority order

Today's squabble over Tata Sons conceals a deep conflict of values. If Tata Sons goes public by raising financial resources through the stock market (while providing a favourable exit path to the Mistry family), as some trustees and board members want, stock-market values would begin to govern Tata Sons. This will diminish the ability of trustees to require group companies to practise Tata values.

India needs more leaders like J.R.D. Tata. We need business leaders who consider the needs of their country and employees alongside—or even before—the needs of investors in their stocks. And who will, in a crunch, accord the former precedence.



GUEST VIEW

MINT CURATOR

Let's work to put the world back in the World Trade Organization

The benefits of a fair rules-based multilateral trade regime are evident. So are the perils of protectionism and unilateralism



PASCAL LAMY, SHASHI THAROOR & PRADEEP MEHTA

are, respectively, former director-general, World Trade Organization, former foreign minister of India, and secretary general of CUTS International.

The setback to prospects of reform of the World Trade Organization (WTO) at its 14th Ministerial Conference (MC-14) in Yaoundé, Cameroon, needs to be seen in a particular context. WTO members were not able to agree on a structured negotiating agenda for reform. Any multilateral agreement is a mutual exchange of policy space. If we want to trade, we cannot achieve a lot without conceding nothing. Growing geopolitical fragmentation, declining trust among nations and a shift from consensual to flexible plurilateral approaches are some factors that explain the stasis. Members could not even agree to a ministerial declaration with an anodyne paragraph on the imperative of the WTO. While this is disappointing, it is not unprecedented, and it certainly does not mark the end of the WTO.

Till recently, there was divergence among WTO members on the contours of reform. This was particularly the case for systemic issues such as consensus-based decision making, its two-tier dispute settlement mechanism and the extent of special and differential treatment of WTO members based on their development status.

The WTO is now being tugged in different directions. Existing impasses remain and new fronts are being opened. Now there is divergence not only on the contours of reform, but also on what the fundamental architecture of the WTO system should be. Underlying these normative considerations are systemic concerns of overcapacity and oversupply, and a shift from protectionism (protecting producers from foreign competition) to 'precautionism' (protecting citizens and consumers from a range of risks) in international trade.

Yet, economies such as China and India are dependent on international trade for economic growth. By extension, they are reliant on a well-functioning, rules-based multilateral trading system (MTS) as a global public good to underwrite trade stability and predictability.

Regional and bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs) can complement the MTS, not substitute it. FTAs cannot insulate businesses and consumers against unpredictability in global trade in the same way a robust MTS can. Innovative models are now under discussion, such as the proposed cooperation between the EU and economies of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement on Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). The effort here will be to establish bridges between these trading systems, such as through common rules of origin. While welcome, such approaches remain second best to a functioning MTS. But this raises a question: what are the prospects of one in the prevailing environment?

The MC-14 saw a new approach of 'operating within the impasse.' A group of WTO members



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agreed upon interim arrangements to operationalize the Electronic Commerce Agreement, while saying that they will continue efforts towards its full incorporation into the WTO rulebook. This indicates a shift in the approach of some members in favour of results-oriented progress, rather than continuing to grapple with seemingly irreconcilable positions. In a well-functioning system, this would be rightly seen as circumvention and subversion. However, in the context of the WTO today, it is being seen as a sign of moving forward.

The WTO is caught in a vicious cycle. As long as systemic issues cannot be resolved, limited progress will be achieved on substantial trade matters of interest to its members. At the same time, the list of systemic issues seems to be expanding, taking energy away from finding a way forward on a core set of issues. One of the architects of the system is now acting as its very bulldozer. While it is too early to conclude that the grand bargain represented by the WTO has failed, it is increasingly clear that the system is unlikely to go back to the form in which it began.

Since 1995, the WTO has endured as an organization whose members complain but cooperate, contest but co-exist. Institutionally, it has proven able to absorb setbacks before, but the present stalemate is one of its greatest tests of resilience and relevance yet.

At a time when the MTS finds itself under assault from all directions, we need to make a strong case for it. Its benefits include the predictability and stability it offers producers large and small as well as consumers around the world. Businesses and busi-

ness chambers have been making a case for aspects of the WTO that are of commercial interest, but they need to do more to garner support for the WTO system at large.

Together, we need to foster a positive narrative around the enduring centrality of the WTO in the global trade architecture. Unless there is a conducive environment, there will be no political interest in meaningful WTO reform. To generate support, we must demystify and democratize discussions related to international trade and the organization. That international trade affects all of us should be the key message that goes out.

We also need to review the way the WTO operates to make it more efficient, speed up decision-making and make better use of its Secretariat's high-quality resources. This is the focus of a new CUTS initiative, 'Trade, Not Just Aid,' co-chaired and steered by the three of us. This outreach aims to take WTO reform related issues around the world, raising awareness about its indispensable role in the daily lives of people—who should know what is at stake.

There is a long road ahead if the WTO is to turn the corner. Our fervent plea is to not write off the MTS with the WTO at its core. For decades, we have seen first-hand the benefits of a freer, fairer, rules-based multilateral trade regime with the WTO at its centre. We have also seen the perils of protectionism and unilateralism.

Overall, we are at a critical juncture in the history of international trade policy. We cannot afford to be despondent. It is time to put the world back in the World Trade Organization.

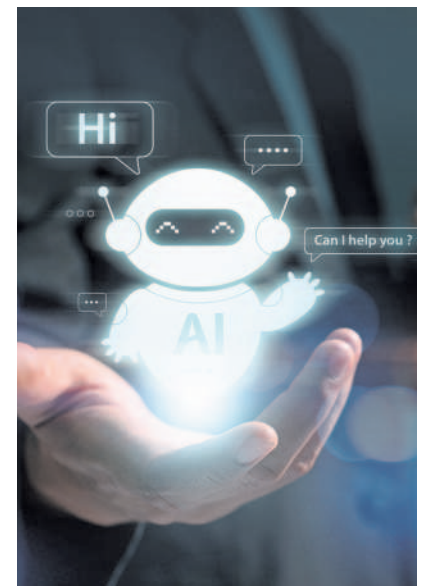
AI can help diplomats analyse a crisis but can't broker peace

Human insights and soft skills are crucial to diplomatic outcomes



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AI can at best help diplomats cope with complexity. ISTOCKPHOTO

From John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev navigating the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 to Henry Kissinger and Zhou Enlai's meetings that laid the groundwork for China's opening up in 1971, modern history is full of examples of human judgement shaping great diplomatic moments. But what if artificial intelligence (AI) could help us face some of today's most pressing crises better?

Singapore is offering an early glimpse of what that future might look like. Last month, the city-state's foreign minister Vivian Balakrishnan revealed that he had built a diplomatic second brain using an open-source technology called NanoClaw. The tool curates transcripts, speeches and other material—particularly his own contributions—into a searchable database. It has become so useful, the minister joked, that he does not dare switch it off.

The idea is quintessentially Singaporean in its efficiency, with appropriate shades of dystopia. Still, no serious diplomat—including Balakrishnan—would bet on an AI system negotiating the end to the war in Ukraine or resolving decades of hostility between the US and Iran. The minister's central message is that while technology can increasingly handle computation, memory and routine tasks, it cannot replace understanding. Or, as he put it: "You can delegate work, but you cannot delegate accountability."

But in a world where diplomacy often feels in short supply, AI can help policymakers cope with complexity. Governments across the globe are already using AI to synthesize huge amounts of data, model different negotiating scenarios and identify potential areas of compromise.

The US State Department is employing these tools to translate documents and summarize information. In Libya, the United Nations used a platform called Remesh to gather and analyse the views of thousands of citizens during the peace process in late 2020 that followed years of civil war. Because it worked on basic mobile phones and supported local dialects, it brought more voices into the conversation than traditional consultations might have managed.

The World Bank, meanwhile, is using AI to predict refugee flows from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo into Uganda. This potentially gives governments and aid agencies more time to prepare housing, schools, healthcare and other essential services before people arrive.

For all of its promise, AI is also inherently vulnerable to risk, notes Asha Hemrajani, senior fellow at the Centre of Excellence for

National Security at Singapore's S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. "Garbage in, garbage out," she told me. "It depends on the data you input into the AI model you are building. And these systems are vulnerable to hacking and manipulation, which could lead to strategic miscalculations. In a high-stakes environment like diplomacy, you have to get it right—you have to keep humans in the loop."

Which is why, as impressive as Balakrishnan's second brain sounds, it raises a troubling question: Whose brain is it replacing? The jobs his tool could perform—drafting briefs, synthesizing country reports, preparing speeches and parliamentary questions—has long been the work of junior diplomats or policy staff.

Diplomacy is hardly unique in facing this dilemma, but the question is especially acute in Singapore, which is among the economies most exposed to AI. Bloomberg Economics estimates that roughly 40% of employment could be affected by the technology—the highest share in the world.

Exposure does not necessarily mean replacement. The figures tell us little about how quickly the technology will be adopted, or whether jobs will be augmented rather than eliminated. Singaporeans are surprisingly optimistic. Only 17% believe workers are unlikely to benefit from AI—compared with 46% in Germany.

That may explain why the government has been able to press ahead with its AI ambitions. Singapore has signed an agreement with OpenAI and another one with Anthropic. It also launched a joint AI alliance with South Korea—backed by a \$300 million fund—and announced plans to deploy AI agents across the public sector.

But moving fast comes with its own risks. The challenge is not whether to use AI in diplomacy, but how. Junior diplomats need to develop judgement that no algorithm can replicate. Time spent learning languages, understanding cultures and accumulating experience with senior diplomats is essential.

Vital human qualities such as empathy and understanding are crucial to good diplomatic outcomes. The next great breakthrough will still require a person who can read a room and pick up on the signals that could make or break a peace deal. No AI model can do that. ©BLOOMBERG

MY VIEW | EX MACHINA

Lawyers risk adopting AI in ways that won't help much

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All of a sudden, legal AI solutions are all the rage. Harvey, a leading legal AI company, is now valued at \$11 billion, while Legora, its nearest rival, just raised \$550 million in a single round at a valuation of more than \$5 billion. Even domestic startups are riding a wave that shows no signs of cresting. All these solutions offer tools for lawyers to use AI, easing the transition for a profession that has always been averse to change. But there is no way you will get the best out of this technology if you have handed it over for someone else to design.

When I started practising law three decades ago, the profession was utterly analogue. There was just one computer in my first office and its sole purpose was to serve as the backup machine when the fax wasn't working. We did have electronic typewriters but they were used by the stenographer pool and every document had to be dictated and typed up from scratch. Even after the firm obtained VSNL-issued email accounts, they were barely used. Most partners preferred to

have their emails printed out each morning so they could dictate their responses to their secretaries, who would type and send them out on their behalf.

But even in those days, I was an early and enthusiastic adopter of technology. I quickly figured out how to repurpose the office modem to connect to bulletin board services active in the city; it was through these that I learnt about the wonders of networked computing. To use the modem in this manner, I had to learn my way around the command line interface, and, through hands-on experimentation, I became computer-savvy years before my peers.

Over time, the legal services industry could not ignore the benefits of digital technology. Lawyers began learning how to use technology themselves, reading and responding to emails and marking up documents without relying on their secretaries. But even today, many senior lawyers know just enough to get by, relying on junior associates to do the heavy lifting.

New technologies unlock workflows that were once impossible. But you can only achieve results when you learn how to use the technology yourself. Lawyers who took the trouble to learn all that their word processors could do dramatically improved

their ability to serve their clients. They built template libraries and macro workflows that significantly reduced the time required to produce documents and conduct research. And since legal drafting is both an art and a science, experienced lawyers who had mastered the use of technology leapt far ahead of their competition.

Three decades later, the same thing is about to happen again. Artificial intelligence (AI) will most likely have an even more profound impact on the practice of law than the introduction of computers did at the start of the millennium. And yet, despite our lessons from the past, law firms are going about incorporating AI into their business processes the wrong way.

Today, most legal AI products are sold with a promise that they will align with existing legal workflows. Harvey provides legal teams "tools that fit their processes, not the other way around"; Legora insists that it "adapts to your workflows, not the other way around." While these statements are meant

to reassure prospective users, they describe a process that is the opposite of what we really need to be doing.

The real advantage of frontier AI models lies in the high degree of personalization they are capable of. That payoff only comes once you understand everything that the model can do and shape it to act in a way that suits how you work. The legal AI systems we are being sold bypass that process, offering users pre-built workflows based on assumptions that these companies make about what the typical lawyer needs.

While these workflows may offer an upgrade over what lawyers do today, when compared against what the technology can actually do, they fall hopelessly short of the mark. You will not be able to get the most out of AI if you adopt someone else's idea of how you should be using it. It is only if you learn to use the technology yourself that you can get it to do what you really want.

I have been using frontier AI models ever

since they became available and have built workflows of my own that no off-the-shelf product can match. I have a drafting assistant that generates text in my own style that I use to come up with first drafts of almost everything I write. I have built custom 'skills' that can produce agreements, policy documents and memos that are good enough to send to clients with minimal review. I have a series of agentic workflows that help with business development, client relationship management and even basic human resources and administrative functions.

None of this took any technical skill. All I did was play with AI so I could learn as much as I could about all that this new technology was capable of. What I realized was that frontier AI is far more intuitive than we assume—a few days with an open mind is enough to get a sense of the many ways in which it can be used for what you need. This is what will separate those who are able to get the most out of AI from those who just use it. And it is a barrier of will, not of aptitude.

Very soon, in my reckoning, the best lawyer who refuses to learn AI will be no match for the average one who embraces it. That is not a reason to ease the transition, it is a sign that we should stop pretending we still have time for one.

Opinion

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10, 2026



DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant

The primary question for a modern corporation should no longer be where to litigate, but rather how to resolve

Closing the gaps

The Rajesh Exports episode exposes weaknesses in disclosure, governance, and enforcement speed

THE SECURITIES AND Exchange Board of India's (Sebi) interim order against Rajesh Exports and its promoter Rajesh Mehta reads like a financial thriller — except the losses are real and the victims are ordinary investors. The allegations are staggering: revenue misrepresentation of nearly ₹1.5 lakh crore over five years, diversion of funds, fabricated claims about a gold mine in Africa, and years of stonewalling the regulator by hiding behind Swiss data-protection laws. That a listed company could allegedly conduct itself in this manner — with auditors signing off, board members looking away, and the chairman sitting on the audit committee — speaks to a failure that goes well beyond one promoter's alleged misconduct. Rajesh Exports has denied the charges, calling the allegations of financial misreporting incorrect, and the promoter has similarly contested the findings. The presumption of innocence matters, and the full picture will emerge only when the process runs its course. But the case has already exposed systemic gaps in how India's disclosure and governance framework actually functions in practice.

To be fair, Sebi deserves credit for the tenacity with which it has pursued this case. The interim order is detailed and thorough. The problem is not the quality of the investigation. The problem is the clock. The period under scrutiny spans FY21 to FY25. The interim order arrived in June 2026 — years after the alleged misconduct began, and long after retail investors and NRIs, who together hold about 19% of the company, had already suffered grievous losses. The stock has fallen a devastating 90% from its peak of ₹946 in January 2023. Even now, the immediate regulatory action is limited to barring the promoter from trading in the company's scrip. The larger investigation grinds on with no clear end point in sight.

The Rajesh Exports case is not an aberration — it is part of a pattern that should alarm policymakers. Gensol's promoters raised large loans from state-owned institutions and allegedly diverted the funds for personal use; by the time action followed, one founder had left the country and retail investors were left with the losses. In the recent Jane Street case, where the regulator accused a firm of manipulating the Bank Nifty and Nifty 50 indices, the final order remains pending. In each instance, the sequence is the same: detection comes late, action comes later, and resolution remains elusive for far too long.

The costs of this delay are not abstract. Every month that an investigation remains inconclusive is a month in which retail investors make decisions based on distorted information. Every case that drags on without resolution sends a signal — however unintended — that the consequences of financial fraud are manageable and deferrable. India's markets have grown enormously in breadth and depth over the past decade, with millions of first-time retail investors entering the system. That expansion is welcome, but it also raises the stakes of every governance failure, because the people most exposed to the consequences of delayed justice are the least equipped to absorb the losses. What the system requires now is structural reform of the enforcement timeline — mandatory deadlines for moving from interim to final orders, faster adjudication, swifter asset freezes, and, where fraud is established, criminal prosecution that actually results in conviction. India's markets deserve better — and so do the investors who have placed their trust in them.

THE HUMAN FACTOR

How AI ate corporate jargon

THERE WAS A time when the corporate world had its own unique — but entirely meaningless — language. We were moving the needle, boiling the ocean, constantly taking things offline, circling back, doing blue-sky thinking, and peeling the onion.

Corporate jargon was irritating, but at least I (these days people refer to me as a "veteran" journalist — a reference to my age, of course) knew what it meant. Or pretended to. But that seems a distant memory in the AI age. Today, a visitor wandering into a typical corporate meeting could be forgiven for thinking they had accidentally stumbled into a machine-learning laboratory. "We need to prompt the team better." "Let's not hallucinate numbers in the presentation." "That idea has great signal." Et cetera.

What was once the language of engineers and data scientists has quietly escaped the server room and occupied the boardroom.

Take "prompting". In AI, it refers to instructing a model. In offices, it now means anything from managing a subordinate to persuading a boss. A manager no longer briefs her team; she "prompts" them. Employees no longer need guidance; they need "better prompts".

Then comes "hallucination" — perhaps the most dramatic migration of all. For decades, employees merely made mistakes. Today they hallucinate. An incorrect sales figure? Hallucination. An optimistic forecast? Hallucination. An executive claiming he always supported a failed project? Advanced hallucination.

A manager's inbox now reads like dispatches from a parallel dimension. One colleague wrote: "Can you review this deck? I've been iterating on the prompts but the outputs still feel a bit low-temperature." A CEO in his mid-50s recalls a vendor presentation that opened with: "Our solution uses retrieval-augmented generation with a fine-tuned model, so you get the accuracy of your proprietary data without the risk of the model going off-distribution." He sat through the whole thing before asking if it came with a user manual. For him.

The spread of AI vocabulary has been astonishingly swift because, unlike traditional corporate jargon, it sounds vaguely intelligent. Saying a team is "overfitting" to historical trends sounds considerably more sophisticated than saying it is stuck in the past. Describing a colleague as having "high signal and low noise" feels considerably kinder than calling everyone else in the meeting annoying. And guardrails have already replaced governance, which itself replaced oversight — the endless corporate tradition of finding fresher words for the concept of "please stop before something goes badly wrong".

Performance reviews are particularly fertile ground. Employees are advised to improve their "reasoning capabilities", reduce "latency" in decision-making, and increase "throughput". A slow worker is no longer slow; he has latency issues. Someone who sends too many emails generates excessive noise. The star performer has become a "10x human" — apparently one evolutionary step short of becoming software. Low-temperature colleagues, meanwhile, are precise, conservative, and reliable, which is corporate AI-speak for "not much fun at parties". Promotions could soon be described as "algorithmic upgrades". Turf wars may become "model competitions". The annual budget round could be renamed "compute allocation".

In any previous era of corporate life, telling someone that your system was hallucinating would have triggered an HR investigation and possibly a wellness check. Today, it is said freely, even fondly, in quarterly reviews. "The model hallucinated a bit on the client data, but we caught it." Everyone nods. No one calls a doctor.

Somewhere right now, a 26-year-old is telling his manager that the team's "loss function needs recalibrating". The manager is nodding. He has no idea what any of it means. But then, he never really did. He just used to be better at hiding it. The annual office party will probably survive — perhaps rebranded, at some point, as a "large-scale cross-functional human networking event". But make no mistake — the essentials will remain unchanged. People will still gather around the food, make the same resolutions they made last year, and leave a little earlier than they promised. Some technologies change the language. Very few change the species.



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COAL RELIANCE

NOT ALL DISCOMS HAVE BEEN ABLE TO UPGRADE INFRA; BROUHAHA ABOUT MEETING HIGH DEMAND IS MISLEADING

Counting on the weather gods

THIS PIECE IS concerned with two unrelated issues linked to the power sector. First, a recent study conducted by two premium engineering institutes in India has concluded that the country should install flue gas desulphurisers (FGDs) in all its coal-based power plants. FGDs are meant to suck out sulphur from the flue gases emitted from power stations. The sulphur in the flue gases adds to particulate matter in the atmosphere and therefore is detrimental to human health. Installation of FGDs has been prescribed even though sulphur content in Indian coal is relatively low. Ironically, in a different study (2022) conducted by one of the two institutes concerned, it was mentioned that because the sulphur content in Indian coal is low, it makes little sense to install FGDs. In fact, it went a step further. It revealed that in the process of removing sulphur from the flue gases, FGDs are releasing more carbon in the atmosphere, and thus installation would result in an increase in carbon footprint.

There is no denying that research is an evolving process where a subsequent study may come to a conclusion that is diametrically opposite to a previous one. However, when that happens, it confuses the policymakers regarding the next course of action. The earlier study of 2022 was music to policymakers' ears because India was not making any progress on the installation of FGDs. There were repeated dilutions to the environmental norms and in the final analysis, the government devised some norms and opined that only about 11% of the power stations need to install FGDs.

SOMIT DASGUPTA

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Though the revised environmental norms were first introduced in 2015, till as late as 2025, only a handful of power stations had installed FGDs. While the actual installation was zero for the state generators, only about 5% of the power stations in the central sector installed FGDs. The private sector performance was a little better at 13%. There are several reasons for this poor performance. First, when the revised norms were issued in 2015, there was practically no domestic manufacturer of FGDs. Soon, there was a scramble to manufacture these, but the issue of cost and its effect on retail price of electricity came up. The fixed cost would go up by about 70 paise per unit and there would also be an enhancement of variable cost to the extent of about 4 paise. Additionally, it was a nightmare for regulators since they did not know about the legitimate costs which should be allowed to the developer. Finally, there was also the question of space as many of the older plants did not have space to install FGDs.

While there is apparently no rethinking about installation of FGDs, the current talk is about the galloping

demand for power and how to meet it. A new demand high of about 270 gigawatt (Gw) was met recently, but this does not mean that there are no power cuts. The way shortages are estimated is complex, and outages due to dilapidated infrastructure are not taken into account. Several parts of the country are facing outages which can stretch for a few hours and affluent areas like Gurugram are no exception. This is partly on account of dilapidated distribution infrastructure which can't take the load. Not all discoms in the country have been able to upgrade their infrastructure (like Delhi, financed through retail tariffs). So ultimately, all the brouhaha about meeting a new demand high has to be taken with a pinch of salt and it is no reflection of consumer welfare.

Having said that, it may be added that it is not only a question of dilapidated infrastructure. There is a drastic fall in generation once the sun goes down, meaning our conventional supply sources — like coal, gas, nuclear — are struggling to meet the night load. Uttar Pradesh has complained that power is not available in

the exchange either. One is thankful that the peak demand has shifted to the evening hours (7 pm) as it used to be earlier. The ageing coal-based fleet seems to be the culprit, as there are several outages due to enhanced power demand. Demand has surged due to excessive heatwave conditions necessitating prolonged use of air-conditioners. This is a matter of concern as we have always boasted that we have more than ample capacity of coal-based generation. There have been statements from the government in the past that no fresh coal-based power stations would be set up. There has, of course, been a volte-face and the latest position is that ~70-80 Gw of fresh capacity will be created by 2035. The actual realisation, incidentally, is only about 25 Gw in the last five years. If measured against the government's own cumulative targets from 2021-22 to 2025-26, only 44% has been achieved pan-India, and if we measure only the central sector, it is even less at 42%.

To sum up, we seem to be heading for a crisis. Government directives to keep all coal and gas plants running has not been good enough. Our addition to renewable capacity, though substantial, is not enough to replace coal. Our battery back-up is almost negligible, so we can't use solar power during non-solar hours. Our growth in nuclear capacity is almost meagre and as for hydro, it is almost non-existent. There is no availability of gas in any case, and generation from gas stations is abysmally low. So, for the immediate future, only the weather gods can come to our rescue.

Views are personal

Green is the engine, not opposite of growth



ABHISHEK JAIN

Fellow and Director, Council on Energy, Environment and Water

Going green is the smart thing to do in a world where businesses are getting disrupted by geopolitical or geoeconomic, technological, and planetary factors

THREE DISRUPTIONS ARE reshaping the world in which Indian businesses are operating. None of them are temporary.

The first is geopolitical and geoeconomic. Military and trade conflicts are reshaping business as usual — whether it is the tariff wars of 2025 or the current West Asia crisis causing worldwide energy shocks. The bulk of these disruptions trace back to one root cause: fossil fuel dependence. Fertilisers, food, cooking fuel, metal production, petrochemicals, shipping, aviation are all critically linked to oil and natural gas. This year alone, industrial hubs in India like the ceramics and steel sectors have faced shutdowns amid the energy crisis. Every business dependent on long global supply chains is exposed. What used to be a once-in-a-decade shock are hitting us several times a year now.

The second is technological. AI is rewriting cost curves and compressing decision cycles, making business models based on slow logistics or labour arbitrage obsolete. Crucially, it accelerates the green transition across multiple sectors — from energy-saving grid optimisation to rapid material research for efficient solar cells. Yet, we must acknowledge the paradox: AI's infrastructure is immensely resource-intensive, with data centres requiring vast amounts of energy and water for cooling. The Council on Energy, Environment and Water's analysis shows that more than half of India's data centres are already exposed to temperatures above 35°C for over 90 days annually; and due to climate change, nearly 90% could face similar heat exposure by 2040. The strategic challenge for Indian leaders is

to harness AI's efficiency without allowing its footprint to undermine broader sustainability goals.

The third is planetary. India lost 247 billion labour hours to heat in 2024 alone — nearly \$194 billion in potential income losses. The heat is felt most in agriculture and construction. But rising climate risks will reach other sectors too. Over 10,000 MSMEs lost more than ₹1,700 crore when Chennai flooded in 2015.

The response to all three disruptions converges in the same place: going green. Reducing fossil fuel dependency directly cuts geopolitical exposure. Building resource efficiency and supply chain resilience cuts climate vulnerability. And technology makes it cheaper and faster to get there than ever before.

Here is the frame Indian business leaders, boardrooms, and CEOs need to internalise. Pursuing green — cleaner energy, circular supply chains, resource efficiency, bio-based products — is competitive resilience and revenue growth.

Green builds resilience. Ørsted, a Danish energy company, had 85% of its portfolio in fossil fuels in 2006. It chose to flip that ratio in 2008 as a long-term strategy to remove its dependence on fossil fuel. Today, it has achieved a 98% reduction in emissions from its baseline and is the world's largest offshore wind developer. This means it is no longer exposed to fuel price volatility when conflict erupts in a faraway region. Hin-

dustan Zinc, operating in water-stressed Udaipur, invested in water recycling and digital water management. It has recycled 71 billion litres of treated sewage water and cut freshwater usage by 28%. Mars Inc launched a climate-smart rice initiative across four countries because 9-12% of its product portfolio depends on rice. It is investing in supply chain resilience before the crisis arrives, not after.

Green also drives growth. Godrej & Boyce's Good & Green lines now represent over a third of revenues, targeting 50% by 2032 — driven by energy-efficient appliances, sustainable construction materials, and alternative refrigerants. Infosys scaled its built environment by 1.7 times while increasing energy consumption by only 20% across 30 million sq ft of green-certified buildings. Companies like Heidelberg Materials are raising capital more cheaply than competitors,

while demand for their low-carbon products outstrips supply.

So what should Indian business leaders do?

Map your exposure. How much of your input costs and supply chains are tethered to fossil fuels or long, fragile global networks? That is your starting point. The cost of inaction shows up as operational downtime, reputational damage, regulatory penalties, and a rising cost of capital as financiers price in these risks. Carbon taxes are already a reality in many markets Indian

exporters serve.

Identify your green growth pathways. Four levers exist: new green product lines; resource efficiency and circular supply chains; green bonds and sustainability-linked finance; and talent. Demand for green skills is growing at nearly twice the pace of supply, according to LinkedIn's 2025 Green Skills Report. A recent study by CEEW suggests the green economy could attract over \$4 trillion in investments and create 48 million full time equivalent jobs by 2047. Not every lever applies equally to every business. But at least one does.

Pursue green through innovation. Young Indian companies — Sea6 Energy in seaweed-based biofuels, Accacia.ai in carbon tracking for buildings — are creating new product and service categories. Large businesses can accelerate this by funding innovators, building in-house R&D, or deepening industry-academia collaboration. For instance, IIT Bombay and JSW Steel are already doing this in sustainable steel.

Shift the internal frame. Stop asking "what is the cost of going green?" Start asking "what is the cost of not going green?" The answer, increasingly, is loss of revenue, rising costs, stranded assets, and an inability to attract the next generation of talent and capital.

The three disruptions are becoming structural transformations. For those willing to act, they are the greatest growth opportunity of our times. Green is not the responsible thing to do. It is the smart thing to do in a hotter world.

Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

El Niño jitters

Apropos of "Clouds over countryside" (FE, June 9), El Niño-induced below-normal rainfall is sending jitters among policymakers, economists, and farmers. The dwindling storage India's top 10 reservoirs is also a major worry. It will be difficult for farmers to proceed with sowing for rabi by relying solely on storage water. The slow pace of agriculture would impact the sale of implements and two wheelers. The

Centre's recent move to slash food grain output target for FY27 is a cautious step as well as a warning signal. At a time when the economy is hit by the ongoing West Asia conflict, the weak monsoon will severely hit rural demand and the farming community. The Centre's announcement of contingency plans to insulate the coming kharif season from El Niño disruptions by ensuring availability of sufficient seed stocks gives solace to farmers. —RV Baskaran, Pune

Policy must shift from hope to buffers

A weak monsoon threatens the one engine that steadied India after the pandemic. El Niño may result in rainfall that is 10% below average, hitting paddy, pulses, and soya bean when kharif sowing is due. The Union agriculture ministry has already cut foodgrain targets for FY27. With reservoirs at 30.7% and 15 major dams less than half full, water stress will spill

into the rabi season. Rural incomes drive a third of FMCG sales and most two-wheeler demand. A 1% rain shortfall cuts consumption by 0.7 points. Policy must shift from hope to buffers. Scale up drip irrigation, crop insurance, and drought-proof seeds. Strengthen MGNREGS wages, rural credit, and cold chains. The monsoon risk is now economic risk. —Babu Crishna, Bangalore

Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

More the Retro, Less The Going Forward

Verdict should buttress investment climate

Retrospective government action has again come into question, this time over telecom spectrum charges imposed over a decade ago on Airtel and Vodafone that were struck down by Bombay High Court on Monday. The verdict, however, contradicts an earlier ruling by Madras High Court on the same levy challenged by Aircel. The matter will now have to be settled in the Supreme Court, whose ruling on treatment of spectrum as a scarce natural resource led GoI to impose the charge in the first place. This is not the only run-in the telecom industry has had with retrospective action. GoI had amended the law to introduce retrospective tax after Supreme Court ruled in favour of Vodafone over transfer of Indian assets by overseas owners. A decade later, the law was revoked following a string of losses in international arbitration.

It can be argued that retrospective governance arises from extraordinary circumstances. The spectrum charge was imposed after a nationwide outcry over corruption in telecom licences. Likewise, Supreme Court recently upheld retrospective GST on online gaming because state governments were losing agency in an epidemic of wagering. Yet, the ends do not justify the means in most cases. And a steady stream of 'extraordinary circumstances' can smell like policy by whim. Retrospective executive overreach draws criticism for being undemocratic and violative of rights, and for not being in consonance with the rule of law. In the Indian context, such action weakens the investment climate, which can be particularly damaging for an economy trying to grow rapidly and finds investors packing bags.

Legal systems vary on the leeway given to retrospective government action. Yet, such action upsets market dynamics in ways difficult to rectify later. Shifting goalposts after the game has started changes the game for the worse. Instead of afterthought, governance does better when it is thought through. Admittedly, India has rarely taken recourse to retrospective taxes and charges. Every instance, though, reduces investor confidence.

Get AI-Enabled, Add Value to Metal Music

Coca-Cola has announced India IPO plans for its largest bottler. But disappearing Diet Coke cans from local shelves is turning out to be a summer of discontent for homegrown sodawalas. Nobody imagined the ongoing US war on Iran would take the fizz out of supplies of the base metal worldwide, after 9% of global production capacity in West Asia — 75% of which is exported — would suspend operations and cancel contracts, buffeted by suspension of shipping traffic.

The global supply squeeze should act as an eye-opener for Indian policymakers and industry to urgently shift focus from legacy dig-and-melt strategy that overemphasised mining and smelting, towards creation of world-class engineering capacity that can fabricate products and components. Lightweight, ductile, corrosion-free, cheap and abundant, aluminium is the metal of the future. It's also everywhere — EVs, batteries, electronics, deodorants, solar panels, smartphones, semiconductors, heartburn pills, packaging material...

As an electrical metal for switchgears, cables and transformers, it's even more significant for energy transition. But with slow buildout of grids worldwide, clearing backlog depends on access to it. Soaring 4-yr-high prices of aluminium means a windfall for Hindalco or Vedanta, which has ramped up smelter capacity. But unless India turbocharges initiatives to convert aluminium into high-value downstream products, it will be left behind. This is symptomatic of our manufacturing malaise. Policy support through PLIs and localisation needs to streamline further, as do export incentives. Industry, too, must catch up and consolidate a fragmented ecosystem or build capacity itself. If we want to be an electro state, the demand inflection point is staring in our face.

JUST IN JEST
Forget paying off loans — aapke paas Reserve Bank of Parental Emotion hai

You'll Always Have Mummy-Papa Bank

When Budhi Ballabh Upadhyaya returned home to his village in Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand, 'for a short while' after 46 yrs as a sadhu, and asked his mum for alms, he wasn't breaking tradition. He was simply following the great Indian banking system known as 'Mere Paas Mummy-Papa Hain'. From the 'Ma, I need money for a geometry box' to the 'Dad, I need seed capital for my startup', the Indian parent remains the most reliable lender on the planet. No paperwork, no collateral, no working-back student loans, just nostalgia — and extra helpings if a son is involved — as interest.

Every Indian household is a branch office of Reserve Bank of Parental Emotion. The father handles FDs of disappointment. The mother manages recurring deposits of affection. Even when the child renounces worldly life, as is the case with Upadhyaya a.k.a. Budhi Nath, the spiritual EMI continues — paid in blessings and Tupperware full of khichdi. Banks may collapse, startups may fail, but the parental treasury never defaults. You could vanish for half-a-century, grow a beard and return chanting mantras — and still, your mother will open the door, fret over how thin you've become, and ask, 'Beta, khana khayega?' before handing you your loan instalment. In India, filial finance is eternal. You can become a monk, mogul or meme. But you'll always be a customer of Bank of Mom.

Why IPO valuations, SpaceX's included, may not conclusively capture the current state of AI play

Temple Offerings at the Altar



Dipankar Bhattacharyya

The season of AI's IPOs begins this week with the SpaceX issue on Thursday to be followed up by Anthropic and OpenAI later in the year. The US will end a long IPO winter with trillion-dollar listings that raise questions over valuations. In a scenario of rising interest rates, AI companies need to access cheap public equity in order to sustain their cash burn. It feeds concerns about the AI bubble that has grown on too much venture capital chasing a technology yet to prove itself.

SpaceX was valued at \$800 bn before it merged with xAI, when the needle moved up to \$1.25 tn. After the IPO, SpaceX is targeting a market capitalisation of \$1.75 tn. Anthropic's value climbed from \$61.5 bn to \$96.5 bn in just over a year. OpenAI is worth \$825 bn, up from \$29 bn in 2023, \$157 bn in 2024, and \$500 bn in 2025. Sustaining this valuation trajectory may become difficult once the companies cross the PE frontier. In each case, the listing price-earnings multiple is set to be several times that of Nvidia, the most profitable AI company around.

Another set of more prosaic numbers indicates cash burn. xAI's revenue in Q1 2026 was \$818 mn, and it posted a \$2.47 bn operating loss. Anthropic is on course to post a \$559 mn profit — its first — on revenue of \$10.9 bn dur-



Suspension of disbelief

ing the June quarter. OpenAI spent \$2.22 for every dollar of the \$5.7 bn it earned in the March quarter. AI's path to profitability essentially begins after public shareholders come on board.

Anthropic's Claude is clearly out-running OpenAI's ChatGPT, while xAI struggles with Grok. IPO valuations don't conclusively capture the current state of play. Yet, Wall Street will bust a gut selling these giant IPOs. The market has been hard for years, and the sheer size of the listings could breathe some life into it. Structurally, IPOs declined with the rise of venture capital, which allows companies to grow much bigger before they list. Still, PE managers need to return money to their clients, and there is a limit to sitting on bloated portfolios.

They are more than willing to work with banks — which need the IPO business — to leave some money on the table for public investors. Therecord, however, shows valuations trump listing-day pops, and there is a wide body of opinion that investors would do well to wait a while before buying more into the AI story.

IPO season typically arrives towards the end of a bull market. Investments in AI have sustained the US stock market since the previous crash. Some other markets like Taiwan and South Korea are also

booming on the fortunes of chipmakers. Absorbing extra stock from SpaceX, OpenAI and Anthropic will not pose any particular challenge, as long as the AI theme is intact. If that wobbles, some really big bets could unravel very quickly.

Getting investors on board AI means asking office workers to park their pensions in a technology that could cost them their jobs. It might be an acceptable bargain if they can see offsetting benefits. These AI IPOs do not offer such clarity. Yet, the trillion-dollar companies that will emerge from these listings will not materially affect investor appetite for the tech. A far bigger chunk of floating stock is available for AI investors. There are very few AI holdouts among top-tier US tech companies.

A celebratory tale is unfolding in AI IPOs that contains several risks. Pace of deployment will determine the handover of AI funding from investors to customers. The risks of the AI bubble popping are climbing with rising interest rates. Untested technology barriers like building data centres in space — something Musk has been voluble about — will have to be crossed.

Risks of the AI bubble popping are climbing with rising interest rates.

Untested tech barriers like building data centres in space will have to be crossed



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JaNe & NaMo, Tale of 2 PMs



Ashok Malik

As Narendra Modi becomes India's longest-serving, popularly-elected head of government, comparative assessments with the man he has surpassed on that specific metric are inevitable. Separately, a sober, rather than superficial, reflection on the milestone is also merited.

The first question is obviously the easier one to attempt to answer, even if the true judgement belongs to history. For the moment, it will suffice to say Jawaharlal Nehru and Modi are likely to go down as India's most consequential PMs in terms of the lasting impact of their legacies.

In context and impulse, there is more in common than either individual's partisans would admit. While no period has been free of tribulations, it could be argued the 2020s have been India's most challenging decade since the postwar architecture was reshaped in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Today, like then, there are global shifts, great-power turbulence, and a messy churning of the political and economic order. Neither Nehru nor Modi had any precedents or templates to follow: They walked alone.

There are other similarities, too. Both men had an instinctive trust — unmatched by any other Indian PM — in technology as not just an economic and innovation-enabler, but as a force-multiplier for social transformation. Finally, both took large and ambitious bets in devoting precious capital to big-picture projects. Nehru built an industrial base, exemplified by the construction of three steel plants in a half-decade in the late 1950s, with three separate international partnerships. Modi's pursuit of an Indian semiconductor mission is driven by a similar determination and equally diverse diplomatic engagements.

From virtually nothing, an ecosystem has begun to emerge. Its second phase will see further investments in materials and equipment. If the semiconductor ecosystem is a skyscraper, India is in the early storeys. Four years ago, it wasn't even at ground-breaking.

Like Nehru, Modi has faced opposition — well-meaning as well as opportunistic — that has questioned such capital-intensive programmes. Yet, Modi has persisted, recognising the need for building national resilience and longer-term economic security. He has taken responsibility and not left tough decisions and hard beginnings to a future generation. Nehru faced similar choices in the 1950s.

Having said that, the pushback Nehru got was ideational, not electoral. Modi operates in a much more competitive polity. This makes his repeated demonstration of electoral appeal

particularly remarkable. Nehru's Congress earned voter success on the legacy and goodwill of the freedom struggle. Other than in small pockets — the Andhra region of the erstwhile Madras state; or Kerala in 1957 — it faced little resistance.

The Modi-era BJP began with a base in largely northern and western India. Today, it's the dominant party in eastern India as well, with inroads in the south, even as far as Kerala. This has been an organic, pan-India flowering — with states such as Haryana and Tripura, Bihar and now Bengal seeing a growing BJP footprint.

Purely as national expansion of a political movement, this is unprecedented since Congress' experience of a very different, non-electoral and uncontested accretion in the 1920s. Nehru was the repository of that rich inheritance. Modi has both shaped and been shaped by bottom-up urges.

It is often asked why Modi takes every election so seriously. Why can't he 'just concentrate on governance'? This is an innocent question that completely misses the hyper-competitive nature of

At the Table, Not on the Menu



Srivatsa Krishna

'If we're not at the table, we're on the menu.' When Canadian PM Mark Carney delivered this line at Davos this January, he didn't have India on his mind. But the one significant achievement of the last 12 years of this government has been to get India a seat at the high table with the big boys.

India is back to the classic 'risk vs uncertainty' dilemma. Today, we have reached a phase of extreme uncertainty, where the probability of understanding the consequences of events is an 'unknown unknown'. To face such uncertainty, our systems should not only be resilient but also be — to use Nassim Nicholas Taleb's

term — antifragile. Which India is becoming. Yet, on some fronts

12 YRS OF PM MODI



Yes, Prime Ministers

modern politics, and inter-connection between electoral validation and policy advance. Each time Modi wins an election — not necessarily for Lok Sabha but even a BJP major state election victory — it replenishes his political capital for the next set of policy and legislative priorities.

Nehru did not need this constant replenishment. He worked to a 5-yr cycle. 'One nation-one election' was the default plebiscitary ethic of the Indian republic. Modi has no such luxury, not in an age of constant electioneering (and even everyday social media referenda). Electoral politics in the Nehru epoch knew wartime and peacetime. For Modi, there can be no easy distinction. Consider an example from another democracy: the US. So much of Donald Trump's future rests on the verdict of midterm Congressional elections this November. This is one round of elections in one presidential term. Modi has navigated and outlasted multiple parliamentary and state elections over a 12-yr period since May 2014. The magnitude of that achievement is incalculable.

The writer is partner, The Asia Group, and chair of its India practice

like ease of doing business, domestic competitiveness, jobs and exports, challenges remain. And it's in this context that Narendra Modi recently appealed to fellow Indians to moderate consumption, while Gol passed on a small sum of rising prices via fuel price hikes. Indeed, more may get passed on. Oil companies are losing about ₹1,000 cr every day, which is not sustainable. Modi's call should be seen as a transparent call to take citizens into confidence about a hostile external situation.

India enters mid-2026 with growth figures that reinforce its economic momentum. Economic Survey estimated FY26 GDP growth at 7.4%, powered by consumption and investment, and keeping India among the world's fastest-growing major economies for the fourth straight year. Real GDP growth for FY26 is estimated at 7.6%, revised up from 7.4%, marking India's strongest expansion since FY22.

Goldman Sachs forecasts real GDP growth of 6.9% in 2026 and 6.8% in 2027, both above consensus expectations. It also expects the

US-India trade deal, easier financial conditions and healthier balance sheets to reduce uncertainty and gradually support a fresh cycle of private investment.

But why, despite years of low corporate tax rates, are corporates still not investing? Improving ease of doing business and tax issues are both works-in-progress. Yet, domestic investments are flat. By March 2026, India's external position had improved materially. CAD narrowed to about 1% of GDP, a manageable level by historical standards. This points to stronger macro stability, even as it underscores the need for continued policy discipline in a more fragmented global environment.

Part of the improvement reflected favourable energy prices. Oil averaged \$65-70 a barrel, keeping CAD near \$45 bn in a \$4-tn economy. But this support is fragile. If oil rises to \$100, deficit could exceed \$100 bn, or about 2.5% of GDP, sharply increasing India's financing needs.

India is highly exposed to any disruption in the Strait of Hormuz. A CAD once expected near 1% of GDP in 2025-26 could widen sharply. If crude averages about \$85 this year, it may approach 2% of GDP. India has attracted global capital well, largely through equity rather than debt. At current valuations, FPI is about \$700 bn, and FDI about \$800 bn, creating an external capital base of roughly \$1.5 tn. But some of this capital can exit quickly, now that the era of easy US money is over and protectionist sentiment there is rising.

India's stronger reserves offer an important counterweight. In 2013, after the taper tantrum, it was grouped among the 'Fragile Five' over weak reserves. Today, it holds about \$680 bn in net reserves, including more than \$550 bn in cash, providing a valuable buffer.

Over the past 30 yrs, India's combined trade in goods and services has never recorded a surplus. 2012-13 was worst, when a \$196 bn merchandise deficit and \$65 bn services surplus produced a net deficit of \$131 bn, or 7.1% of GDP. 2020-21 was best, when a \$99 bn merchandise deficit and \$89 bn services surplus narrowed the overall gap to \$10 bn, or 0.4% of GDP.

Again, to paint this as something the Modi government has engineered is incorrect. Despite all the welfare schemes, India's fiscal deficit remains something to be envious about, through deft macro-economic management and expenditure control.

In short, India has not recorded a surplus in combined goods and services trade in the past 30 yrs. Against the above backdrop, and an 'unknown unknown', fragile, anti-resilient, hostile external environment, Modi's leadership is going to be tested, as also the collective will of India.

The writer is an IAS officer. Views are personal



THE SPEAKING TREE

Beautiful Patience

NAJIB SHAH

Scriptures of the Semitic religions narrate a touching story of Jacob and his son Joseph. Jacob's other sons plot to destroy Joseph or have him banished. They get their father's permission to go out with Joseph, where they overpower him and lower him into a deep well. They return, present Joseph's torn shirt, and recount to their father a tale of a wolf having eaten Joseph. Jacob, devastated and saddened, exclaims, 'Beautiful patience.' This is the sort of patience where one does not complain; an expression of extreme grief where you seek solace in God, confident that He is merciful and will help you tide over your problems. God does intervene, and Jacob is rescued from the well by travellers in a caravan.

Ramayana is a powerful parable of the virtues of patience, perseverance and never losing faith. Ram is the epitome of patience in his stoic acceptance of exile, as are Sita and Bharat. In today's angry, impatient world, every body seems to have forgotten the virtues of patience; it builds resilience, prevents impulsive reactions and helps in better decision-making.

As the celebrated Urdu poet Bashir Badr, who passed away recently, said, 'Patthar ke jigar valon gham me vo ravani hai/ khud raah bana lega behta hua paani hai' — O those with hearts of stone, there is such a flow/pasion in this sorrow; the flowing water will make its own path.

Just as a flowing stream carves its path through hard rocks, patience and perseverance find a way through the most difficult times.



Caught in The Offside

Every four years, the World Cup brings us jaw-dropping goals and roaring stadiums. From its beginnings in Uruguay to the massive tournament kicking off across North America on June 11, it's a global mega-phenomenon. But behind the scenes, reality gets complicated.

The Guardian's 'Today in Focus' podcast dives into this dark side with 'The Criminal Careers'.

lets Cashing in on the World Cup. Focusing on co-host Mexico, the episode investigates how organised drug cartels plan to slice off a piece of that massive economic pie.

Host Annie Kelly keeps things moving with immersive stadium audio, while guest and Mexican journalist Leon Krauze brings the heart. Krauze shares personal anecdotes about growing up with the game, beautifully balancing his reporting with memories of meeting his wife just before Mexico last hosted the tournament. Past forward to this year, and the couple is heading back to the stadium with their three boys.

The result is a smart, grounded investigation that skips cheap drama to show how sport and criminal enterprise collide. It doesn't ruin the magic of football; it just reminds us that global parties unfold in the real world.

It's the perfect pre-kickoff brain food.

Chat Room

Bonds Dock Away From Boondocks

Appropos 'India to Pitch for Bond Indices Entry Again' by Banikar Pattanayak, Deepshikha Sikarwar and Rozebud Gonsalves (Jun 8), it is welcome that India seeks to pitch again for inclusion of its sovereign debt into major global bond gauges. Here, the following lessons from the recent past are instructive. 5 yrs after RBI introduced fully accessible route (FAR), which allowed non-residents (FPIs, NRIs and OCIs) to invest in specified securities by removing caps on foreign investments, it needed the inclusion in JP Morgan EM Bond Index in June 2024 and Bloomberg EMLocal Currency Government Index in January 2025 to induce FII inflows in FY25. Further, while it is self-evident that higher interest rates in the Indian bond market are an attraction, what is required to keep FPIs hooked is to check forex volatility. Angara Venkata Girija Kumar Chennai



Editor's TAKE

Nicobar island project: Development or ecocide

Nicobar, an island of immense ecological value, sits at the crossroads of strategic ambition and environmental recklessness

In the annals of India's development story, few projects have generated as much heat as the Great Nicobar Island Development Project. Conceived by NITI Aayog in 2021 and fast-tracked through environmental clearances the following year, the ₹81,000-crore mega-scheme promises a transshipment port, a dual-use military-civil airport, a township, and a power plant on one of the most ecologically sensitive islands on Earth. The government calls it holistic development. Critics call it something closer to ecocide.

The project's strategic logic is not without merit. Great Nicobar sits at one of the world's most consequential maritime chokepoints, near the Strait of Malacca, through which a staggering share of global trade passes daily. As the Indo-Pacific becomes an arena of intensifying great-power rivalry, New Delhi's desire to anchor a strategic and commercial presence here is understandable, even necessary. But strategy does not exempt a government from ecological accountability.

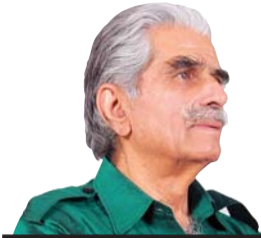
The environmental objections are not fringe concerns. More than seventy independent scientists and experts issued an open letter in late 2025 describing the project as an "exploitative commercial proposal" destructive to rich and diverse ecosystems. The numbers behind their alarm are staggering: approximately 9.6 lakh trees across 130 square kilometres of prehistoric tropical rainforest are slated for felling. Coral reefs, nesting grounds for giant leatherback turtles, and some of the world's last pristine island biospheres hang in the balance. When the Union Ministry of Environment defended the project before the National Green Tribunal in October 2025, it claimed full awareness of biodiversity impacts and a mitigation plan, but offered no satisfying answers as to what those mitigations actually entail. The human cost is no less troubling. The Shompen, one of India's most isolated and vulnerable indigenous communities, number fewer than 300 individuals. Their homeland lies directly within the project's footprint. The Nicobarese Tribal Council has alleged that community consent was falsely certified by authorities – a charge that, if true, would represent not just a legal violation but a moral failure on the part of the government. Experts warn that seismic tremors near the islands could signal volcanic activity. Great Nicobar sits in one of the most tectonically active zones on the planet – the same fault line that produced the catastrophic 2004 tsunami. Building a city intended to house hundreds of thousands of people atop this zone is not bold ambition. It is a recipe for disaster.

Nevertheless, the government's urgency is understandable. China's expanding naval reach and port investments across the Indian Ocean have understandably alarmed New Delhi.

What India must do is strike a balance: achieve its strategic objectives with minimal intervention, not an overhaul of the entire island. A genuinely independent environmental review, real and verifiable consent from the Shompen and Nicobarese communities, and a transparent assessment of seismic risk are the minimum conditions for the project to proceed. Great Nicobar's ecosystems, once destroyed, cannot be rebuilt. The island is a living system that the world cannot afford to lose.

Delhi courts Nepal's new political forces

By extending a warm reception to Lamichhane, New Delhi underscored its determination to maintain momentum in bilateral ties amid political transitions in Kathmandu and reset its relationship with the Himalayan nation



ASHOK K MEHTA

Two back-to-back visits from Nepal's top leaders last week demonstrated Delhi's proactive diplomacy. For Rashtriya Swatantra Party (RSP) Chairman Rabi Lamichhane, the visit was godsend, even if it was party-to-party, as he met top leaders. This is significant due to the uncertainty over Prime Minister Balen Shah's travels abroad during the first year of his tenure, which will be dedicated to 'domestic issues' of good governance and accountability. There were reports that he might go to the UNGA in New York and visit India either before or after it. But everything remains in the realm of speculation. Bhupdev Shah, the party general secretary and right-hand man, was known to have said in an interview to a Kathmandu portal that Balen was focused on achieving 100 goals in 100 days and would stay in the country for the first year.

This, and the fact that Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri's travel to Kathmandu in mid-May – with an invitation from Prime Minister Narendra Modi for Prime Minister Balen Shah to visit India – did not take place, confirmed that no visit from Shah should be expected this year. This will stir speculation that the Chinese might take advantage of the diplomatic vacuum, but the conversation in Kathmandu is mainly about which country Shah will visit first: India or China.

As part of India's Neighbourhood First policy, Delhi acted with great alacrity when Foreign Minister S Jaishankar was the first to arrive in Colombo within days of Anura Kumara Dissanayake becoming President, carrying an invitation to visit India. Delhi was therefore quick to avert widening the diplomatic gap with Nepal by getting BJP President Nitin Nambin to invite Lamichhane, which was immediately accepted, giving him a leg up over Balen, who has been hogging the spotlight, not always for the right reasons.

Lamichhane arrived in Delhi accompanied by his wife Nikita Poudel, Joint General Secretary Bipin Acharya, and Member of Parliament Deepak Bohara, along with a signed edit-page piece in Hindustan Times titled "How Can an Aspirational Nepal and a Rising India Reconnect?" He was received by BJP General Secretary and head of the Foreign Policy Cell and Diaspora, Vijay Chauthaiwale, who earned now-dubious fame when Arzu Rana, wife of then Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, tied him a rakhi four years ago.

Lamichhane had a hectic programme, symbolised by the red-carpet welcome and, accord-



LAMICHHANE WILL BE RE-ELECTED CHAIRMAN OF HIS PARTY AT THE END OF JUNE IN HIS CHITWAN STRONGHOLD, BOOSTING HIS RATINGS AS A NATIONAL LEADER

The writer, a retired Major General, served as Commander, IPKF (South), Sri Lanka, and was a founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, now the Integrated Defence Staff

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ing to a trusted source in the RSP, the warmth and humility shown by Modi in his meeting with him. He acknowledged reading Lamichhane's article and expressed willingness to help in whatever way he could in resetting ties. He requested that his good wishes be conveyed to Prime Minister Balen Shah, to whom he had already sent an invitation to visit India.

According to Kathmandu Post, the border issue was not discussed, though it had created a political earthquake in Parliament when Balen Shah stated that Nepal too had occupied Indian territory. Overall, the Lamichhane visit was very productive, with a string of meetings with Home Minister Amit Shah, Foreign Minister Jaishankar, NSA Ajit Doval, and, pointedly, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, whose visit had to be called off. Including Misri was designed to underline the point that Balen Shah's newly designed diplomatic protocol required recalibration with India, which enjoys special and multifaceted relations with Nepal. Rabi's popularity among Nepalese in India could be gauged by the tumultuous welcome he received at the Pyarelal Auditorium, which was jam-packed. No one should forget that Lamichhane was one of the most famous television show anchors of a programme titled Seedha Kura Janata Sang (Straight Talk with the People). He gained national fame in 2013 by setting a world record in the Guinness Book for the longest television talk-show broadcast, running con-

tinuously for over 62 hours on News24.

From Delhi, Lamichhane proceeded to Lucknow and then to Ayodhya. The question Nepalese may be asking is whether he was showing deference to the Hindu Rashtra and monarchy at a time when the Royalist Rashtriya Prajatantra Party had been decimated by the RSP landslide and the party further divided. Incidentally, during the talks in Delhi, the RSS was conspicuously omitted.

Lamichhane returned to Kathmandu and received a hero's welcome from the media. They bombarded him with questions, which he was at pains to answer, given that the visit was merely to strengthen party-to-party relations and no specific issue was taken up for discussion, including the sensitive Kalapani dispute.

For that and other government-to-government matters, Foreign Minister Shishir Khanal arrived in Delhi on June 5, for a quick follow-up to Lamichhane's familiarisation with the Indian leadership. He was received by Additional Secretary (North) in the Foreign Ministry, Mannu Mahawar. Khanal had met Jaishankar last month during the India Foundation-helmed Indian Ocean Dialogue.

He has prioritised the bilateral issues Nepal has in mind, notably the central themes of development diplomacy and connectivity, which were at the heart of Lamichhane's article. This was Khanal's first official visit to India, during which he had frank and warm discussions with Jaishankar on the gamut of bilateral issues. These included linking borders through the 150-km Raxaul-Kathmandu railway line, for which the DPR has been completed;

the thorny issue of direct flights from the China-constructed Pokhara and Bhairahawa/Lumbini international airports to destinations in India, which have not been operationalised due to Indian

security concerns; a comprehensive list of Nepal's hydropower projects constituting the integrated energy market; and recent cross-border issues. The Lamichhane article recommended resetting relations to August 3, 2014, when Modi first visited Nepal as Prime Minister.

One other issue that has been pending for nearly five years is recruitment under the Agniveer scheme, which previous governments in Nepal had rejected. While Dhanraj Regmi, RSP MP and son of a soldier, has been actively canvassing for its resumption, Indian Army Nepali Gorkha veterans had also met Lamichhane seeking its revival. It is not known whether Khanal raised the issue last week.

After his successful confidence-building visit to Delhi, Lamichhane will be re-elected chairman of his party at the end of June in his Chitwan stronghold, boosting his ratings as a national leader. The other key actor in Nepal's development diplomacy taking off is balancing China – never easy.



The prejudices we still carry

as a woman, particularly since an elected representative would be expected to deal with all kinds of people, including unsavoury elements. The advice was given as practical wisdom. A few days later, I overheard a group of morning walkers discussing another resident. Their conversation was punctuated by loud laughter and knowing glances. The object of their amusement had stated that the apartment was in his wife's name and that she would cast her vote as she chose. What followed was not a discussion about voting rights or personal choice. The laughter was at the suggestion that a man who did not control his wife's decisions had somehow failed in his role. These were accomplished professionals occupying senior positions in their respective fields.

The conversations reminded me of an evening nearly twenty-five years ago during an official visit to another city. I was taken to a prestigious club frequented by prominent politicians from rival parties. The atmosphere was relaxed and cordial, with political differences seemingly suspended over drinks and conversation. What I remember most clearly, however, was the laughter that followed an extremely sexist remark about a female politician.

The incidents occurred in different places and at different times. But they seemed connected by a common thread.

We often measure social progress through visible indicators. More women occupy leadership positions today than ever before. By almost every measurable standard,

society has moved forward. Yet many old prejudices still survive in subtle forms – in assumptions disguised as concern, in jokes disguised as humour, and in opinions disguised as common sense. They appear when competence is acknowledged in principle but doubted in practice, when independence is celebrated publicly but mocked privately, and when equality is accepted as an idea but resisted as a lived reality. This is what makes such attitudes difficult to confront. Overt discrimination is easier to identify. Hidden prejudice often arrives wrapped in the language of realism, tradition, practicality, or experience. Those expressing it rarely see themselves as prejudiced at all.

Perhaps this is why legal and institutional measures, important though they may be, can only take society so far. Societies do not become truly equal when women are simply allowed to participate. They become equal when competence is judged independently of gender, when respect is extended without qualification, and when dignity is not contingent upon conformity to old expectations.

Progress, after all, is not measured only by what we claim to believe. It is measured by what we reveal about ourselves when we speak freely, laugh casually, and assume nobody is paying attention. The prejudices we fail to confront are often the ones we quietly pass on.



The writer is a founder of Kala - Crazy About Literature And Arts, is an author, speaker, coach, and strategy consultant

PICTALK



Father-son duo beat the heat under lawn sprinklers near India Gate as temperatures soars in New Delhi.

PHOTO: PANKAJ KUMAR

SANJAY CHANDRA

2ND OPINION

The ongoing society elections have generated the usual debates, disagreements, and campaign promises. Yet a few conversations I encountered recently stayed with me long after the election discussions themselves had faded.

One of the candidates is a woman who is widely known within the community for her commitment and hard work. She is often among the first to respond when residents face difficulties and among the last to leave when a task remains unfinished. Unlike many who appear only during elections, her engagement with the community has been visible throughout the year. A resident from her own tower recently advised her not to contest. His reasoning was straightforward. She would lose. Not because she lacked commitment or capability, but because she was a woman. He further suggested that she should recognise her limitations

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TALENT NEEDS PATIENCE BEFORE REACHING CRICKET'S SUMMIT

There is no denying the talent that the young cricket prodigy, Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, possesses. While excitement has surrounded his call-up for India in the T20 series, cricket would do well to distinguish between promise and preparedness. In sport, one must not confuse early brilliance with enduring greatness. History is filled with prodigious talents who attracted enormous attention but struggled to meet expectations. Sports fans remember players such as Freddy Adu, whose career never matched the hype generated during his teenage years. Excessive publicity and unrealistic expectations can place immense pressure on young athletes long before they are fully prepared for the demands of elite competition.

The exceptional few, such as Sachin Tendulkar, Lionel Messi, and Max Verstappen, combined

extraordinary talent with years of disciplined training, strong support systems, and progressively tougher challenges. Their success was not built on talent alone but on patience, resilience, and continuous development.

Within Indian cricket, Tendulkar emerged through the rigours of long-format cricket at a time when T20 did not dominate the sporting imagination. Others, including Vinod Kambli, faded early despite immense promise, highlighting the importance of temperament and sustained growth.

If Vaibhav is to serve Indian cricket over the long term, his development must remain anchored in the longer formats of the game. Otherwise, he risks becoming merely a short-format specialist, vulnerable to the next wave of fleeting talent.

R NARAYANAN | NAVI MUMBAI

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A new role for the Opposition

The Opposition's renewed call for unity must be carefully calibrated. Voters across states have grown weary of negative campaigns that focus solely on attacking the government without offering constructive alternatives. Electoral setbacks in several states have shown that excessive criticism, unaccompanied by a credible vision, often erodes public trust rather than strengthening Opposition ranks.

Instead of positioning themselves as obstructionists, Opposition parties should channel their collective energy into advancing governance agendas that address the concerns of ordinary citizens. Unity should not be limited to amplifying grievances; it should involve pressing the government to implement projects and policies that genuinely benefit the nation. By demanding accountability on development, employment, infrastructure, education and health-care, the Opposition can establish itself as a responsible and relevant force. A strategy rooted in constructive engagement is more likely to resonate with citizens than relentless criticism. It allows the Opposition to rebuild credibility, demonstrate political maturity and show that unity is about strengthening democratic institutions and promoting national progress.

O PRASADA RAO | HYDERABAD

A wake-up call for political parties

A major rebellion is reportedly brewing within the Trinamool Congress (TMC), with several MPs said to be seeking recognition as a separate bloc and extending support to the ruling NDA. If true, this development could have significant implications for both West Bengal and national politics. Such political realignments raise important questions about internal party democracy, leadership accountability, and the mandate entrusted by voters. While elected representatives have every right to express dissent, any change in political allegiance must be transparent and consistent with constitutional provisions, including the Anti-Defection Law, to preserve public trust in democratic institutions.

The situation also highlights a wider challenge facing political parties across India: the need to address internal grievances, encourage dialogue, and remain connected to grassroots concerns. At a time when Parliament should focus on pressing issues such as inflation, unemployment, education, and economic growth, leaders must prioritise governance over political manoeuvring.

This episode serves as a reminder that democratic stability depends not only on electoral success but also on responsible leadership, institutional integrity, and respect for the people's mandate.

VIDYASAGAR REDDY KETHIRI | NEW DELHI

Turning literacy into opportunity

The Uttar Pradesh government's success in implementing the Nav Bharat Saksharta Abhiyan demonstrates that large-scale adult literacy is achievable when political will, administrative commitment, and grassroots infrastructure work together effectively. Reaching 11.68 lakh adults above the age of fifteen in just three years is a commendable achievement and a significant step towards inclusive development. The programme's objective extends beyond basic literacy. It seeks to promote awareness, self-reliance, and meaningful participation in economic and social life. Experience from states such as Kerala and Himachal Pradesh shows that literacy initiatives create lasting impact only when linked to livelihood opportunities, legal awareness, health education, banking access, and digital literacy.

The centrally sponsored programme offers valuable lessons for other states with large adult literacy burdens. However, its success ultimately depends on sincere and sustained implementation by local administrations. Whether this initiative becomes a genuine social transformation or remains merely an impressive statistic remains to be seen. One hopes the commitment endures beyond electoral cycles and continues empowering people at the grassroots level.

A MYLSAMI | COIMBATORE



Rising seas, stronger cyclones and the fight for our blue planet

Protecting children in the digital age

The oceans — sustaining life, biodiversity, and oxygen production — face mounting threats. Rising sea levels, warming waters, coral bleaching, plastic pollution, and intensifying coastal disasters are pushing marine ecosystems towards a dangerous tipping point



SATENDRA SINGH | TANUSHREE

Every year the world comes together to observe World Ocean Day — a moment to reflect on how deeply our lives depend on the health of our seas. Oceans cover nearly 71 per cent of Earth's surface, produce half the oxygen we breathe, regulate the global climate, and sustain the livelihoods of over three billion people. Yet today, these vast blue expanses face an unprecedented convergence of threats: climate change, pollution, habitat destruction, overfishing, and even the environmental fallout of armed conflict.

The theme of World Ocean Day 2026 — "Reimagine: Beyond the World We Know, A New Relationship with Our Ocean" — captures the urgency of this moment. It is a reminder that humanity's fate is inseparable from the fate of the ocean, and that meaningful change demands more than awareness. It demands action. Central to this year's campaign is the call for strong Marine Protected Areas and the urgent implementation of the global 30x30 Goal — the commitment to place at least 30 per cent of the planet's lands, waters, and oceans under conservation protection by 2030.

The Ocean as Earth's Life-Support System

The oceans are far more than a scenic backdrop to human civilisation. They absorb roughly 30 per cent of all carbon dioxide emissions and about 90 per cent of the excess heat generated by those emissions. Without this enormous buffering capacity, Earth's surface temperatures would climb rapidly, rendering vast regions uninhabitable. In this sense, the ocean is not just the planet's lungs — it is its most critical climate regulator. But this service comes at a cost. As oceans absorb more heat and carbon dioxide, they grow warmer and more acidic, making conditions increasingly hostile for marine life. The consequences are already visible: more frequent marine heatwaves, mass coral bleaching events, disrupted migration patterns among fish species, and the intensification of tropical storms. Ocean warming is not a problem of the distant future. It is one of the defining challenges of our time.

Rising seas and coastal peril

Global mean sea levels have already risen between 21 and 24 centimetres since 1880, driven by the thermal expansion of warming water and the accelerating melt of glaciers and ice sheets. The latest IPCC projections suggest sea levels could rise by anywhere between 30 centimetres and one metre by the end of this century, depending on future emissions.

The human stakes are immense. More than 680 million people currently live in low-lying coastal zones. Major cities — Mumbai, Kolkata, Shanghai, Bangkok, Jakarta, New York, and Miami — face growing flood risks. Entire small island nations risk being submerged, with their populations displaced. For India, with over 7,500 kilometres of coastline supporting ports, industries, fishing communities, and dense urban populations, the threat is particularly acute. Rising seas combined with growing coastal populations are creating a slow-moving disaster that will define the coming decades.

Corals: Ocean's Vanishing Rainforests

Coral reefs occupy just one per cent of the ocean floor, yet they shelter approximately 25 per cent of all marine species. They sustain fisheries, provide livelihoods through tourism, and protect coastlines by absorbing wave energy. But they are also among the most climate-sensitive ecosystems on Earth. Warmer water triggers coral bleaching — corals expel the symbiotic algae they depend on for survival, and repeated bleaching leads to colony death. Scientists estimate that up to 50 per cent of the world's coral reefs have already disappeared or severely degraded since 1950. A recent global bleaching event affected reefs in more than 80 countries. The loss ripples outward: declining fish stocks, diminished tourism, and coastlines vulnerable to storm surges.

Acidification and plastic: Twin silent crises

Ocean acidification — often called the "evil twin" of climate



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SINCE 1865

OCEAN WARMING IS ALSO FUELLING MORE POWERFUL TROPICAL CYCLONES. WHILE THE TOTAL NUMBER OF STORMS MAY NOT BE RISING DRAMATICALLY, A GROWING PROPORTION ARE REACHING EXTREME INTENSITY. CYCLONES FANI, AMPHAN, TAUKTAE, YAAS, BIPARJOY, REMAL, AND DANA HAVE ALL DEVASTATED COASTAL COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION IN RECENT YEARS

Satendra Singh, IFS, former Executive Director, National Institute of Disaster Management, GOI and Tanushree, Junior Faculty at FDDI, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, GOI

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change — receives far less attention than it deserves. Since the Industrial Revolution, ocean acidity has increased by 26 per cent. This threatens species that rely on calcium carbonate to build shells and skeletons, including corals, shellfish, and plankton. As these foundational organisms struggle, the effects cascade through entire marine food webs, ultimately threatening food security for coastal communities worldwide.

Meanwhile, plastic pollution has reached catastrophic proportions. Between 19 and 23 million tonnes of plastic waste enter the oceans every year. Plastic has been found in the deepest ocean trenches and in the most remote marine environments. Sea turtles mistake plastic bags for jellyfish. Seabirds feed plastic fragments to their chicks. Abandoned fishing gear entangles and kills marine animals. As larger plastic breaks down into microplastics, these particles have turned up in seafood, drinking water, human blood, and even placental tissue. If current trends continue, plastic entering the ocean could nearly triple by 2040.

Mangroves: Nature's frontline defence

Among the most underappreciated coastal ecosystems are mangrove forests. These remarkable trees — thriving at the boundary between land and sea — serve as nurseries for fish, crabs, and prawns, improve water quality, and function as highly efficient carbon sinks, storing more carbon per unit area than many terrestrial forests. India has approximately 4,992 square kilometres of mangrove cover, including the Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove forest. Critically, mangroves provide natural disaster protection. Research shows that intact mangrove belts can reduce wave height by up to 66 per cent, significantly buffering the impact of cyclones, storm surges, and floods. Communities shielded by healthy mangroves during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and subsequent Bay of Bengal cyclones suffered considerably less damage than those where mangroves had been cleared. Despite this, mangroves continue to face destruction through urbanisation, aquaculture expansion, industrial development, and rising seas. Protecting and restoring them is one of the most cost-effective climate adaptation strategies available.

Cyclones, conflict, and the road ahead

Ocean warming is also fuelling more powerful tropical cyclones. While the total number of storms may not be rising dramatically, a growing proportion are reaching extreme intensity. Cyclones Fani, Amphan, Tauktae, Yaas, Biparjoy, Remal, and Dana have all devastated coastal communities across the Indian Ocean region in recent years.

When intensifying storms combine with rising sea levels, their destructive reach extends deeper inland — threatening deltas, agricultural zones, ports, and entire coastal economies. Less discussed, but equally serious, is the environmental damage caused by armed conflict. Warships, explosions, attacks on oil infrastructure, and the destruction of coastal facilities all contaminate marine ecosystems. Oil spills in strategic waterways such as those in West Asia can devastate coral reefs, mangroves, and fisheries for decades. Environmental protection must be integrated into conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction efforts.

A shared responsibility

The solutions are not a mystery. Governments must accelerate low-carbon transitions, expand Marine Protected Areas, restore coastal ecosystems, and strengthen environmental enforcement. Industry must reduce plastic production and embrace sustainable practices. Communities can cut plastic use, support sustainable fisheries, and participate in coastal restoration. Internationally, cooperation must deepen because oceans belong to no single nation. The ocean has sustained human civilisation for thousands of years. On this World Ocean Day, the call is clear: we must now sustain it in return.



VIPUL GAUR

"Privacy is not an option, and it shouldn't be the price we accept for just getting on the Internet." - Gary Kovacs

Children today are entering the digital world at an early age. Smartphones, online gaming platforms, social media applications and virtual classrooms have become an inseparable part of childhood. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this transition, pushing millions of students towards online learning and digital interaction. While technology has undoubtedly expanded access to education and communication, it has also exposed children to unprecedented risks in the digital sphere.

A growing number of children are unknowingly sharing personal information across gaming platforms, social media applications and educational websites. In many cases, neither children nor parents fully understand how such data is collected, stored and used. The rise of targeted advertising, behavioural tracking and online fraud has made children one of the most vulnerable groups in the data-driven economy. In this context, the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023 assumes critical importance.

The DPDP Act, 2023 is India's primary law governing how personal data is collected, stored and used in the digital space. Under this framework, a Data Principal refers to the individual whose data is being processed, while a Data Fiduciary is the entity (such as an app, platform, or organisation) that collects and uses that data.

Under Section 9 of the said Act, special safeguards are provided for children's online data. It mandates that digital platforms and data handlers must obtain verifiable consent from a parent or lawful guardian before processing any personal data of a child. It also restricts practices such as behavioural tracking, targeted advertising, and any processing that may adversely impact a child's well-being. In principle, these provisions aim to ensure that children are not reduced to data sources for commercial exploitation and are protected from manipulative digital practices.

While the intent of the DPDP Act, 2023 is clearly protective, its implementation in the context of children raises practical concerns. The idea of "verifiable parental consent" assumes a level of digital awareness and supervision that may not exist uniformly across households. In reality, many parents themselves are not fully aware of how digital platforms collect and use personal data, and consent is often given mechanically through quick approvals rather than informed understanding.

At the same time, children today are active users of online games, social media platforms, and EdTech applications, many of which are designed to encourage constant engagement. In such an environment, distinguishing between meaningful consent and routine digital acceptance becomes increasingly difficult. This creates a gap between the law's intention and its real-world effectiveness.

A significant part of this challenge emerges from the rapid digitisation of education itself. Schools and EdTech platforms today rely heavily on digital tools for attendance tracking, assignments, assessments, and communication with parents. While these systems have improved access and efficiency, they have also led to the large-scale collection of children's personal data, often without a clear understanding among students or even parents of how this information is stored or used.

Many educational applications collect behavioural data such as login patterns, time spent on tasks, performance analytics, and interaction history. In some cases, this data is used not just for academic tracking but also for product improvement and user engagement strategies. This raises an important concern: data generated in the classroom is increasingly becoming part of a broader digital ecosystem, where the boundaries between education and data profiling are becoming blurred.

Beyond education platforms, children's digital exposure is also shaped heavily by social media applications and online gaming environments. These platforms are designed around engagement-driven algorithms that encourage prolonged usage, often by analysing user behaviour and preferences. For children, this translates into continuous exposure to content tailored to keep them engaged, sometimes without a clear understanding of how these systems operate.

In such ecosystems, behavioural tracking becomes routine. Every click, interaction, and viewing pattern contributes to a digital profile that can be used to predict and influence future behaviour. The DPDP Act, 2023 seeks to restrict targeted advertising and tracking for children; however, enforcing these boundaries in fast-moving digital environments remains a significant challenge. The result is a space where children are active participants, yet largely unaware subjects of extensive data collection. The challenge, therefore, is not merely about the existence of a robust legal framework such as the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, but about ensuring its meaningful implementation in a rapidly evolving digital ecosystem. Protecting children online cannot depend only on formal consent mechanisms; it must also be supported by greater digital literacy among parents, educators, and children themselves. Schools and educational institutions must be encouraged to adopt transparent data practices, while platforms must be held accountable for designing child-centric and privacy-respecting systems by default.

At the same time, awareness around digital footprints and data sharing must become an essential part of early education. Without these complementary measures, the idea of "verifiable consent" risks becoming a procedural formality rather than a genuine safeguard.

Safeguarding children's digital presence requires a collective effort where law, education, and technology work in alignment. It is only then that India can ensure that its youngest internet users are not merely participants in the digital world but are also adequately protected within it.



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From waste to wealth: Why India must get serious about biogas



KUSHAN MITRA

India has a habit of discovering useful ideas and then burying them under slogans. Biogas is one such idea. It is routinely described as a clean fuel, a rural livelihood generator, a waste-management solution and a climate instrument. All of that is true. But unless the government builds a sensible policy architecture and a financially viable market structure, biogas will remain a useful concept trapped in pilot projects, small installations and optimistic speeches. That would be a mistake. In a country that produces huge volumes of cattle manure, agricultural residue and municipal organic waste, biogas is one of the few energy options that can simultaneously address emissions, waste disposal and fuel import dependence. It is a rare case where environmental logic and energy security logic point in the same direction. The climate case is straightforward. Organic waste releases methane, a greenhouse gas far more potent than carbon dioxide over the short term. Capturing that methane reduces the emissions problem at source. In other words, biogas is not merely about producing a green fuel; it is about preventing a worse one from entering the atmosphere in the first place. That distinction

matters because India's biogas debate is often framed too casually. Not all biofuels are equally defensible. Crop-based fuels can raise questions about land use, food security and water stress. Waste-based biogas does not carry the same moral and economic ambiguity.

When the feedstock is cattle dung, municipal organic waste or agricultural residue, the equation is cleaner: the country is turning a liability into an asset. I recently travelled to Banaskantha district in Gujarat, where I saw firsthand how this can work. A tripartite venture between Banas Dairy, the local district dairy union, the National Dairy Development Board and Suzuki Research and Development India has created facilities where about 100 tonnes of cow dung are converted into biogas every day. The operation is industrial in scale, even if still modest in the larger national context, and the gas is sold directly to local transport users outside the plant.

This example from Gujarat points to the promise of the model, but it also reveals its limits. Such projects are viable only when multiple revenue streams are available. Gas sales alone rarely support the full economics. Plants also depend on slurry sales, fertiliser value, carbon credits and, in some cases, waste-processing fees. That is not a weakness of the model; it is the model. The problem is that policy in India still tends to treat biogas as a single-product energy business rather than a multi-product circular-economy system. That is where the government must become more serious. If it wants biogas to scale, it must stop thinking in terms of announce-



ments and start thinking in terms of market design. A biogas plant needs assured feedstock, predictable offtake, stable regulation and a financing structure that reflects its real cash flows. None of those things happens automatically. At present, the sector suffers from a familiar Indian policy problem: enthusiasm at the top, fragmentation on the ground. Municipal waste systems remain uneven, even though good work on waste-to-gas has been showcased in places like Indore. Agricultural residue collection is inconsistent. The case for biogas becomes even stronger when viewed through energy security. India still relies heavily on imported natural gas, much of it arriving as LNG from external suppliers and exposed to international price volatility. That dependence is not merely an economic issue; it is a strategic vulnerability. Every unit of domestically produced biomethane reduces that exposure, however incrementally. Biogas will

not replace LNG imports, but it can narrow the gap and improve resilience. In fact, when the gas shortage induced by the West Asia crisis occurred, industrial users across India were informed of a cut in supplies. This included the Maruti-Suzuki plant at Hansalpur, Gujarat. Production of gas from the Banaskantha Biogas facilities was diverted to Hansalpur and made up over half the shortfall according to Maruti-Suzuki officials. This is why the biogas conversation should not be reduced to environmental idealism or rural romanticism. It should be treated as industrial policy. A serious biogas ecosystem can create local jobs, improve sanitation, generate organic fertiliser that can help restore soil health, reduce methane emissions and lower foreign exchange outgo on imported gas. Few policy areas offer so many dividends from the same tonne of waste. But these require a sustainable financial model. That means the government must create conditions under which private capital can actually underwrite projects. Feedstock aggregation must be systematised. Municipal bodies, dairies, farmer collectives and cooperatives must be integrated into collection networks. Offtake contracts must be bankable. By-product markets must be formalised. Digestate standards must be clear. And if carbon credits are to be part of the revenue stack, the rules around verification and monetisation must be credible. This is the unglamorous part of clean energy policy. It is much easier to announce a target than to build the supply chain, legal framework and revenue certainty that make the target real. There is also a larger governance

lesson here. India's waste streams are not going away. Its livestock numbers are not going away. Its municipal waste burden is not going away. These will only increase as the country gets richer and more urban. Nor is its appetite for gas likely to disappear soon. A policy that treats these realities separately is less useful than one that connects them. Biogas links agriculture to energy, sanitation to industry and climate policy to import substitution. That is why the government should be more pragmatic. It should encourage decentralised plant construction where feedstock is available, but not imagine that every district will support the same business model. It should recognise that some feedstocks and locations are better than others and that commercial discipline is not a betrayal of public purpose but a precondition for it. The ideal outcome is not a sector dependent on permanent subsidy. It is a sector where the economics make sense because the policy has been designed sensibly. If that happens, biogas can become what it ought to be: not a boutique environmental project, but a mainstream part of India's energy and waste infrastructure. Biogas is one of the few solutions that can deliver measurable gains on emissions, waste and fuel imports at the same time. But only if the government stops treating it as a niche idea and starts treating it as a national necessity.

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CONTRAPUNTO

Football is inherently dangerous, and that will never change

- CHRIS BORLAND

Football Is US?

The beautiful game is getting cold vibes in America, partly thanks to Trump. But the magic may yet happen

World Cup is almost here, but in one of its host nations, the party feels oddly unloved. Across much of the footballing world, the familiar fever has already taken hold. In Buenos Aires, parks and cafés are humming with speculation about Argentina's chances of defending their crown, with fans swapping Panini stickers, and tracing possible routes to glory. In Cape Verde, one of the smallest nations ever to reach the tournament, the mood is even more electric. The 10-island archipelago off West Africa has been celebrating its surprise qualification like a national awakening, and daring to dream of more.

But in US, the atmosphere is strikingly different. That is partly cultural. Football, or soccer in American usage, has never quite occupied the country's sporting bloodstream in the way baseball, basketball, or American football do. Major League Soccer has certainly grown, helped by ageing global icons such as Messi choosing America as a late-career stage. Youth soccer, suburban soccer moms, and packed summer friendlies all exist. Yet, for the average American sports fan, World Cup still does not carry the ancestral pull it commands in Europe, Latin America, Africa, or parts of Asia.

Politics has made that distance feel wider. Trump's America is not the America of USA '94, when the tournament arrived as a sunny advertisement for post-Cold War confidence. This World Cup comes wrapped in suspicion, border anxiety, and geopolitical tension. A host nation remains in active conflict with Iran, a participating country. Citizens of Haiti, Iran, Senegal, and Ivory Coast face travel barriers that could prevent them from watching their teams in person. Add the Trump administration's hardline immigration posture, uncertainty over how foreign visitors will be treated, and ticket prices that seem designed for oligarchs rather than ordinary fans, and this World Cup begins to look less like a welcome mat than a velvet rope.

And yet football has a habit of escaping cages built around it. Once the ball rolls, the tournament may find its soul, not in official slogans or VIP boxes, but in America's immigrant neighbourhoods. In St Louis, Missouri, home to a large Bosnian community, excitement is already building around Bosnia and Herzegovina's appearance. For families who fled war in 1990s, this is not merely sport. It is memory, pride and belonging in motion. If America struggles to embrace the world's biggest sporting event, its immigrants may still teach it how.



Swiss Watch

If Switzerland becomes first nation to cap population, the real casualty will be globalisation

Switzerland will vote in an interesting referendum this Sunday. The question before voters is: should its population be capped at 10mn till 2050? It's at 9mn now, and natural growth - total births minus total deaths - is a paltry 6,000 per year. There's no chance of touching 10mn this way. But Switzerland is also an immigrant magnet. About 2mn immigrants have made it their home in just the past 25 years. Overall, they make up 27% of population. And this is the real trigger for the referendum. It's a call from the political right, to preserve "Swissness", and ease pressure on infra and housing.

Criticism of the referendum is along predictable lines. If it passes - opinion polls show it might - reduced immigration will hurt Swiss growth, especially when the native population is ageing fast. Basically, a reminder of economic reality. But Switzerland has been here before. In the 1960s, when native population and GDP were growing fast, trade unions - the political left - were crying 'inforestieramento' and 'uberfremdung' against excessive immigration. Their demands for a 500,000 cap on the number of immigrants had a role in immigration quotas for workers.

To outsiders, Swiss fears of pressure on housing and infra can seem exaggerated. The country has 9 rooms for 5 people, on average. Nobody hangs out of their trains. But quality of life is subjective. A lone passenger in an auto can seem wasteful to someone squeezed in with 5-6 others in a shared auto. So, how much space the Swiss want for themselves, and how 'Swiss' they want to remain, is their business. For us, the referendum is interesting mainly as a barometer of globalisation. With tariffs, Trump's already shaken the global village. Sunday might bring another wakeup call, on an alphorn.



Lost and found

Each year it gets lost in India, causing much hullabaloo till it's located

Jug Suraiya

It had gone and got itself lost again. Or not lost, but maybe just misplaced. This happens year after year, so it shouldn't come as a surprise, but it does.

There's much confabulation and conjecture in mainstream and social media as to what the dickens could possibly have happened to the darn thing. Where could it have gone?

It couldn't be easy, getting itself lost or misplaced, the way it keeps doing. It's not something small that could go and fall into some nook or cranny, under the sofa cushions in the sitting room. Or behind the fridge in the kitchen. Or lurking inside the potted plants in the balcony.

It's supposed to be pretty sizeable. Though how sizeable or unsizeable it is on any given occasion is a matter for great and lengthy disputation among the many experts whose job it is to know everything there is to know about the problematic thing in question.

And the number of experts seems to be growing with each passing year. It's a noteworthy growth industry, of specialised experts in this particular area of expertise, and contributes significantly to the much-needed generation of employment in the country.

The proliferation of experts is aided by the very essence of what it means to be an expert, in any field, in that no two or more experts can hold the same view or agree with one another, because if they did, instead of two, or more, experts you'd only need the one expert, who'd presumably be selected by the drawing of lots or some similar process founded on random chance, and the other, or others, would be pink-slipped, leading to a marked spike in the unemployment rate.

This perpetually errant subject of overwrought discourse and debate is vital to the nation's finances, by creating a superabundance of experts, and providing other economic stimuli.

So, it's a good thing that after all the many alarms and excursions it regularly causes, it always manages to find itself and turn up, as it has done this time around, sooner or later.



second opinion

Western Rightwing's George Floyd?

The murder of a white Brit by a British Sikh is powering a narrative, across the West, of non-whites lording it over whites. Yes, Brit cops messed up initially. But now, the idea of immigration is in crosshairs

Rashmee Roshan Lal



Columnist based in London

In the days after the 9/11 attacks, a T-shirt with a reassuring message became increasingly visible on the London Underground. "Don't freak, I'm a Sikh." It was a reference to the hostility directed at turban-wearing men in US, because some Americans mistakenly believed their facial hair and headgear revealed them as members of Osama bin Laden's al Qaida and Taliban.

The T-shirt with its jaunty slogan seemed a fitting riposte by Sikhs. Scattered around the West and elsewhere, the roughly 1.5mn strong diasporic group felt themselves to be well-regarded. They were seen as an exuberant, self-confident, well-integrated community, often throwing up frontline politicians in their adopted home countries. Add to that the conspicuous hosting of langars and ceaseless habit of sewa, and Sikhs were bathed in the glow of being a model minority.

That was then. In 2026, the community is in the crosshairs of an international far-right movement, led by Trump's administration and Elon Musk, to bend public policy towards an iniquitous new standard, "white lives matter". The trigger is the actions of a turban-wearing Gen Z British Sikh, Vickrum Digwa, in the English port city of Southampton. Digwa carried a small kirpan, but used a longer knife to fatally stab Henry Nowak, a teenage student of British Polish ethnicity, in the chill gloom of a Dec night. He falsely told police the dying victim had hurled racist abuse at him.

Police handcuffed Nowak, not realising that life was ebbing from him. They also dismissed his "I can't breathe" plea, which was eerily reminiscent of George Floyd's last words as a white police officer fatally knelt on the African-American's neck in Minneapolis in 2020. Floyd's murder catalysed a global movement for racial justice. Can Trump and the far-right claim Nowak as a white George Floyd?

For all that Digwa has been sentenced to 21 years in prison, the case isn't really over. It's still being tried in the broader court of public opinion in multiple countries, having lit an explosive debate. It's supposed to be about race relations but is, in actual fact, about

brutal murder and a set of despicable lies. Unfortunately, there is little chance of seeing it as such. That the police initially paid respectful heed to the murderer's fabricated account of a racial attack, and failed to notice Nowak's injuries, has provoked outrage from US's state department, Trump's vice-president JD Vance, and defence secretary Pete Hegseth, as well as Musk and the British, European and Japanese far-right.

A Polish far-right member of European parliament has insisted Digwa, who's a UK national, is "an Indian". She added that the story symbolised "Britain's descent into the depths of the earth...brainwashed by this suicidal, leftist ideology." French far-right politician

brave spat at, and other forms of physical intimidation or verbal abuse. They say it's happening in gym changing rooms, shopping malls, on the streets. Some are being asked in fearful tones if they carry a kirpan, the ceremonial dagger having assumed a hideous importance in British imagination.

It's a far cry from the goodwill that's marked Sikhs' equation with the British state, and the legal accommodations made for them over the years. Harbans Singh Jabbal is believed to be the first turbaned Sikh in Britain to wear a police uniform, nearly 60 years ago. Turbaned Sikhs are exempt from wearing a helmet while riding a motorbike. Amritdharis are allowed to carry the kirpan.

British govt is trying to push back, but there are limits to what a small country can do when the hyperpower tries to foment a race war. Starmer has forcefully rejected the allegation there is "two-tier policing", which disadvantages white people. His deputy, David Lammy, has challenged Vance's focus on criminal-minded migrants, and correctly described Digwa as "a Brit".

Even so, Hegseth used a D day anniversary to claim Europe is facing another "invasion" by migrants, some 82 years after the defeat of Hitler's Third Reich. This reasoning is plain: Woke policies give coloured people too many rights, deny white people dominance of their homelands, and enable the cancer of anti-white racism to metastasize, soon to consume Europe. They want multiculturalism and mass migration to end. As also anti-racism protections that provide succour to non-white groups.

This is an argument for returning Europe to a system that measures human value by skin colour. In his second term, Trump's administration has made clear its intention to destabilise liberal European systems in favour of white supremacist ones. It must be heartened that rising anti-immigrant sentiment is reshaping the political agenda across Europe.

Consider this: Switzerland votes on Sunday (June 14) in a referendum to cap its population at 10mn. Led by the rightwing Swiss People's Party, despite opposition from business groups and the federal govt, it is the Alpine version of Brexit, and could be similarly ruinous. The tragedy is that the campaign led by the right across Europe, could snap the very threads that hold its societal tapestry together - tolerance, empathy, humanity.



Image by Al. from a photograph

Eric Zemmour, who ran for president in 2022, has said Nowak's "immigrant perpetrator" was being protected by the "religion of anti-racism".

Vance has publicly posted that, "Henry Nowak died the same way a civilisation dies: abandoned, handcuffed by authorities who neither trusted nor cared for him, and accused of hate crimes he did not commit." He added that Nowak's murder is evidence "European elites" had failed to oppose the "politics of self-hatred".

The effects of this dangerous stream of disinformation are already apparent. Far-right demonstrations in Southampton became violent, leaving several police officers injured. Some British Sikhs are reporting an unfamiliar surge of animosity towards them, including

Male, Age 20, Can't Legally Marry. Let UCC Correct That

BJP state govts are implementing uniform civil codes. But what really needs uniformity, is the legal age for marriage: 18 for men & women. Also, clauses for live-ins are worryingly illogical

Neeraj Kaushal



Professor of Social Policy

Assam recently became the third state to pass a Uniform Civil Code, a common law for people of all faiths, and for long, a BJP election promise. BJP says UCC will bring a uniform law for every citizen. Yet, uniformity in UCC, in all three states, isn't even.

To begin with, men are getting a raw deal. While UCC considers women

mature enough to tie the knot at 18, men must wait for three more years, till they turn 21, to take on the responsibility of starting a family. Men cannot even get into a live-in relationship at 18, women can. By Indian law, a man under 21 is a 'child' for the purpose of marriage or live-in relationships, but a woman enters adulthood as she turns 18.

It is not often we see laws discriminating against men, yet, such laws are just as harmful as female discrimination, and a violation of the Constitution. Men, like women, should have the legal right to marry at age 18.

BJP is slowly introducing UCC in states where it is in govt - in Jan 2025, a bill was passed in Uttarakhand assembly and implemented; in March 2026, Gujarat passed UCC and is now in the process of rolling it out. Assam passed the bill end-May.

All three exclude STs "to preserve their constitutional protections", again making 'uniformity' a casualty. In Assam, STs constitute 12% of the state population, and a recent study showed, have a 21% child marriage rate (marriage before age 18). But they remain out of UCC purview.

All three UCCs have a legal framework for live-in couples. But requirement of mandatory registration of a live-in relationship within a month of entering into it, is more like legal strangulation for a live-in relationship. Here, too, there is lack of uniformity - for marriage, the mandatory registration window is 60 days.

in Uttarakhand, failure to register live-in relationships can result in imprisonment of up to three months or a fine of up to ₹10,000. Gujarat's, reportedly, may have stricter penalties. But the larger concern is how does govt propose to implement the clause on live-in registrations? Unlike marriages, most live-in relationships do not have a clear start date.

To understand why, one must study why couples choose live-in arrangements over marriage. A tiny minority get into live-in relationships because they do not see the need for marriage. Most youngsters choose



Image by Al

to live-in, if they have the economic means, courage, and/or social milieu, before marriage, to test their compatibility. Such relationships are seen to be more fragile and less durable than marriages. Research shows live-in relationships start in tentative ways. For some, it leads to marriage, some remain as live-ins and some fade away.

Thus, it is not clear how govts will implement it. How will it establish on which specific date a couple entered the live-in relationship, when even the couple

is not very certain? What happens when they decide to get out of the live-in relationship? What if a couple is in a live-in relationship for a few months, falls out of it, then gets back into it? Given the hassles, UCC is more likely to discourage live-in relationships that are, in any case, even today a rarity in Indian society.

Non-uniformity aside, UCC remains silent on inter-faith marriages - it is unclear how courts will interpret this silence. Would UCC cover all marriages including inter-faith marriages? Or would they continue to be governed by the Special Marriage Act that requires couples to submit a formal written notice to inform the court at least a month prior to marriage? The notice is publicly displayed for a period of 30 days to allow anyone to legally object to the union. Will UCC bring uniformity between intra-faith and inter-faith marriages? We don't know.

But there can be little wrangle on the marriageable age for men. Worldwide, while almost all countries have a minimum legal age of marriage, gender equality is the norm. Only 38 of the 117 countries for which Pew Research has collected data, treat men and women differently and almost all of them (with the exception of one, Lesotho) have higher minimum legal age of marriage for men than women. In only 20 countries, the legal minimum age of marriage for men is more than 18.

A higher minimum age for men, while discriminatory to them, reinforces patriarchal norms. These norms expect men to be household heads and breadwinners and relegate women to the position of homemakers.

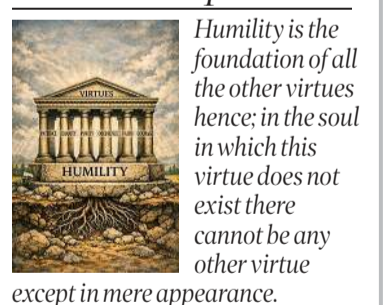
In 2023, Supreme Court dismissed a petition to increase minimum legal age of marriage for women to 21. Fact is, increasing female minimum marriage age to 21 would have made over half of all recent marriages illegal, per NFHS. For the sake of uniformity, as is the global norm, it makes more sense, instead, to reduce marriage's legal age for men to 18.

The writer teaches at Columbia University

Calvin & Hobbes



Sacredspace



Humility is the foundation of all the other virtues hence; in the soul in which this virtue does not exist there cannot be any other virtue except in mere appearance.

Saint Augustine

Borderless Appeal Of AI And Santa Claus

Narayani Ganesh

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is omnipresent. Many think it is omniscient and omnipotent, too. Anyway, there's no escape. Much like Santa Claus or Father Christmas. Both create magic - Santa fires the imagination, instils hope of goodness, peace and harmony and embodies generosity, charity, goodness and celebration. AI, too, fires the imagination, enables gleaning essential information but AI is neutral like any other technology, so it does not promote any of the virtues and values that Santa does as a keeper of conscience. AI has no emotion, no feeling. It just does out what was put in, in the format and manner in which you ask for.

Two decades ago, in 2006, Finnair, to flag off their inaugural flight service from India to Finland, invited a few journalists and took us to also visit the office of Santa Claus, in Rovaniemi, in

Lapland, in the Finnish Arctic Circle. It was a make-believe world of fantasy, mythology and magic. To meet Santa, "in flesh and blood", and experience the workings of the post office that received more than 60,000 letters, from children across the world, was a dreamy experience. "Every letter is replied to," Santa informed us, as we watched Santa's workforce sorting mail, country-wise. Some twenty years later, in Norway's Narvik in the Arctic Circle area, a large data centre is under construction in a valley surrounded by ice and snow-capped mountains and freezing fjords. The magic of Rovaniemi is absent, it is all dark and grey. The data centre is one among 800 such centres coming up across the world, all to service AI, the super-duper poker-faced, robotic Santa in the digital era. As a potential tourist

destination, it will be nothing like Santa's post office in the Arctic. The AI magic is what one associates with an Alexa or robotic house help, not the kind of magic one associates with Santa.

AI can be dangerous. Most users ignore the disclaimer that comes with every chatbot or other large language models: "The content may contain errors or biases." By contrast, Santa is harmless. His very existence is a disclaimer of sorts; everyone is conscious of this and no one minds.

At a recent conference on 'Dialogues for Harmony' hosted by the Azim Premji Foundation at AP University, Bengaluru, participant Harmeet Shah Singh, communication and advocacy director of United Sikhs, UK, was speaking in a session on 'Seva as the foundation for community and interreligious harmony'. He went hammer and tongs at AI: "Mark

my words," he said. "Three years from now, AI will destroy everything."

Harmeet Singh said he asked AI for certain verses from the Gurbani and it promptly provided several, based on the topic in question. On closer examination, when Singh tried to cross-check with Gurbani sources, he found that AI had fabricated all the verses and passed them off as Gurbani. "Is this acceptable?" he thundered. Well, this is tricky. Imagine AI doling out spurious health advice or telling you how to deal with relationship issues. Could be disastrous. Yet, undeniably, AI tools have made sifting information from tomes and mounds of material less difficult, provided one cross-checks the veracity of such AI-generated content.

Neither Santa nor AI need to be trashed. They have their place so long as we know what their place is and we keep them there and not let them take over our lives.

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THE SPEAKING TREE

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Beyond stigma

Personal relationships cannot define character

RECENT observations by the Supreme Court that consensual premarital relationships cannot be treated as a "blot on character" mark an important moment in India's evolving understanding of personal liberty. The court's message is simple yet profound: private choices made by consenting adults should not become grounds for social condemnation or institutional discrimination. The case before the court illustrates this principle vividly. The dispute arose from the cancellation of the candidature of a police constable aspirant who had disclosed, while applying for the post, that a criminal case had been registered against him by a woman with whom he had allegedly been in a relationship for nearly four years. The woman claimed that the appellant had promised to marry her but eventually married another woman. The authorities treated the mere existence of the relationship as evidence of questionable character. The SC rightly rejected this approach, observing that consensual premarital relationships cannot automatically amount to moral turpitude.

For far too long, the idea of "character" in India has been shaped by rigid moral codes, often applied unevenly and disproportionately to women. Employment opportunities and social acceptance have frequently been influenced by judgments about an individual's private life rather than professional competence or adherence to the law. By separating legality from morality, the court has reaffirmed a constitutional principle: the State cannot police the intimate choices of adults.

At the same time, the judiciary has emphasised the need to distinguish between consensual relationships and genuine cases of coercion or deception. Not every failed relationship warrants criminal prosecution. Laws meant to protect women must remain robust, but they should not become instruments for adjudicating private morality. A mature society safeguards dignity not through stigma and silence, but through respect for autonomy, informed dialogue and commitment to consent.

Delayed justice

End complacency as the default option

CINEMA does not create stereotypes, it amplifies lived experience. In the case of the judiciary, images and dialogue continue to lend familiarity to the systemic anomalies. The delay in the delivery of justice is now so normalised that only very unusual instances garner attention — minus the revulsion such absurdity should ideally trigger. In Bihar, it took over 30 years to sentence an 85-year-old man to three years in jail in an attempt-to-murder case. He remembers little about the incident. In UP, after a 27-year trial for criminal intimidation, a wobbly 80-year-old was told to stand in court for a day as punishment. He faithfully attended the hearings. Confession and an appeal for mercy led to the verdict. In Mumbai, an 80-year-old will go to prison for a crime committed 13 years ago.

By 2025, the National Judicial Data Grid reported more than 5.1 crore pending cases, nearly 4.5 crore of these in subordinate courts. A speedy trial is a fundamental right, yet remains symbolic for most undertrials. They comprise over 70% of the prison population. Many have spent more years in jail than the punishment prescribed for their alleged crimes. Delay seems to be the default option of criminal procedure. Hurdles can be expected at every stage — from the FIR to investigations, filing of the chargesheet, framing of charges, the trial, and the appeal. The fix is known. Courts with the sanctioned strength, police reforms, technology integration, strong anti-corruption measures, hybrid courts, strengthening legal aid and more lok adalats are all doable. The sluggish clean-up adds to the crisis of credibility. A loss of trust in procedures opens a window for corruption.

The apex court has time and again expressed its dismay over the state of affairs. Institutional efficiency needs a more direct and determined intervention.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, THURSDAY, JUNE 10, 1926

Indian agriculture

THE speech made by Lord Irwin on Monday last at the opening of the Conference of Ministers and Directors of Agriculture in Simla shows what the public know already, the depth and reality of his interest in agriculture problems. For a Viceroy who had been in India for only a little over two months His Excellency showed remarkable knowledge as well as a confident grasp of the concrete problems of Indian agriculture, which many an official who had spent the best part of his life in this country might envy. Of course the view point was almost purely official. There is not a word of reference in the speech to those aspects of the problem, which the Government have unwisely excluded from the scope of reference to the Royal Commission on Agriculture. This may have been because the purpose of the conference, as His Excellency stated was "to discuss certain preliminary steps connected with the forthcoming enquiry by the Royal Commission." Still, this being the first occasion when a Viceroy keenly interested in this particular problem had an opportunity of making a public pronouncement on the subject, it would have been well for His Excellency to show that his view of the problem was sufficiently comprehensive, and that he was not entirely oblivious of those aspects of the problem that particularly concerned the relations between the agriculturist and the State. India has too long been a mere producer of food and of raw material for the rest of the world, and there is nothing in her present economic conditions which the sensitive and self-respecting Indian nationalist more keenly resents than the policy which has reduced her to this state.

Why RBI should sell some gold

If forex reserves are sold when needed, why are we so sentimental about parting with gold?

SUBHASH CHANDRA GARG
FORMER FINANCE SECRETARY

A BLOOMBERG report (June 2) claimed that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) sold about \$12 billion worth of its gold reserves in two weeks through May 22. The Central bank denied the allegation the next day, stating clearly that its gold stock remained unchanged at 880.52 tonnes. Bloomberg retracted its report. As soon as Bloomberg made the allegation, an intense media war (most aggressively on social media) broke out, speculating about the actual state of the Indian economy. Many commentators argued that this showed the precarious situation of the rupee and India's foreign exchange reserves.

The banking regulator, while denying that any gold was sold, carelessly attached a page from its May 2026 Bulletin, which had the April (not May) weekly gold stock data. This made social media users question the veracity of the RBI's denial and accused it of spreading falsehoods. This imputation was plainly wrong as the monetary regulator would never make a false factual statement.

Many recalled 1991 when India had to sell and mortgage its gold to avert an imminent default on its debt-servicing obligations. While the immediate issue has been laid to rest, the wider question of Indians' touchiness about the sale of RBI's gold remains. How should the Reserve Bank deal with its gold reserves? Should it buy more or sell some when needed or just stay put?

As per the apex banking regulator's data (it started publishing about the physical quantity of gold it held from 2020), at March-end



SENTIMENT: Gold is a reserve financial asset for the RBI, like other assets which it holds. PTI

2026, it had 880.34 tonnes of gold; in March 2020, its gold reserves were 653.01 tonnes. Going further back, the RBI had 560.3 tonnes in March 2018 (IMF data). The financial regulator began buying gold from the market in 2018-19 (as decided by an RBI committee, of which I was its member as Secretary, Economic Affairs). The idea was that the RBI should buy small quantities of gold, especially in situations when there was excessive inflow of foreign exchange, which would also help prevent the rupee from unwanted strengthening.

The purchases increased the gold reserves to 693.45 tonnes in March 2021. The financial system regulator bought a good quantity of gold the next year, taking its gold reserves to 760.43 tonnes in March 2022. After slowing down purchases in 2022-23 (794.63 tonnes) and in 2023-24 (822.09 tonnes), the RBI bought a large quantity of gold again in 2024-25, taking its reserves to 879.58 tonnes. In 2025-26, there was hardly any purchase and the gold reserves increased by just 0.76 tonnes. The RBI bought 0.18 tonnes of gold in April 2026, which is where its current stock stands.

In eight years, the Central bank bought a total of 320 tonnes of gold. While India moved to the eighth position globally, the RBI's gold reserves are about 10% of those of the US (8,133 tonnes).

Buying gold currently makes no sense. The option of staying put is symptomatic of a fear psychosis. Sell some gold without fear.

China held 2313.5 tonnes in the first quarter of 2026.

A standout feature of India's gold reserves accumulation strategy is that the apex monetary regulator uses foreign currency reserves (US dollars, euros, etc.) to buy gold. India does not have any current account surplus as its imports exceed exports. India's reserves are primarily built from capital account surpluses (largely from volatile foreign portfolio investment and foreign debt).

The rising price of gold has also brought in another important change in the role of gold reserves.

As gold prices have been rising for the last two years, the dollar value of the RBI's gold reserves has gone up sharply. At the end of March 2018, the apex body's gold reserves equalled \$21.615 billion. In March 2026, these were valued at \$120.742 billion.

While the physical gold quantity increased by 57%, the dollar value increased by 460%. In rupee terms, the gold value rose still higher: In the Central bank's balance sheet, it was placed at Rs 1.44 trillion on June 30, 2018 and Rs 10.94 trillion on March 31, 2026, generating a massive growth of 660%. The financial regulator revalues its gold on a daily basis at 90% of the London Bullion Market Association (LBMA) price in US dollar and at the prevailing rupee-US dollar market exchange rate.

The Bloomberg report touched a raw nerve — of Indians viewing any gold sales by the regulatory body as tantamount to India's economic house being on fire. Why are we so touchy? If the RBI can buy gold from the market (as much as 320 tonnes in the last eight years), why should it not sell when advisable? Why did the alleged sale of 12 tonnes alarm so many people?

The alacrity with which the Central bank had to clarify and assure that all the gold was intact betrayed its underlying nervous-

ness about selling gold.

Can we stop being overly sentimental about selling gold? Gold is a reserve financial asset for the apex monetary regulator, like other assets which it holds, primarily foreign exchange reserves. If foreign currency reserves can be used/sold, what is so special about gold that it must not be sold?

The RBI today sits on the horns of this golden trilemma: should it buy more gold to catch up with the US and China? Should it sell some gold to close the dollar demand-supply gap when needed? Or, should it stay still — neither buy nor sell gold?

Currently, there is a major gap — the dollar demand exceeds its supply. The Central bank can easily clear this gap by using its forex reserves, including gold. Its inability or unwillingness to use gold (it makes up about 20% of the forex currency reserves) is forcing the government and the RBI to undertake other desperate measures to shore up the dollar supply. On June 5, the financial regulator introduced extraordinary (and imprudent) measures like bearing the partial hedging cost of the PSUs' borrowings and the full cost for banks' FCNR (B) deposits, inducing them to raise foreign borrowings and deposits.

The Central banking authority and the government should consider the option of selling some gold dispassionately. It will require changing its own and the people's mindset that gold is like any other foreign exchange asset and there is no odium attached to gold sales, when required. The notion that selling gold amounts to economic desperation or signifies that the economy is in trouble is wrong and needs to be laid to rest. Currently, international gold prices are quite high and the RBI is sitting on considerable gains as it bought its gold in the last eight years at far lower prices. It makes sense to book some profit and shore up usable foreign currency reserves.

Buying gold currently makes no sense. The option of staying put is symptomatic of a fear psychosis. Sell some gold without fear.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

An emergency fund is not an investment; it is an insurance policy. — Dave Ramsey

Four metres from a fatal plunge

COL RS NARULA (RETI)

THE mountains of Jammu & Kashmir have a strange beauty. They can calm your soul one moment and threaten your life the next. I was a young Army officer then, posted to my first unit in the Valley. One afternoon, I was assigned a routine courier duty — carrying important military documents from the headquarters situated nearly two hours away. We set off in a battered one-ton Army vehicle with another officer, four armed guards and our driver Om Prakash (name changed).

Green valleys stretched endlessly below us, birds circled lazily over cliffs and clouds floated like white sails across the sky. Soon after, the vehicle began coughing and jerking violently. "Problem in the carburettor, Saab," Om Prakash muttered nervously. He tinkered under the bonnet, restarted the engine, and somehow got us moving again. But the old vehicle stalled repeatedly. Each time, the guards jumped down to push the vehicle while Om Prakash restarted it using the downhill slope. After the fourth breakdown, exhaustion overtook everyone. The men sat silently at the rear, rifles resting between their knees. With the vehicle in neutral gear and the engine off, it continued rolling slowly downhill.

I leaned against the window, watching tiny birds sip water from a rocky hillside. Ahead, the road curved sharply to the left around a deep gorge. One wrong move and we would plunge hundreds of feet into the valley below.

Something felt odd. The silence. The absence of engine noise. A strange uneasiness crept over me. Then I casually turned towards the driver's seat. It was empty. For a split second, my mind froze. The vehicle was moving on its own.

I spun around and looked. To my horror, Om Prakash was running behind the vehicle, trying to catch it. In that instant, death sat beside me. We were hurtling towards the gorge. Another few seconds and our vehicle — along with two officers, four soldiers and classified documents — would disappear into the valley forever.

Training took over where thought ended. I lunged across the seats, grabbed the steering wheel with one hand and dived onto the seat to press the brake pedal with the other while turning the wheel sharply towards the mountainside. My body twisted awkwardly as the vehicle skidded forward in terrifying silence.

Then it stopped. Just four metres short of the edge. For several moments, nobody spoke. The silence. When Om Prakash reached us, panting and confused, the mystery unravelled. Unable to push the vehicle from the side, he had gone behind it to shove it downhill. But once the slope steepened, the vehicle gathered speed faster than he could run. And he simply failed to catch it.

The guards assumed I knew everything. I assumed the driver was driving. In reality, nobody was controlling the vehicle.

Whenever I think back to that silent vehicle rolling towards the abyss, I still feel the cold touch of death sitting beside me.

The author is a Patiala-based contributor

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RIC revival can bring good

Refer to 'Return of RIC — with strings attached'; at a time when geopolitical rivalries and prolonged conflicts are disrupting global stability, the Russia-India-China (RIC) framework offers a constructive avenue for dialogue and cooperation. Its relevance stems from strategic flexibility rather than military alignment. While China describes India as a partner, this spirit must be reflected in actions that foster mutual trust. Representing nearly one-third of the world's population, RIC can facilitate trade in local currencies, reduce dependence on the weaponised US dollar and promote cooperation in Central Asia, Afghanistan and the Arctic. In a fragmented world, the initiative deserves renewed attention and pragmatic support.

VIJAY KUMAR KATIAL, PANCHKULA

INDIA bloc's unity a façade

Apropos of 'Oppn allies corner Rahul for ill-treating DMK'; the coming together of the INDIA bloc partners should be taken with a pinch of salt. Their claims of unity belie their actions. In the West Bengal election, the Congress and the TMC were pitted against each other. In Tamil Nadu, the Congress was in alliance with the DMK, but supported Joseph Vijay's TVK in government formation. The façade of unity hides deep contradictions within. There is ego clash amongst leaders of the bloc. While their arch rival BJP remains on guard and election-ready throughout the year, the bloc members come together only out of compulsion.

YOGINDER SINGHAL, LADWA

Keep personal ambitions aside

Refer to 'Fault lines'; there is a realisation in the INDIA bloc that unless all members get together and put up a united front, it's going to be difficult to counter the NDA government. The political leaders must keep their personal ambitions on the backburner and focus on ideological differences. Merely launching a scathing attack on the incumbent government will not help the Opposition. Efforts must also be made to take along the AAP and the DMK, which did not attend the INDIA bloc meeting. Equally paramount is the resolution of the leadership issue.

RAVI SHARMA, DHARIWAL

Definite strategy needed

With reference to 'Fault lines'; traditional alliances are breaking away and political morality is at its lowest ebb. The INDIA bloc meeting in New Delhi on Monday failed to draw a definite strategy to confront the NDA. Lack of cohesion among the constituents and the inter-state contradictions stand in the way of their cooperation at the national level. Without a definite strategy towards good governance, the presence of unity is hard to be taken seriously by the public. Mere rhetoric to provide an effective alternative to the ruling party may not sustain due to contradictions among the alliance partners.

NIRMALJIT SINGH CHATRATH, KAPURTHALA

TMC crisis unprecedented

Apropos of 'Trinamool implodes, 20 LS MPs look to join NDA'; while Mamata Banerjee was striving for opposition unity at the INDIA bloc meeting in Delhi, her party was edging towards a split back home. Rebellion within the TMC had begun right after its defeat in the Assembly elections, with 58 MLAs forming a separate faction. Now, this rift appears to be extending to the Parliament as well. When the TMC came to power in Bengal in 2021, many Left leaders and workers had switched sides. Similarly, as the BJP gained strength in the state, people moved from the TMC to the BJP. However, the crisis currently looming over such a big political party — barely a month after the election results — is unprecedented.

RK ARORA, MOHALI

Vigil key to dealing with drugs

Refer to 'Border smuggling'; India is a nation of talented and ambitious youth who dream of achieving big in life. In states like Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, the increasing consumption of drugs has become a serious matter. The administration is not taking sufficient action to address this growing problem. Opening de-addiction centres or running anti-drug campaigns is not enough. We need to change people's mindset on how to deal with drug addiction. The authorities and families should be vigilant at all times.

LUCKY, ROHRU

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit.

These should be cogently written and can be sent by e-mail to: Letters@tribunemail.com

The many faces of Modinomics



R JAGANNATHAN
SENIOR JOURNALIST

As the Modi government completes 12 years in power, it provides us with a vantage point from which to assess his economic performance.

The latest set of numbers is flattering, with GDP growth in 2025-26 coming in at 7.7%, and the last quarter of the fiscal year giving 7.8% despite the fact that this quarter (January-March 2026) included one month of the West Asian conflict's disruptions. One could conclude that the government's management of the economy has been very good in a difficult year, which saw other disruptions, too — Operation Sindoor, effects of the Ukraine war, the US tariff challenge and the weaponisation of China's rare earths monopoly, etc.

A brief history of the economic environment during 2014-26 is useful here. The Modi government faced two back-to-back monsoon failures in 2014-15 and 2015-16, but it compounded this problem by introducing its own disruption: demonetisation. By 2018, just a year before the General Elections, the government was faced with a loss of business

confidence. Modi began correcting this image and in 2019, after re-election, he offered one of the largest corporate tax cuts for India Inc. But it was badly timed, for in 2020, we got the Galwan clashes and Covid, and the economy went into a tail-spin, from which it recovered over the next three years. But after 2024, the Trump tariffs and the Gulf war undermined growth prospects and India was late to take up the AI challenge. Both the markets and the rupee tanked.

On the other hand, it is difficult to recall any government doing more reforms on a consistent basis after 1991. The UPA did practically no reform, but Modi ensured that reforms remained on track — from cleaning up the subsidy delivery system to legislating the insolvency code. In 2017 and the next few years, bank and corporate balance sheets were cleaned up. At no other time has the country invested so much in infrastructure, including roads, airports, seaports, defence or digital infoways.

Modinomics is not a static ideology. It has been reworked to fit economic and political realities. It is clear that Modi as PM has been different from Modi as Gujarat CM. For example, when he was CM and a likely candidate for PM, Modi famously said that the government had no business being in business. He also said that his approach was "minimum government, maximum governance". From this, many observers concluded that Modi



Modi government's policy is to balance economic change with political longevity.

was some Indian version of Margaret Thatcher or Ronald Reagan, who would restrain government expansion and privatise state-owned businesses. Modi also indicated that he preferred empowerment over entitlement, implying that his government would try to help people help themselves and not make freebies an ever-expanding welfare entitlement based on 'rights'.

Not only has very little privatisation been done (Air India is an exception), but the role of government in many sectors has increased. State-owned banks were rescued by massive injections of government equity. Plans to privatise companies as diverse as Bharat Petroleum, Concor, Shipping Corporation and IDBI Bank were drawn up and then quietly scuttled or delayed. Far from cutting freebies, once it was realised that these were essen-

tial to winning elections, the BJP embraced the idea with gusto even though Modi has often rallied against 'revdis'. On the other hand, Modi's essential fiscal conservatism was crucial to India's economic revival after Covid. He did not spend like crazy on expanding entitlements — despite the recommendations of many renowned economists — and the net result is India's central finances are in a better shape now than they would have been if he had followed the advice of experts.

Modi used the fall in crude prices after 2014-15 to tax petro-goods and repair the broken finances left behind by the UPA government. He also used his first term to reform the subsidy system (direct benefit transfers using Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile) and forced loan defaulters to repay loans at the insolvency courts. For the first

time in India's history, defaulters were not spared.

During his first term, when Modi was out to prove that he was tough on corruption and black money, there was a visible slide in business confidence. Two voluntary disclosure schemes for foreign and domestic black money were announced in 2015 and 2016, but they drew a limited response as the penal tax rates were too high. A law to prevent benami transactions in property was operationalised.

In 2016-end, we got demonetisation, which came as a massive blow to the cash-based economy. While one of its unintended side benefits was a quicker transition to the digital economy (UPI is the preferred mode for lower value transactions), there is little doubt that many small and medium enterprises continue to struggle.

As the 2019 elections loomed, Modi reversed course on doling out freebies and started the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi payments to farmers (Rs 2,000 every four months). Before that, state governments were given a wink-and-a-nod to offer freebies of their own, and UP and Maharashtra offered farm loan waivers. Now, of course, they are part of every election. The withdrawal of the three farm reform laws, which were opposed by rich farmers also punctured his zeal for big-ticket reforms that could upset large segments of voters.

Now, the focus is on reforms that are incremental in nature, like steady deregulation, implementing labour codes and incentivisation of manufacturing through the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme. This scheme has been widely successful in electronics, where Apple has been the leading performer. It is now the preferred way of enticing investment in the private sector.

As for jobs, this is where the Modi government faces a big challenge. While it has been successful in formalising jobs (as the growth in provident fund accounts shows), automation and artificial intelligence are likely to dent middle-skill jobs in the most employment-generating businesses: software services, banking and finance, telecom and manufacturing. The real job growth has occurred in platform work (Swiggy, Zomato, Uber) and retail and logistics sectors which employ low-cost labour.

With freebies eating up the revenue outlays, the government's ability to create jobs in the state sector has declined both at the Centre and in states.

Modi has been realistic on jobs, though he won't admit it. He has realised that jobs won't happen easily in the organised sector, which can automate and produce the same output with fewer workers, and that future growth will come from smaller enterprises, self-employment and start-ups. While startups conjure up the image of young educated people using technology in cutting-edge areas, it also includes subsistence-level self-employment for the vast millions (the "pakora" seller). Which is why Modi, even in his first term, emphasised Mudra loans to promote self-employment. It is easy to make fun of this, but it is better than pretending that everyone can get a cushy, regular job.

Modinomics has evolved in the face of economic and political challenges from the Prime Minister's original hopes to something more realistic — and that is not a criticism. The truth is no other party has any better ideas for improving the country's economic future. That is what keeps Modi ahead of his political rivals.

Incremental change and small, regular reforms by stealth are the road ahead. Clearly, the Modi government does not want wholesale disruption and political turmoil. Modinomics is about balancing economic change with political longevity.

A young Nepal seeks partnership over patronage



JAYANT PRASAD
FORMER AMBASSADOR TO NEPAL

The Indian government warmly received the chairman of Nepal's ruling Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) Rabi Lamichhane in New Delhi last week. He came at the invitation of BJP President Nitin Nabin. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Foreign Minister S Jaishankar met Lamichhane. Some commentators in both India and Nepal found this to be special, unmindful of the fact that New Delhi has a tradition of welcoming chiefs of political parties and former Nepali PMs and according them protocol akin to that of a visiting Head of Government.

When I was based in Kathmandu from 2011 to 2013, besides the incumbent PM, Baburam Bhattarai, other leaders who visited India and enjoyed the highest level of access to the government leadership included Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Madhav Nepal and Sushil Koirala, all of whom were not holding government

office. On Lamichhane's heels came Nepal's Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal.

Nepal's sub-Himalayan location ties its destiny closely with India. It is therefore important for the two countries to maintain healthy communications. Since Nepal's PM Balendra Shah is preoccupied with internal issues and there is little prospect of his early visit to India, it was sensible to invite Lamichhane and Khanal.

This is an opportune time to engage Nepal, for there has been a momentous change there, with political power passing into the hands of a young generation, decisively sweeping aside established parties. One of the youngest republics in the world has the youngest Head of Government, who leads a council of ministers with the youngest average age.

The RSP is just two seats short of a two-thirds parliamentary majority, a position that has resulted largely from the charisma of Balendra Shah. His government has a relatively free hand in shaping policy. The RSP and Gen Z, which supports it, believe that, unlike Nepal's previous political transitions, the recent transformation in Nepal was entirely internal. While this is largely true, India quietly supported the timely electoral process.

On the eve of his departure from Kathmandu, Lamichhane promised to recalibrate Nepal-India relations transparently. When, as a TV anchor, he set a world record by hosting a



SPECIAL: Rastriya Swatantra Party chairman Rabi Lamichhane (L) with S Jaishankar in New Delhi. ANI

62-hour talk show in April 2013, the theme of his broadcast was "Buddha Was Born in Nepal", popular with Nepali nationalists who presumed that Indians wanted to take away this credit from Nepal. Lamichhane's visit helped the Indian leadership understand the expectations of Nepal's RSP-led government. Bibek Thoj Thapa, 29, an analyst with the Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement, says that Gen Z would like to see "India as a partner, not as a big brother, building bilateral relations based on shared responsibility, without being transactional."

While the new government has changed the style of diplomatic conduct, it has reaffirmed the traditional parameters of Nepalese foreign policy, anchored in neutrality, independence and the constitution-

To take relations with Nepal forward, it is important to focus on what can be done and avoid being mired in legacy issues.

al principle of non-alignment, with a focus on development diplomacy. The new protocol-based code of conduct for diplomatic interaction does not alter the existing contours of Nepalese policy. While the style has changed, the substance remains unaltered. According to Nepal's former Ambassador to India, Professor Lok Raj Baral, "there is more continuity than change" in the new government's foreign policy.

The Nepal government's policy for the forthcoming fiscal year aspires to achieve 7% average annual real GDP growth, create 1.5 million permanent jobs over five years and produce 30,000 MW of hydropower in the near future. If these were to happen, Nepal would become the most prosperous country in South Asia. Nepal's present hydropower production is less than 4,000 MW. The

three main challenges for the government to reckon with are: internal dissension, sabotage by the old guard and the weight of popular expectations.

The government's constraints also include a lack of resources and a deficit of experience, leading to clashes with the judiciary, which has stayed many decisions taken by Shah. It includes several contentious issues with India that require resolution, such as the border disputes, the 1950 Treaty revision and the operationalisation of the Pokhara and Bhairahawa airports. India has withheld permission to allow international flights at these airports due to their proximity to an Indian Air Force station.

The new government cannot succeed without active engagement and support from India. On its part, India will have to conduct diplomacy sensitively, without a heavy hand and ensure non-reciprocity as the guiding principle for putting India's relations with Nepal back on the rails.

To take the India-Nepal relationship forward, it is important to focus on what can be done and avoid being mired in legacy issues. By expanding a 35-square-km resolvable issue into a 370-square-km intractable dispute, the previous KP Sharma Oli-led government has not just hamstrung efforts to resolve the Kalapani controversy but also inserted a permanent thorn in the India-Nepal relationship.

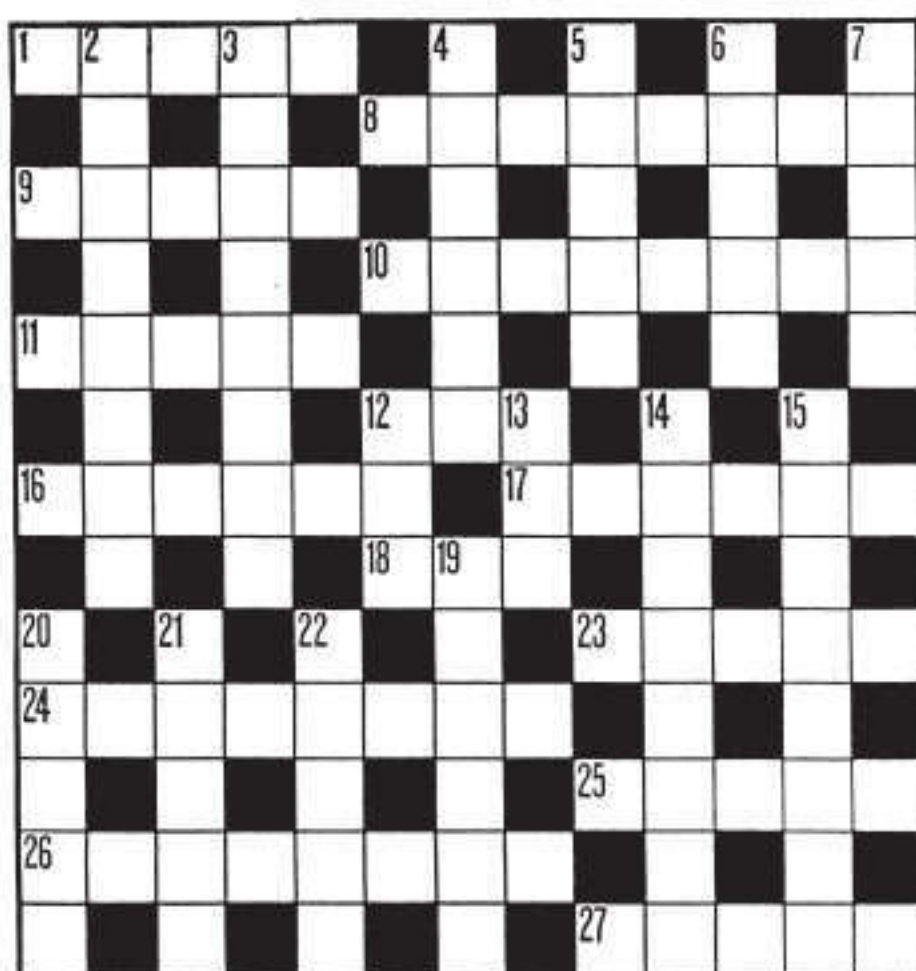
Landlocked Nepal's econo-

my suffers from high logistics costs. Almost all of its third-country trade passes through designated Indian ports after transshipment at land borders by road or rail. Although China in 2016 allowed access through its east coast ports, this route has not been used by Nepalese exporters because Kolkata and Visakhapatnam are substantially closer than the designated Chinese ports of Tianjin, Shenzhen, Lianyungang or Zhanjiang.

Nepalese goods can be transported in the future via the Ganga river, thereby enabling Nepal to overcome the limitations imposed by its landlocked status. The two prerequisites for this are India's facilitation of the passage of barges originating in Nepal to the Bay of Bengal and the availability of 24/7 water in the canals linking Nepalese rivers to the Ganga. The most promising of these is the Saptakoshi, the biggest Nepalese river at the shortest distance to the Bay of Bengal.

The other promising areas of India-Nepal cooperation include the completion of the Raxaul-Kathmandu railway, an international airport at Nijgarh, strengthening the Himalayan and Churia Hills ecosystems, education, health, tourism, biotechnology and people-to-people exchanges. This listing seems overambitious and the impediments are many. But if India and Nepal want to build a future together, this might be the way to go.

QUICK CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- Discard as useless (5)
 - Legitimate target (4,4)
 - Laughter (5)
 - Carefully rehearsed move (3,5)
 - Loud strident noise (5)
 - Piece of work (3)
 - Uninhibitedly eager (4-2)
 - Nevertheless (4,2)
 - Trite quotation (3)
 - Brusque in manner (5)
 - Make light of (4,4)
 - To tire (5)
 - Covertly (2,3,3)
 - Actuality (5)
- DOWN**
- Relax completely (5,3)
 - One's second self (5,3)
 - Form a liking for (4,2)
 - Feel about blindly (5)
 - Falter (5)
 - Nervous excitement (5)
 - Very small amount (3)
 - Entreat (3)
 - Expression of agreement (4,4)
 - Invite trouble (3,3,2)
 - Additionally (2,4)
 - Hoax (5)
 - Total confidence (5)
 - Common viper (5)

Yesterday's Solution

Across: 1 Impoverish, 6 Fiji, 10 Extol, 11 Prescient, 12 Distract, 13 Until, 15 Outpace, 17 Clipper, 19 Pacific, 21 Artisan, 22 Train, 24 Laboured, 27 Treatment, 28 Unite, 29 Rude, 30 Starry-eyed.

Down: 1 Item, 2 Patriotic, 3 Veldt, 4 Replace, 5 Sceptic, 7 Inept, 8 Intolerant, 9 Acquaint, 14 Competitor, 16 Affinity, 18 Postscript, 20 Collect, 21 Arbitrator, 23 Ahead, 25 Usury, 26 Tend.

SU DO KU

7				1	2
	6				3
		9	2	4	
6	5	8		7	
		6	9		
	8		2	1	9
	4	3	8		
8				9	
1	7			8	

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

6	5	8	2	7	9	3	4	1
9	3	2	6	4	1	5	7	8
7	1	4	8	3	5	9	2	6
2	9	6	1	8	7	4	3	5
5	8	7	4	6	3	1	9	2
1	4	3	9	5	2	6	8	7
3	2	1	7	9	6	8	5	4
4	7	5	3	1	8	2	6	9
8	6	9	5	2	4	7	1	3

CALENDAR

JUNE 10, 2026, WEDNESDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1948
- Jyeshtha Shaka 20
- Jyeshtha Parvishite 27
- Hijari 1447
- Krishna Paksha Tithi 10, up to 12:58 am
- Ayushman Yoga up to 6:20 am
- Saubhagya Yoga up to 4:03 am
- Uttarabhadrap Nakshatra up to 9:22 am
- Moon in Pisces sign
- Gandmoola start 9:22 am

FORECAST

SUNSET: 19:24 HRS
SUNRISE: 05:21 HRS

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	42	26
New Delhi	43	30
Amritsar	44	28
Bathinda	45	27
Jalandhar	44	28
Ludhiana	44	27
Bhiwani	44	26
Hisar	44	29
Sirsa	44	30
Dharamsala	35	21
Manali	30	15
Shimla	30	19
Srinagar	30	15
Jammu	41	26
Kargil	23	10
Leh	21	09
Dehradun	39	24
Mussoorie	28	19

TEMPERATURE IN °C

The Statesman

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

Everest's Limits

The survival of Dawa Sherpa on Mount Everest last week will inevitably be celebrated as a miracle. It was. Yet reducing the episode to a tale of human endurance risks obscuring a more uncomfortable reality about what Everest has become in the twenty-first century.

For decades, the world's highest peak symbolised the outer limits of human exploration. Today, it is more a commercial industry. Hundreds of climbers from across the globe pay substantial sums each year to pursue a summit photograph, creating an ecosystem of expedition operators, guides, support staff and logistics providers. At the centre of this ecosystem stand the Sherpas, whose labour, skill and local knowledge make the aspirations of others possible.

The irony is that while the climbers often receive the publicity, it is the Sherpas who bear a disproportionate share of the risk. They carry equipment through dangerous icefalls, establish routes, transport oxygen cylinders and repeatedly move between camps at altitudes where the human body is steadily deteriorating. The dangers they face are not limited to avalanches and crevasses. Exhaustion, oxygen shortages and sudden weather changes can turn routine movements into life-threatening situations.

The episode is also a reminder that Everest's greatest asset is not technology or infrastructure but the experience, judgement and resilience of Sherpa communities.

Dawa Sherpa's ordeal demonstrates how fragile survival remains above what mountaineers call the "death zone". Modern equipment, satellite communications and commercial organisation have undoubtedly improved safety, but technology cannot repeal geography. At extreme altitude, rescue itself becomes uncertain. Helicopters face operational limits. Ground teams must contend with the same hazards confronting those they are attempting to save. There comes a point where even the best-equipped expedition cannot guarantee recovery.

That reality should prompt reflection as Everest records some of its busiest climbing seasons. More climbers mean more revenue for Nepal's mountain economy, but they also mean greater pressure on routes, camps and rescue systems. Congestion near summit approaches has repeatedly been linked to delays, oxygen depletion and fatalities. The challenge for authorities is not merely to maximise tourist numbers but to ensure that growth does not outpace safety.

The broader lesson extends beyond mountaineering. Modern society often assumes that every risk can be managed through technology, planning and money. Everest remains a powerful reminder that some environments still operate according to their own rules. Human beings can prepare, adapt and persevere, but they cannot eliminate uncertainty.

Dawa Sherpa's survival deserves admiration because it represents exceptional courage and resilience in circumstances where the odds were overwhelmingly against him. Yet the most important question raised by his experience is not how one man survived. It is whether the institutions and commercial practices surrounding the world's most famous mountain are evolving quickly enough to protect those whose work makes the Everest dream possible for everyone else.

No End

Wars often end long before the shooting stops. They end when one side concludes it cannot win, when both sides accept the limits of military power, or when external actors impose a framework that neither can ignore. None of those conditions exists in Ukraine today. Recent diplomatic manoeuvres have once again highlighted a fundamental reality: Moscow and Kyiv may both speak the language of peace, but they continue to define peace in mutually incompatible ways. Ukraine seeks security, sovereignty and the recovery of territory lost through force. Russia seeks recognition of territorial gains and a political settlement that permanently limits Ukraine's strategic choices. Between those positions lies a gap that no summit, letter or mediation effort can presently bridge.

The conflict has therefore entered a phase in which diplomacy is increasingly directed at international audiences rather than at producing an actual settlement. Kyiv wants to demonstrate to its Western partners that it remains committed to negotiations and is not the obstacle to peace. Moscow wants to reinforce the perception that time remains on its side and that battlefield realities will eventually compel acceptance of its demands. Both sides are engaged in a contest for political legitimacy as much as a contest for territory.

The war is also becoming more geographically expansive. Ukrainian drone attacks reaching the outskirts of St Petersburg, alongside continued Russian strikes across Ukraine, underline how the conflict is increasingly affecting economic assets, infrastructure and public morale far beyond the front lines.

This evolution carries important consequences for Europe. The conflict is no longer merely a question of Ukraine's future. It has become a test of European strategic resilience, defence preparedness and political cohesion. As Washington's attention is increasingly drawn to crises elsewhere, particularly in West Asia, European governments are being forced to confront the possibility that they may have to shoulder a larger share of responsibility for Ukraine's security and for the continent's broader stability.

The greatest danger is not escalation alone. It is the gradual normalisation of a prolonged war without a credible peace process. History offers many examples of conflicts that continued for years because neither side was willing to concede and external powers lacked the leverage to compel compromise. Such wars do not end decisively; they simply become part of the political landscape.

That possibility now looms over Ukraine. The tragedy is that both sides continue to insist that peace is possible while defining it in ways the other cannot accept. Until that contradiction changes, diplomacy will remain largely symbolic, military pressure will continue to shape events, and the prospect of a negotiated end will remain distant.

More than three years after Russia's full-scale invasion, the most realistic expectation is not an imminent peace agreement but a continuing war punctuated by diplomatic gestures, military escalation and shifting international attention. The conflict may evolve, but it is unlikely to end until one side's assumptions about victory prove unsustainable. Until then, peace will remain an aspiration discussed at negotiating tables but determined on the battlefield.

Global factory

A successful manufacturing strategy will require coordinated action across multiple fronts. Infrastructure investments must continue, but they should be accompanied by improvements in education, skill development and innovation. Industrial policy should encourage both large-scale investments and the growth of small and medium enterprises that form the backbone of manufacturing ecosystems. Greater emphasis on research and development can help move Indian industry up the value chain



The global manufacturing landscape is undergoing a profound transformation. Geopolitical tensions, supply-chain disruptions, rising labour costs in traditional manufacturing centres and the search for resilient production networks have compelled multinational corporations to rethink their strategies. The "China-plus-one" approach has become a defining feature of global business decisions, creating opportunities for emerging economies to attract investment and expand industrial capacity.

For India, this moment presents a historic opportunity. The question is whether the country can translate this favourable global environment into a sustained manufacturing revolution and emerge as the next global factory.

The aspiration is neither new nor unrealistic. Manufacturing has played a central role in the economic rise of nearly every major industrial power, from Britain and Germany to Japan, South Korea and China. It creates jobs at scale, boosts exports, strengthens technological capabilities and generates multiplier effects across the economy. For a country like India, with a young workforce and an ambition to become a developed nation by 2047, manufacturing is not merely an economic option; it is a strategic necessity.

India's recent economic performance provides grounds for optimism. The country has emerged as one of the world's fastest-growing major economies despite global uncertainties. Major policy initiatives such as Make in India, Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes, the National Logistics Policy and investments in infrastructure have sought to improve the competitiveness of domestic manufacturing. Roads, ports, railways, airports and digital infrastructure have expanded significantly over the past decade, reducing some of the structural bottlenecks that

previously discouraged industrial investment.

The results are beginning to show. India has witnessed notable growth in sectors such as electronics, mobile phone manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, defence production and renewable energy equipment. The country's emergence as a significant exporter of smartphones demonstrates that industrial transformation is possible when policy incentives, market demand and private investment align. The rise of domestic manufacturing champions in several sectors further indicates that India possesses the entrepreneurial capacity necessary to compete globally.

Yet the journey from an emerging manufacturing destination to a global factory remains far from complete. One of the most significant challenges is employment generation. While economic growth has been robust, manufacturing's share in total employment has not expanded sufficiently. A successful manufacturing strategy must create large numbers of productive jobs, particularly for semi-skilled workers entering the labour force each year. Without employment-intensive industrialisation, manufacturing growth may contribute to output without adequately addressing the country's labour-market challenges.

Labour productivity represents another area requiring attention. Competing with established manufacturing economies demands not only lower costs but also higher efficiency, quality and reliability. India's workforce is large, but skill levels vary considerably across sectors and regions. Bridging this gap will require sustained investment in vocational training, technical education and industry-oriented skill development. The success of manufacturing depends as much on human capital as it does on physical infrastructure.

The regulatory environment continues to pose challenges. Although significant reforms have been undertaken, businesses often encounter complex compliance requirements, bureaucratic delays and legal uncertainties. Investors value predictability as much as incentives. Simplifying regulations, improving contract enforcement and ensuring

policy stability will be critical to attracting long-term manufacturing investments. Global companies seeking alternatives to existing production hubs are likely to prioritise jurisdictions that offer both efficiency and certainty.

The integration of Indian manufacturing into global value chains remains another crucial objective. Modern manufacturing rarely occurs within a single country. Components are produced across multiple locations before being assembled into final products. India's manufacturing ambitions will therefore depend on its ability to become an integral part of these interconnected production networks. Trade policy, logistics efficiency and export competitiveness will play decisive roles in determining whether India can secure a larger share of global manufacturing activity. Energy and sustainability considerations are equally important.

Future manufacturing growth must align with climate commitments and environmental responsibilities. As global consumers and investors increasingly prioritise sustainability, green manufacturing can become a source of competitive advantage. India's expanding renewable energy sector provides an opportunity to position the country as a destination for low-carbon manufacturing. Industrial growth that disregards environmental concerns may prove economically unsustainable in an increasingly climate-conscious world.

The geopolitical context strengthens India's prospects. Many multinational corporations are seeking to diversify production locations to reduce dependence on a single country. India's large domestic market, democratic institutions and strategic partnerships with major economies enhance its attractiveness as an investment destination. Moreover, audiobooks, podcasts, and digital products. Third, engagement innovation: building reading communities and utilising AI and technology to connect more effectively with audiences. In an era of information overload, readers do not lack information, they lack curated knowledge. This is both the opportunity and the mission of the publishing industry.

If I were to offer a concise message for today, June 5, 2026, it should be "To retain readers, publishing must move beyond selling books and start creating experiences for learning, connection, and human development."

A book-reading event held by ThaiHaBooks on the occasion of the Children's Day 2026.

You once said, "The future of publishing is not just about producing more books, but about creating more value for people and society." What exactly are these values?

Precisely. I believe the future of publishing will not be measured by the volume of



SIDDHARTH ROY

The writer is a civil engineer, consultant (invitee) to Rashtriya Raksha University under the Ministry of Home Affairs, and a columnist. Views expressed are personal

Việt Nam News

Technology paves the way for publishing industry's sustainability and global reach

Technology is comprehensively reshaping the Vietnamese publishing industry. We are transitioning from traditional publishing models toward a multi-platform digital content ecosystem, where print books, e-books, audiobooks, AI, and data coexist and complement one another.

Technology is not only transforming how books are produced but also changing how readers access knowledge. It enables publishers to expand their reach, personalise the reading experience, and bring Vietnamese knowledge to a global audience faster than ever before.

I believe that in the future, the industry's competitive advantage will shift from volume to value. Success will not be defined by how many books a publisher prints, but by how effectively they bridge the gap between knowledge and the reader. Therefore, technology is not just an option, it is a prerequisite for sustainable development and international integration.

To put it simply, technology is transforming publishing from a "book-making" industry into a "content, data, and experience" industry. It helps expand the readership, diversify the ways knowledge is accessed, and integrate Vietnamese publishing more deeply into the global market. In the digital era, technology does not replace publishing; rather, it makes the industry stronger, faster, and more closely connected to its readers.

I believe the publishing industry should not compete with social media by trying to mimic it. Instead, it must leverage its unique strengths: providing deep, reliable, and enduring

To retain readers, the industry needs to innovate across three dimensions. First, content innovation: placing the reader's needs at the very center. Second, format innovation: building a multi-platform ecosystem that includes print, ebooks,

audiobooks, podcasts, and digital products. Third, engagement innovation: building reading communities and utilising AI and technology to connect more effectively with audiences. In an era of information overload, readers do not lack information, they lack curated knowledge. This is both the opportunity and the mission of the publishing industry.

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Precisely. I believe the future of publishing will not be measured by the volume of

titles released, but by the impact the industry has on individuals and society.

In a digital context, the primary value of publishing is no longer just providing information since information is now everywhere. What society needs most is curated, verified, and systematised knowledge. That is the first value.

The second value is human development. A good book doesn't just give readers more facts; it encourages deeper reflection, inspires better living, and helps individuals become the better versions of themselves.

The third value is fostering lifelong learning. As technology and AI evolve rapidly, the ability to self-teach and continuously update one's knowledge will become a core competency for every citizen.

Finally, publishing plays a vital role in preserving cultural identity, spreading humanistic values, and enhancing a nation's soft power during international integration.

Letters To The Editor | ✉ editor@thestatesman.com

Welcome

Sir, This refers to "Tiger Global Ruling" by Rajat Bansal published today. The Supreme Court's observations in the Tiger Global case bring much-needed attention to a long-pending problem.

Grandfathered investments made under treaty provisions should not be subjected to retrospective uncertainty simply because the legal regime has since changed.

The GAAR provisions, applicable from April 2017, should logically apply prospectively, and the Court's apparent recognition of this is welcome.

However, clarity in the domestic law remains insufficient. The Assessing Officer's discretion to invoke GAAR even in treaty-protected situations creates unnecessary litigation.

What investors need is not just judicial reassurance but a clear statutory framework that settles the boundary between legitimate tax planning and avoidance.

Until that exists, tax uncertainty will continue to weigh on foreign investment decisions regardless of how individual cases are decided.

Yours, etc., M. Barathi, Bengaluru, 1 June.

Hawkers

Sir, Hawkers are an important part of urban economies in India. Hawking plays a vital role in accommodating the section of the urban workforce that the formal sector cannot absorb.

Hence, the informal sector's role in striking a balance in urban economies is instrumental and deserves both recognition and respect.

Anti-encroachment supporters miss this aspect of the urban economy. The visuals of payloaders razing tea stalls, juice shops, or kiosks may spark a sense of progress, order, or action, but in practice, the process may hide deeper structural failures - failures that range from a job-dearth formal sector to inefficiencies in urban planning, leaving no space for street vendors, to outdated street-vending infrastructure.

Without addressing these issues, the problem is likely to persist as urbanization expands rapidly.

And to address these issues, the administration first has to acknowledge and respect the role of the informal sector and treat hawkers as allies or partners who deserve their own space rather than as encroachers who must be evicted.

Yours, etc., Shrestho Ghosh, Kolkata, 4 June.

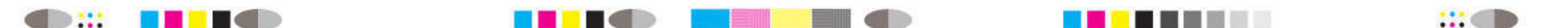
Not Mamata

Sir, Apropos the report "TMC 2.0 is born, but will it find a place in the sun?" (June 4), I wish to comment that not much cerebral exercise has to be done to come to the conclusion that expelled leader Ritabrata Banerjee is no substitute for Mamata Banerjee. Rather, he will be handicapped when his political wisdom is found lacking.

Secondly, Mr Banerjee was accused of moral turpitude which is still fresh in the minds of the public. How can such a person be expected to lead a party primarily belonging to ordinary people?

The people for sure will not accept any Tom, Dick and Harry becoming the TMC supremo during the life time of Mamata Banerjee.

Yours, etc., Arun Gupta, Kolkata, 4 June.



How the lot of women has changed

NEERAJ KUMAR AND SATYAKI DASGUPTA

The latest National Family Health Survey-6 (NFHS-6) Report gives us some crucial insights regarding the different facets of development. The current article brings together some outcomes and makes a state-wise and time-wise comparison of certain gendered indicators.

The percentage of households with any female member owning a house and/or land has increased from 14 per cent in NFHS-5 to 18.8 per cent in NFHS-6 in India. Although it is still a low percentage, the legal history of women owning a house or land is a history of struggle and resistance. One of the earliest shifts happened with the Hindu Women's Right to Property Act, 1937 and the Shariat Application Act, 1937 which recognized women's individual right to inherit and own property.

The major breakthrough in recent years happened with the passing of the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 which declared that a daughter becomes a coparcener by birth, enjoying the exact same rights and liabilities in ancestral property as a son. These progresses have been made possible with increasing intensity of the voices of feminist activists.

The state with the largest percentage is Meghalaya with 65.3 per cent. The matrilineal system followed by major tribal groups in Meghalaya may be responsible for this. Further, the Sixth Schedule gives the local councils of tribal areas the power to make laws regarding inheritance, which may have institutionalised the matrilineal system in Meghalaya.

Kerala has the second largest percentage of such households. Historically, the princely states of Travancore and Cochin had passed regulations which grant individual property rights to women. The state with the largest improvement was Karnataka which improved from 16.2 to 29.5 per cent. Sikkim, on the other hand, reported the lowest percentage and also has undergone a decline from NFHS-5.

An important aspect of the well-being of women is the prevalence of spousal violence. The positive trend that is visible is that the percentage of married women aged 18-49 years who have ever experienced spousal violence has decreased at an all India level as well in most states. The national percentage has decreased from 29.2 to 22.3 per cent. The biggest drop in this percentage among states was seen in Karnataka which fell from 44.4 to 14.1 per cent. This can be seen as a major turnaround from the NFHS-5, when Karnataka recorded the highest percentage of women who experience spousal violence in the country, and there was a sharp increase from 21 per cent in NFHS-4.

A report in The Hindu mentions that conviction rates in related cases are abysmally low, and there is a larger chance of bailouts in the case of domestic violence. The ensuing discussion and intervention may have resulted in an improvement in Karnataka. A surprising trend can be seen when we note that the largest increase in this percentage happened in Kerala which reports an increase from 9.8 to 17.7 per cent. Although there has been a declining trend in Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana

and Bihar, their percentage is still above the national average.

The highest figure is reported in Bihar. In spite of being declared a dry state in 2016, a report finds that "84 per cent of women face spousal violence when their husbands get drunk often" according to NFHS-5. It is noteworthy that the percentage of men who consume alcohol has increased from 15.4 per cent in 2020-21 to 16.5 per cent in 2023-24.

An important statistic to look at from the point of view of women's safety is the percentage of women aged 18-29 who experienced sexual violence by the age of 18. The national figure has fallen from 1.2 to 0.7 per cent. Although such figures should be interpreted with caution, it is still noteworthy that the percentage fell in all states. The biggest improvement happened in Karnataka again which fell from 2.1 to 0.1 per cent.

In a progressive step, in early 2026, Karnataka passed the Eva Nammava Bill, a legislation specifically targeted at protecting individual freedom, and explicitly criminalizing social and economic coercion used by families or local communities against adults who choose their own partners. The bill also mandates fast-track courts for the provision of protection and legal justice to women facing threats from their relatives.

An important part of women's empowerment is their access to financial resources. The all India figure of the percentage of women having a bank or savings account that they themselves use has increased from 78.6 to 89 per cent. The biggest improvement has happened in Nagaland and West



Bengal. The movement in West Bengal has been notable since this percentage was only 43.5 in 2015-16 (NFHS-4). Currently, the figure for West Bengal is 95.3 per cent which is the highest in the country.

The Lakshmir Bhandar scheme can be understood to explain this increase. The money is strictly distributed into an Aadhaar-linked, single-operated bank account belonging exclusively to the woman.

An interesting observation here is that although Bihar is lagging behind in some indicators, the percentage here is 90.9, a significant increase from 76.7 per cent in NFHS-5 and 26.4 per cent in NFHS-4. Much of this can be attributed to the financial assistance schemes that the government has provided to the women of Bihar over the years.

Although we note a high percentage of women having bank accounts, only 30.8 per cent of women worked in the last 12 months and were paid

in cash. Interestingly, while 90.9 per cent of women in Bihar have a bank or a savings account, only 16.5 per cent of the women worked in the last 12 months and were paid in cash. The discrepancy between these two figures can suggest that the bank accounts are primarily used for benefit transfer schemes.

The NFHS-6 reveals some interesting patterns about different facets of development in India. However, simply looking at the national figure may not tell the whole story. Therefore, it is important to look at a more disaggregated state-wise analysis. Among the gendered outcomes, Karnataka seems to have improved in quite some aspects from the previous rounds, Bihar on the other hand seems lagging behind in some indicators. State specific legalities and histories play an important role in determining the current outcomes.

(The writers are faculty members at Christ University, Bengaluru.)

100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 10 June 1926

OCCASIONAL NOTE

Now that the Riff resistance has been broken and Abdel Krim's headquarters are in the hands of the French, the discovery has been made that the experienced foreign officers who were said to be assisting the Arab rebellion existed only in the imagination of French and Spanish newspaper correspondents. It is possible that these correspondents enlarged on rumours heard in the allied camps. Wars of the kind waged in the Atlas range against primitive but courageous tribesmen are always accompanied by reports of the assistance given to the enemy by foreign officers. These reports are generally based on nothing more convincing than that somebody watching the enemy lines has caught a glimpse of a foreign uniform. In our own pre-War frontier campaigns how often has it not been rumoured that a Russian officer was distinctly observed moving about amongst the tribesmen? In the case of the Rifis not only was all the gossip and tittle-tattle of the base camps retailed in Paris and Madrid, but irresponsible newspaper men in Tangier picked up and wired abroad all the rumours of the bazar. It is true that during the course of the fighting one or two ex-officers did visit Abdel Krim's headquarters, but they do not seem to have been permitted to visit the firing line.

News Items

RESCUE AT SEA

PLIGHT OF EXHAUSTED SAILORS

(TIMES SPECIAL SERVICE)
LONDON, JUNE.

THE steamer Bessa has picked up a boat 15 miles south-west of Dungeness in which four exhausted men, without provisions and without water, were endeavouring to reach France.

LORD READING AND INDIA

FAITH IN BRITISH RULE JUSTIFIED

LONDON, JUNE.

SPEAKING at the Guildhall, where he received the Freedom of the City of London, the Marquess of Reading said that he realized that his course as Viceroy was to try to guide India to ultimate peace and progress along constitutional lines and in accordance with the King's Proclamation. He declared that he pinned his faith implicitly upon the justice of British rule, the fidelity of British promises, and the purity of British administration (Loud cheers). "My faith was amply justified, as events have proved."

SHIPYARD "HUSTLE"

STEAMER BUILT IN RECORD TIME

(BRITISH OFFICIAL WIRELESS.)
RUGBY, JUNE.

THE 5,500 ton passenger steamship Nerissa, which left the Clyde on her maiden voyage for New York during the week-end is said to have been built in record time. The order was placed on November 3, 1925, and the keel was laid a week later. The ordinary time for completing her would have been ten or eleven months, but it was imperative that she should be delivered by the end of May. As a result of close co-operation among the workers at Messrs. Hamilton and Company's Clyde-side shipyard, the vessel was launched after 148 days and she was completed for her maiden voyage in seven months.

ISLAMIC CONGRESS

QUESTIONS FOR DECISION AT MECCA

LONDON, JUNE.

THE Congress which will consider the future of the holy cities, the Hedjaz, and the Caliphate was opened to-day by Ibn Saud at Mecca. Delegates from India, Russia, Java, Palestine, the Hedjaz, Egypt and Sudan were present. Sherrafadnan was appointed President and Suleiman Dadvi, the Indian leader, vice-President. —Reuter.

An India-Europe labour paradigm

PRABHU DAYAL

Europe is currently facing an unprecedented demographic crisis. Across the continent, falling birth rates and rapidly aging populations are creating massive labour shortages that threaten economic stability, healthcare systems, and industrial productivity.

Concurrently, India is navigating its own unique demographic phase, boasting the world's largest youth population with over 65 per cent of its citizens under the age of 35.

This stark contrast presents a compelling economic synergy, raising a critical question: Can India effectively supply the manpower that Europe desperately needs? While India possesses the raw numbers to fill Europe's demographic deficits, transforming this potential into a seamless labour supply chain requires overcoming significant structural, linguistic, and regulatory barriers.

The European Union's labour market is under severe strain. According to Eurostat data, the working-age population in the EU is projected to shrink by millions over the coming decades, while the dependency ratio continues to climb.

Germany, Italy, and several Central European nations are already experiencing acute deficits in highly skilled sectors like Information Technology, engineering, and healthcare, as well as essential service sectors like hospitality, logistics, and eldercare. To maintain its global competitiveness and sustain its social welfare systems,

Europe cannot rely solely on internal automation or shifting retirement ages; it must aggressively source external talent.

India stands out as the most logical partner to address this deficit. The country adds approximately 12 million people to its workforce annually. This demographic dividend means India has a surplus of both white-collar professionals - such as software developers, doctors, and financial analysts - and blue-collar or grey-collar workers, including construction specialists, nurses, and hospitality staff.

Furthermore, India's education system produces millions of English-speaking graduates every year, giving Indian labour a distinct communication advantage in the global market over competitors from other regions.

While the United States (now tightening visa regimes) used to be the default destination, the EU has stepped in as an attractive alternative by offering important benefits:

Work-Life Balance: Professionals note that while financial savings might not match the US, Europe provides superior job security, healthcare, and an improved work-life balance.

Low-Cost Education: Countries like Germany and the Netherlands offer high-quality, low-cost higher education, leading Indians to account for the highest share (20.8 per cent) of EU student residence permits.

But there are barriers to seamless mobility. Despite the clear alignment of supply and demand, India cannot automatically fill Europe's talent

gap without addressing several entrenched challenges.

The Skills and Language Gap: While English proficiency is high among India's elite white-collar professionals, it is less prevalent among vocational and blue-collar workers. Furthermore, many European nations, such as Germany, France, and Japan, require proficiency in their native languages (e.g., German, French) for safety and integration, particularly in healthcare and public-facing roles. Additionally, Indian vocational certifications do not always align with strict European industry standards, necessitating extensive retraining.

Regulatory and Visa Hurdles: Historically, European immigration policies have been fragmented, bureaucratic, and cautious. Obtaining work visas, navigating complex point-based systems, and securing the mutual recognition of professional qualifications remain slow and cumbersome processes for Indian applicants.

Geopolitical and Social Dynamics: Immigration is a highly sensitive political issue within the European Union. Balancing the economic need for foreign labour with domestic political pressures regarding cultural integration and border control often leads to hesitant policy implementation.

The Government of India is taking several actionable steps to increase safe and regulated labour mobility to Europe. These include:

Comprehensive Mobility Pacts: Implementing the landmark India-EU Comprehensive Mobility Framework and bilateral agreements with specific EU nations (such as Italy,



Austria, Germany, and Romania) to guarantee structured quotas, fair pay, and safe migration routes.

Skill Harmonization: Aligning Indian vocational and professional qualifications with EU standards so that degrees, especially in healthcare, IT, and engineering, are recognized across member states.

Institutional Facilitation: Utilizing the India Centre for Migration (ICM) to manage legal migration, prevent human trafficking, and support European employers seeking Indian manpower. Pre-Departure Training: Expanding skill development and European language training across Indian states to ensure workers meet specific host-country requirements before departure.

India has the undeniable capacity to serve as the primary engine of manpower for an aging Europe. The raw demographic alignment is a historical certainty. Approximately 2.8 to 3 million overseas Indians reside in the European Union and

in the UK, with the annual flow heavily leaning towards skilled professionals, STEM experts (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), and students.

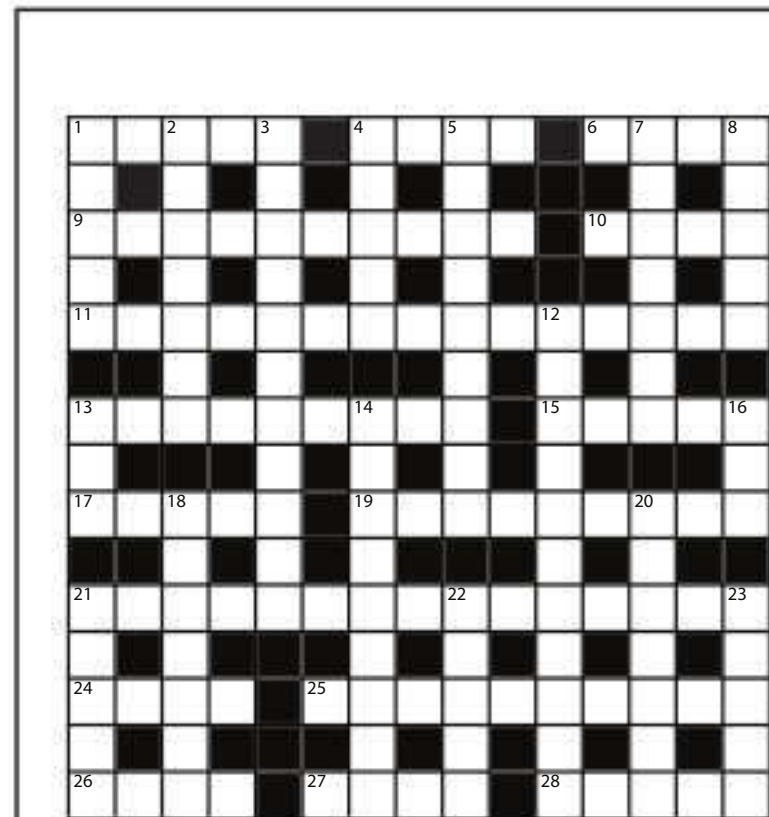
Though historically overshadowed by Gulf and North American movements, Europe has emerged as a top target for Indian labour.

However, numbers alone will not suffice. For India to truly satisfy Europe's labour demands, both sides must treat human capital as a shared strategic asset. This requires deep investments in language skills, the standardization of technical certifications, and the political will to create agile, legal migration pathways.

If these structural bridges are successfully built, the Indo-European labour partnership could become a defining pillar of global economic stability in the twenty-first century.

(The writer, a retired IFS officer, served as India's Ambassador to Kuwait and Morocco and as Consul-General in New York.)

Crossword | No. 293486



Yesterday's Solution

P E R T I N F A L L I B L E
O E T O L E R A
S E I G M E N T C A T I O N S
T I N T I A T T Y
M O M E N T O F T R U T H
A E I N R N E S
S A N E S T M A N D O L I N
T B S Z E A
E M P H A S I S D R U M U P
R A L D S T A D
R O L L E R I C O A S T E R
S L R B K T A
T R O C H E E E R E L O N G
U U U A E R C O
B O R D E R L I N E A K I N

ACROSS

- Chastise wife that's turned against child (5)
- Small object does not have small volume (4)
- Way of working leads to some surprisingly low-level growth? (4)
- Engineers sign code that's compiled and accepted as valid (10)
- Reunifying divided African country's capital (4)
- Skinhead perhaps receives accidental punishment (5,5,5)
- Individuals who aren't qualified to bet on race (9)
- Patient daughter looked around before taking on job? (5)
- Sperchandise for sale as advertised on the radio (5)
- Boy left upset about unpleasant incident using offensive language? (9)
- Be active in Samaritan organisation preserving international philanthropy (15)

DOWN

- Excellent service disrupted by new complaint (4)
- John confronts drunk punching two bores (10)
- Church official cited over missing Mass (4)
- Where patient might go when heart's lost pulse (4)
- Polish hospital observed nurses (5)
- Lofty idealist's ultimate motive for betrayal (4,7)
- Try to obtain confidential information from man in pub (5)
- Depressing directive to cut back on applause (9)
- I believe texting about intelligence is sinister (7)
- Bored about wife's ostentatious display (5)
- Office staff concealed sign (11)
- Exposed weaknesses in principle (3)
- Speed of racing driver going flat out (9)
- What appears regularly in diary? (5)
- Gas starts to oxidise metal, affecting main supply (7)
- Complex organisation implicated if I censure banks (7)
- Attended to large group during speeches (5)
- Term for being "in control" (5)
- He possesses special ring (5)

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



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THE ASIAN AGE

10 JUNE 2026

INDIA must get serious on fixing state-level differences

Indian politics today is a paradox of the weird variety: There is a ruling alliance headed by a party obsessed with election victories and always plotting for the next, a disparate group of Opposition parties who run a recreation club called INDIA where they meet occasionally or when partners meet with electoral rout and a people seething with anger against a government teetering even when facing something as routine as an entrance examination, leave alone substantive issues such as economy or the foreign policy.

In normal cases, it is the job of the Opposition to command the attention of the people in a restive polity but the cross purposes at which each of the alliance partners works neutralise their efforts. The meeting of 25 parties in Delhi on Tuesday under the INDIA banner was nothing but a reflection of the fact that it has still not been able to reconcile the contradictions among themselves before taking on the formidable alliance led by the BJP. The Opposition platform indeed sought to address some of the profound issues that the country faces now but its emaciated look sans two major founding allies, the DMK and the AAP, cannot be brushed aside.

A look at the political reality on the ground would convince anyone that the single important factor that makes them form a common platform is their opposition to the BJP's Hindutva politics. This could naturally lead to a situation in which the partners fight with one other for the same space in the states where they are strong. This would also bring the Congress, the only de facto national party in the alliance, in conflict with their INDIA allies in states. Three years into the formation, the bloc has not been able to make a framework for practically addressing this contradiction.

This explains why the DMK and the AAP are no more with the formation. The recalcitrant and often irrational approach of the Congress in Tamil Nadu, Delhi and Punjab to reclaim its lost space resulted in the key partners walking out of its; it has left the ally in Jharkhand also miffed that the Congress refused the basic courtesy of consulting it before taking as important a decision as fielding a candidate for the Rajya Sabha. The Left, the natural partner in an anti-BJP alliance, is upset because senior Congress leaders went to Kerala and alleged that the LDF there and the BJP are in an electoral deal.

Every one of the five issues that the bloc has identified is critical for the people, and the Opposition must hit the streets and make the government see reason. The series of lapses in the education sector has the youth seething with anger; the SIR has undermined the constitutional principle of adult suffrage and the economy is saddled with serious issues that may need urgent fixing. Better parliamentary coordination is required to make the most of the opportunity during sessions. A functional Opposition is a critical requirement of a functional democracy and it is welcome if the INDIA bloc can provide one. But to take on the BJP electorally is a different task; the Congress-led group will have to work overtime and with unity of purpose if it were to achieve that goal.

Make manufacturing much safer

The tragic accident involving a massive spill of molten steel at the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant on Monday, which killed at least eight workers and injured several others, is a grim reminder of the dangers faced daily by industrial workers.

Preliminary reports indicate that a ladle carrying molten metal malfunctioned leading to an explosion, which unleashed steel heated to nearly 1,600 degrees Celsius on workers in the steel melting shop. While inquiries have been ordered and compensation announced, the tragedy has once again exposed the devastating consequences of safety failures in heavy industries.

The larger question that policymakers need to answer is, why do such accidents continue to recur despite advances in technology, automation and industrial safety standards? The Visakhapatnam Steel Plant itself has witnessed several serious accidents over the years, including fatal incidents involving molten metal handling and explosions. But the problem extends beyond steel plants.

In recent years, the country has witnessed fatal accidents in pharmaceutical factories, chemical plants, mines and manufacturing units. Investigations mostly pointed out to a familiar set of causes — ageing equipment, inadequate maintenance, production pressures, poor risk assessment, insufficient worker training and weak enforcement of safety protocols. Safety audits are ignored or treated as paperwork exercises rather than life-saving mechanisms.

Therefore, managements should empower workers to report safety concerns without fear of reprisal. Trade unions, safety committees and management must work together to create a culture where warning signs are acted upon immediately.

Industrial growth and worker safety must never be viewed as competing priorities. Every worker has the right to return home safely after a day's work.

If the government wants to make the country a global manufacturing hub, it must take steps to prevent such industrial mishaps. Otherwise, the manufacturing sector cannot attract the best of the talent as the service sector does.

THE ASIAN AGE

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The rise and the fall of Mamata and her party



Shikha Mukerjee

Some things in electoral politics have become predictable ever since 2014. Where defections are constrained by the law of two-thirds, legislators are encouraged by the law to take a more complicated route and work assiduously to manoeuvre a breakup the party and form a new one. It has also become routine for the breakaway group of legislators to appropriate the name of the original party.

The audacious split of the Trinamul Congress by an unlikely duo in just 27 days after the May 4 defeat — Ritabrata Banerjee and Sandipan Saha — neither of whom were prominent or controversial or audibly disgruntled leaders of Mamata Banerjee's party or government, is an entirely new chapter in breakup politics in India.

There are no obvious and visible rewards for breaking up the Trinamul Congress. The 58 MLAs claiming to be the new Trinamul Congress will sit in Opposition. The elected BJP with a two-thirds majority has no particular use for any support these legislators could offer. A tractable Opposition does, however, serve a purpose: the BJP gets to claim that multi-party democracy is alive and kicking, without the stress of a strong Opposition, within the legislature and outside it.

No leader of the new Trinamul Congress is quite like Eknath Shinde, who was rewarded for breaking up the Shiv Sena and forming an alliance with the BJP; he was made chief minister in 2022 and then settled for being deputy chief minister in 2024 after the Maharashtra elections, willing to serve as deputy to the BJP's Devendra Fadnis. Having taken over the larger group of Trinamul Congress legislators, after convincing the

Speaker, Rathin Basu, to recognise him and his fellow rebels as the "real" TMC and dismissively assigning the role of "chief adviser" to Mamata Banerjee, Ritabrata Banerjee is an intriguing operator in Indian politics. It raises the question: why or rather how did Ritabrata Banerjee, a relative newcomer to the TMC, and certainly not one of the party's stars or prominent leaders, capture the loyalty of 57 other newly-elected legislators? And why did they agree to join him in vivisectioning the party? The only reward for steering the split is that Ritabrata Banerjee gets to be Leader of the Opposition, which means he gets the same perks and privileges as a Cabinet minister.

As attention swivels to what the 28 Trinamul Congress Members of Parliament will do and who amongst them will take the lead in engineering the split that is widely expected, the question is about when it will happen rather than whether it will happen. A split in the Trinamul Congress in the Lok Sabha will mean a big deal, as the BJP plans to reintroduce the defeated delimitation of constituencies bill and bring in the "one nation-one election" change.

With negotiations reportedly underway as well to woo the DMK's support of 22 MPs in the Lok Sabha and eight MPs in the Rajya Sabha for the delimitation bill, the addition of two-thirds of Trinamul Congress' 28 MPs in the Lok Sabha and 13 MPs in the Rajya Sabha would help the BJP considerably over the numbers hump it faces. The cohesion within the INDIA bloc that thwarted the BJP's proposal for clubbing delimitation with women's reservation is now broken.

Where does that leave the rump of the legislature

Attention has been diverted, both Mamata Banerjee's and that of the public, from the unresolved status of nearly 27 lakh deleted voters whose cases are still under adjudication

party and Mamata Banerjee? Saddled with a divided Trinamul Congress, where even at the grassroots breaks with the original party are being engineered as a survival strategy by the councillors of municipalities and mayors of municipal corporations, panchayat functionaries and even party leaders.

Faced by the flood of desertions within the party, she seems to be floundering. Attention has been diverted, both Mamata Banerjee's and that of the public, from the unresolved status of nearly 27 lakh deleted voters whose cases are still under adjudication. Her promises to fight for their right to be recognised as citizens have been overtaken by the more basic fight to prevent the Trinamul Congress from being dismembered. A street fighter by instinct, with a cult following mesmerised by her past confrontations, Mamata Banerjee's expertise is not exactly the best suited to dealing with the enemy within the Trinamul Congress. She is known to succumb to sob stories and overlook ethical and normative infractions. If she cannot be as ruthless as the situation demands for reorganising the Trinamul Congress, the outlook for the party that remains with her is probably bleak.

Mamata Banerjee has to fight on two fronts; prevent the dismemberment of her party to the point where it becomes politically ephemeral, in the state Assembly certainly and also in Parliament. She has to figure out how to salvage the wreck that the breakaway groups have left behind. These breakups rob the party of its organisational backbone, immobilising

the apparatus of control and command. The modus operandi of converging the party's position with support from the administration and the police made the Trinamul Congress a classic example of a "state party".

The party does have an organisation in the districts, where territory has been distributed to key leaders. Without access to the power and apparatus of the State, the Trinamul Congress and Mamata Banerjee are seriously hamstrung and considerably diminished, just as the CPI(M)-led Left Front was after its devastating defeat in 2011.

By reorganising the party, Mamata Banerjee has not addressed the problem of the elephant in the Trinamul Congress, Abhishek Banerjee, her anointed heir and the target of all attacks by rebel party people involved with the breakups, as the root of all that was evil within the organisation. That he is at the heart of the crisis is the result of a narrative that has grown with every retelling by rebel party leaders and throughout the scorching campaign by the BJP.

Heaping all the blame on Abhishek Banerjee is absurd; as the culture of intimidation and corruption and absence of democracy within the Trinamul Congress was not entirely of his making. Shifting blame and holding him responsible for the unendurable rapaciousness of the party's local functionaries implies that wrongdoers were not responsible for their actions.

The future of the breakaway Trinamul Congress may be even bleaker as it survives as a tractable Opposition, which it has effectively promised to be. The BJP gains the most. It gets a compliant Opposition, the support it needs for its reformist agenda on delimitation, "one-nation-one-vote" dreams, without being faulted for destroying multi-party democracy or gobbling up smaller regional parties by converting them into independent franchisees.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist in Kolkata

LETTERS
CANUTE & TRUMP

Why did Donald Trump step into the Iran quagmire despite America's bitter lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan? The explanation goes beyond an ego trip. It is a combination of personal conviction, a compliant inner circle and a global order that currently lacks coherent leadership. Mr Trump has long projected himself as a leader who can bend events to his will. Such confidence can be an asset in negotiations; in war, it is a blunt tool. Yet many advisers aligned themselves with the President's preferred course, narrowing the space for caution. History is replete with leaders who mistook military superiority for political control and entering a conflict is often easier than determining how it ends. The Iran episode is proving to be a costly reminder.

R. Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

GERMAN PRIDE

ENDING YEARS of heartbreaking near-misses and shedding his tag as the best active player without a Major, Germany's Alexander Zverev finally broke through such barriers to win his maiden Grand Slam title, defeating Italy's Flavio Cobolli in an epic five-set final in the French Open. Zverev took full advantage of a chaotic draw, navigating through a tournament that saw early exits and injuries from top players Alcaraz, Sinner and Djokovic. In the process, he became the first German male player to win a Major since Boris Becker at the 1986 Australian Open, and the first German to win at Roland Garros in the Open Era.

R. Sivakumar
Chennai

NEWSPRINT HAZARD

THROUGH THE columns of your esteemed newspaper, I'd like to draw the attention of the authorities and the general public to an important food safety issue in Maharashtra. Many street food vendors continue to wrap popular snacks such as vada pav, bhajis, samosas and other fried items in old newspapers. While this practice may seem economical and convenient, it poses a serious health risk. Newspaper ink contains chemicals not meant for direct contact with food. When hot and oily food is wrapped in newspapers, these harmful chemicals can seep into the food and may affect health. The FSSAI has repeatedly advised against the use of newspapers for packaging, serving or storing food. Yet, the practice is still common.

Jubel D'Cruz
Mumbai



Anita Anand

Among all the things we humans can aspire to be, who would want to be a "cockroach"? The Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), founded on May 16 this year, is inviting young people to join its ranks. It was formed in response to remarks made by the incumbent Chief Justice of India, Justice Surya Kant, on May 15, in which he said: "There are youngsters like cockroaches who do not get any employment or have any place in the profession. Some of them become media people, some become social media people, RTI activists, and other activists, and they start attacking everyone."

The next day, Abhijeet Dipke, an Indian student at Boston University in the United States, announced on the social media platform X the launch of a "platform for all the 'cockroaches' out there".

The eligibility criteria were being unemployed, lazy, chronically online, and able to rant professionally. Abhijeet Dipke is a political communications strategist who previously worked with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP).

The party's website went live with the tagline "Voice of the Lazy & Unemployed". Within 78 hours of its launch, the Instagram account crossed three million followers, surpassed ten million in under five days, overtaking the ruling BJP's official handle. As of May 22, the account had over twenty million followers. It also crossed 200,000 followers on X and claims to have registered over 350,000 members through online forms. The CJP is demanding the resignation of Union

education minister Dharmendra Pradhan. At the CJP's first press conference on June 3, the movement's spokesperson, Saurav Das, said: "We seek minimum accountability from this system, where rot has set in."

The protest concerns the government's cancellation of the qualifying National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test (Neet), conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA), due to the leakage of exam papers. The exam enables young people to enter the job market. Neet is a common, uniform test for admission to undergraduate medical education at all medical institutions.

According to the Neet website, the exam has been rescheduled for June 21.

While the CJP calls itself a party, it is not registered as one. Right now, it is a movement, spearheaded by young people who are tired of being dismissed by the so-called bastions of law and order in India. Many of these are well past their prime and disconnected not only from what is going on in the country but also from challenges faced by the youth, people of every age group, and minorities.

On June 6, a huge rally was held at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi, where the CJP gave the education minister a week to resign. Besides the call for his resignation, their manifesto is limited, but it also calls for parity in other aspects of life.

The current ruling party, the BJP, doesn't understand NGOs and civil society activists and has treated them as threats over the last 12 years. Those questioning government policies are arrest-

ed, harassed, and even killed. These are not terrorists or anti-nationals, as they have been branded by the government. In a democracy, they are asking for transparency and parity.

The government views development as offering schemes and doling out licences to the already rich and powerful businessmen and women of the country, which it considers legitimate. Dissent is silenced.

While the demands for the resignation of ministers in other countries for various reasons may or may not have borne out, many have resigned. However, India's politicians are particularly thick-skinned and adamant about staying in power. The party leader remains silent. However, the stepping down or removal of the education minister may not bring about change in the ministry, which has been systematically destroyed by the ruling party's backwards-looking policies. This rot has spread to almost all ministries and institutions, which have been destroyed.

The Chief Justice's use of the term "cockroaches" to refer to the youth is interesting.

My research suggests that cockroaches are indeed marvellous creatures. They display collective decision-making when choosing food sources. When a sufficient number of individuals (a "quorum") exploit a food source, this signals to newcomer cockroaches to stay there longer rather than leave for elsewhere. Cockroaches appear to use just two pieces of information to decide where to go, namely how dark it is and how many other

cockroaches there are. A study used specially scented, roach-sized robots that seemed real to the roaches to demonstrate that once there are enough insects in a place to form a critical mass, the roaches accepted the collective decision about where to hide, even in an unusually well-lit place.

Cooperation and competition are balanced in cockroach group decision-making behaviour.

Can the honourable judge say the same of his profession and his peers? And indeed, of the present government?

The CJP may or may not amount to much. But it's here now, raising issues that need to be raised in large numbers. And we can only be concerned with the present. Other youth movements, most recently in Nepal and Bangladesh, have managed to topple long-standing governments in their countries. What the future holds for them, no one can say. But the message is clear. People are fed up.

Beyond the whataboutery surrounding the CJP movement lies the essential question: how long can citizens endure a government that has reneged on almost all its promises since coming to power in 2014? By promoting hate and fear and playing the Hindutva card, it has violated most principles of the Constitution. It must be held accountable.

While my age doesn't qualify me to join the movement, I am going to say I am a cockroach anyway. Are you?

The writer is a development and communications consultant



quick
BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	73,918.76	0.54
Nifty 50	23,242.10	0.52
S&P 500*	7,321.19	-1.14
Dollar (₹)	95.35	-0.38
Pound Sterling (₹)	127.65	0.08
Euro (₹)	110.24	0.04
Gold (10gm) (₹)	152,969.1815	-1.17
Brent crude (\$/bbl)	90.98	-3.47
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.913	-0.036
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.542	-0.008

Zepto files updated DRHP with SEBI for IPO

Bengaluru based Quick commerce company Zepto filed updated draft red herring prospectus with Securities and Exchange Board of India for planned initial public offering. The public offer comprises of a fresh issue aggregating up to Rs 8,010 crore and an offer for sale of equity shares of over 11.34 crore equity shares of Rs 5 face value. Earlier on May 9 SEBI had approved Zepto's confidential DRHP.

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AI agent nos will equal staff soon: TCS chief

TCS stock down 33.3% year to date, hits fresh 52-week low intraday

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, JUNE 9

IT giant Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) expects the number of artificial intelligence (AI) agents deployed across its operations to eventually match its human workforce, said chairman N. Chandrasekaran, while outlining the company's transition to an AI-led delivery model.

Addressing the company's 31st annual general meeting, Chandrasekaran said TCS is investing in AI agents for internal operations, solution frameworks and client-specific work, with employees and AI systems expected to work together in the future.

"The day is not far when TCS will have as many artificial intelligence (AI) agents as its human workforce," he said.

"The company's employees and the AI agents will work together, and that will be the future."

Chandrasekaran said the company, which employs about half a million people, has no plans

EVOLVING TREND

- TCS sees AI agents matching its workforce.
- COMPANY headcount drops by 23,460 to 5.84 lakh in FY26
- COMPANY has 5 million AI agents.



AI agents for internal operations and client related

TCS will continue to hire.

THERE IS no downsizing of staff. We just want to have the right talent. We want to use the agents. The company's employees and the AI agents will work together, and that will be the future.

— N CHANDRASEKARAN, TCS chairman.

AI termed biggest opportunity for TCS.

- AI revenue run rate reaches \$250B.
- 100% of company's revenue will have an AI component by 2028-30
- Focus shifts from volume hiring to talent quality.

to reduce its workforce as AI adoption increases. "The company has half a million employees. The day is not far when the company will have half a

million AI agents. There is no downsizing of staff. That is not planned at all. We just want to have the right talent. We want to use the agents. The rate of

addition of employees will not be as it used to be," he said.

He added that TCS would continue hiring, although the pace may moderate.

Starlink approval on hold due to security concerns

New Delhi, June 9: India has effectively frozen approvals for Elon Musk's space-based internet service Starlink to begin commercial operations, due to concerns over the use of its satellite terminals in the Iran war, according to

people familiar with the matter.

Security agencies under the ministry of home affairs have withheld the final clearances Starlink needs to launch, the people said. Reports that Starlink terminals were in

use during the Middle East conflict despite the service not being licensed in Iran have heightened fears in New Delhi about its ability to control a US-based operator during geopolitical tensions, they said. The setback lands

just days before SpaceX's June 12 Nasdaq listing targeting \$1.75 trillion valuation.

Home ministry and ministry of communications did not respond to emails seeking comment. An email to SpaceX went unanswered. — Bloomberg

Centre may continue steps to cushion pharma: Official

B. KRISHNA MOHAN
HYDERABAD, JUNE 9

The Centre will review and, if necessary, extend beyond June 30 a set of measures introduced to protect the pharma sector from supply chain disruptions caused by the West Asia war, D. Ravi Teja, deputy director, ministry of commerce and industry, said on Tuesday.

Ravi Teja said the measures were aimed at keeping production and export costs under control amid rising logistics expenses linked to the conflict.

He said the government had identified critical petrochemical inputs used in pharmaceutical manufacturing, including anhydrous ammonia, isopropylene, methanol, acetic acid and phenol, whose costs had risen due to supply chain disruptions. To ease the impact on manufacturers, full customs duty exemptions have been provided on 40 critical petrochemical raw materials till June 30.

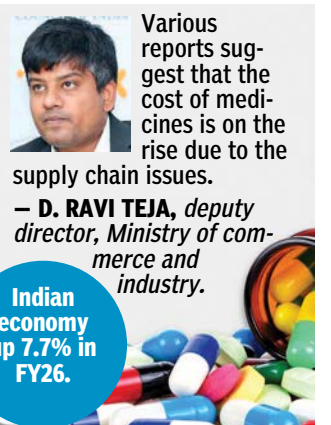
The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has also extended key trade facilitation and customs clearance circulars till June 30 to prevent bottlenecks in port clearances and shipping operations.

"Various reports suggest that the cost of medicines is on the rise due to the supply chain issues. We will review the measures and look to extend as needed," Ravi Teja said in Hyderabad.

According to him, the measures are aimed at containing production and export costs for bulk

EXPORTS VITAL

- Customs duties currently exempted on 40 critical petrochemical inputs till June 30.
- Move aims to offset West-Asia related supply disruptions.
- Measures aimed to control drug production costs



Various reports suggest that the cost of medicines is on the rise due to the supply chain issues.

— D. RAVI TEJA, deputy director, Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Indian economy up 7.7% in FY26.

drugs and formulations while supporting uninterrupted exports despite supply chain pressures.

India is the world's third-largest pharmaceutical producer by volume, supplying nearly 20 per cent of global generic medicines and exporting to more than 200 countries.

The country has set a target of achieving \$50 billion in pharmaceutical exports by 2030. The United States accounts for 34 per cent of India's pharmaceutical exports, while Europe contributes 19 per cent, he said.

On Telangana, he said the state accounts for 35-40 per cent of India's pharmaceutical exports, with outbound shipments valued at \$8 bn, putting the state as a key manufacturing and export hub.

Growth will come from biosimilars, biologics, specialty medicines, vaccines, generics alongside efforts to up domestic production of APIs and key starting materials.

PRICE OF AVIATION TURBINE FUEL GOES UP BY 10%

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, JUNE 9

State-owned fuel retailers on Tuesday hiked jet fuel or aviation turbine fuel (ATF) prices around 10 per cent for the airlines. Now, jet fuel for domestic airlines will now cost ₹115 per litre, up from ₹104.92, according to an industry source.

The new rate will be locked in for up to three years for airlines that opt to participate in the government-backed price stabilisation scheme. However, airlines that do not opt for the scheme will pay market-linked prices, which are currently around ₹142 per litre, similar to international carriers.

"Those opting into the price stabilisation scheme will receive ATF at ₹115 per litre, insulated from global fluctuations."

GAMES

SHORT TAKES
Hayden Glasgow franchise owner

Glasgow, Scotland: Former Australian opener Matthew Hayden on Tuesday joined Glasgow Cosmic as co-owner and head coach ahead of the inaugural European T20 Premier League (ETPL) season. Hayden was batting coach of Gujarat Titans in the recently concluded IPL.

"Cricket has given me a lifetime of opportunities — as a player, teammate, mentor, broadcaster and coach — and the chance to help build a new franchise from the ground up is a challenge that excites me enormously," Hayden said in a statement.

"What attracted me most to the Glasgow Cosmetics project was not simply the cricket opportunity, but the vision behind it. Great teams are built on strong values, clear purpose and people who are prepared to think boldly," he added.

The franchise is owned by Mugafi Group. — PTI

Saneeth enters Oz main draw

Sydney: India's Saneeth Dayanand advanced to the men's singles main draw of the Australian Open badminton tournament after winning his qualifying matches here on Tuesday.

Dayanand, seeded fourth in the qualifying rounds, first eased past local hoggie Karono 21-17, 21-15 before logging a 21-9, 21-16 victory over Malaysia's Ming Hong Lim to make the cut. He will face China's Hu Zhe An in his opening main draw game.

However, Manraj Singh lost his second qualification match, to Malaysia's Eugene Ewe 11-21, 18-21 to bow out of the competition.

In the men's doubles main draw, it was curtains for the Indian pair of Achutaditya Rao and P. Arjun Reddy after they went down to the Australian combination of Kanki Igawa and Ooi Yi Hern 15-21, 15-21 in their opening game. — PTI

Siraj swings out of UK tour

Mumbai, June 9: Mohammed Siraj has been rested as part of workload management, with Prasidh Krishna named as his replacement for Ireland and England tours, the BCCI said on Tuesday.

The Indian cricket board described the move as a "precautionary measure" to ensure quick recovery ahead of the long international season.

Siraj was named in the squad for the Ireland and England series consisting two and five T20s respectively but was not picked for the Asian Games in Japan.

"Fast bowler Mohammed Siraj has been withdrawn from India's squads for the upcoming T20I series against Ireland and England," the BCCI said in a statement.

"Following discussions between the BCCI Medical Team and the Team Management, Siraj has been advised a period of rest as part of his workload management programme. The decision has

been taken as a precautionary measure to ensure

adequate recovery ahead of a long international season. The Men's Selection Committee has named Prasadidh Krishna as Siraj's replacement for both T20I series," the BCCI added.

Siraj was a late addition to the Indian squad in their last T20I assignment — the T20 World Cup — while he played in each of the 17 matches for Gujarat Titans in the IPL 2026, taking 19 wickets.

The right-arm pacer was also a part of the one-off Test against Afghanistan

which ended inside three days on Monday. — PTI

Updated squad for Ireland and England tours: Shreyas Iyer (captain), Tilak Varma (vice-captain), Abhishek Sharma, Sanju Samson (wicket-keeper), Ishan Kishan (wicket-keeper), Shivam Dube, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Varun Chakaravathy, Ravi Bishnoi, Harshit Rana, Arshdeep Singh, Prince Yadav, Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, Prasadidh Krishna.

England captain Ben Stokes and teammate Gus Atkinson are facing a probe by the England and Wales Cricket Board for breaking team rules in the early hours of Monday morning following England's win in the first Test against New Zealand at Lord's.

It is the latest controversy concerning the England team following a tour of Australia where the side faced allegations of a drinking culture during a 4-1 Ashes series loss concluded in January.

TalkSport reported on Tuesday that Stokes is likely to step down from his role and could also announce retirement.

If Stokes is stripped of the captaincy, vice-captain Harry Brook — already the skipper of England's white-ball teams — could lead the hosts in next week's second Test across London at the Oval.

This would represent a remarkable reversal for Brook, who was fined and censured for late-night

drinking and clashing with a nightclub bouncer before captaining England in a one-day international in Wellington in October.

"The ECB is currently investigating a breach of team protocols following the conclusion of the first Men's Test against New Zealand," the governing body said in a statement issued Monday.

"Ben Stokes and Gus Atkinson were present at a nightclub in the early hours of Monday morning when an incident took place. We are currently seeking further information, and an announcement regarding the squad for the second Test will be made in due course," ECB stated. — AFP

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Gaikwad hits ton for India 'A'

Dambulla (Sri Lanka), June 9: Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's first outing post a thunderous IPL 2026 ended in a muted 14, but seasoned Rituraj Gaikwad made a composed 101 to lead India 'A' to a respectable 277 for 6 against Sri Lanka in a tri-series One-day match here on Tuesday.

After electing to bat, India 'A' were pushed to a mini-crisis at 16 for 2 in five overs after early dismissals of Sooryavanshi and Prabhsimran Singh.

But vice-captain Gaikwad, who fetched his 21st List 'A' hundred in 112 balls, and skipper Tilak Varma (60, 97b) added 150 runs for the fourth wicket to steady India's ship.

The Indian batters were a bit too slow to begin with, collecting their runs mainly through singles and doubles in the initial phase. The lone display of aggression came when Gaikwad hammered spinner Vijayakanth for a six over mid-wicket, which also helped him reach his fifty in 66 balls.

Thereafter he showed a

lot more urgency to push the scoring rate ahead. Tilak was more focused on giving strike to his partner.

The left-hander reached his fifty in 86 balls just like his partner, lifting slinging pacer Garuka Sanketh for a six over mid-off.

Gaikwad brought up his hundred with a single off left-arm spinner Wanuj Sahar, but got out soon to

the same bowler while trying to clear the deep mid-wicket fence.

But Ayush Badoni (24, 18b) and Suryansh Shedge (26 not out, 14b) added 46 quick runs.

Earlier, there was a lot of focus on Sooryavanshi's outing and he seemed in a good touch while cracking three fours. But a moment of impatience curtailed his stay — an attempted

bunt over mid-off off Shiraz ended in the hands of a diving Sahan Arachchige.

Priyansh Arya made a run-a-ball 32 but a terrible mix-up with Gaikwad resulted in the former's run-out. — PTI

■ Brief Scores: India 'A' 277/6 in 50 overs (Rituraj Gaikwad 101, Tilak Varma 60, Mohamed Shiraz 2/67) vs Sri Lanka 'A'.

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Rituraj Gaikwad plays a shot in this file photo.

— BCCI

Brazil's Neymar is on recovery road

Morristown (USA), June 9: Neymar is "recovering well" from the calf injury that has made him a doubt for the start of Brazil's World Cup campaign, the team said in a statement on Monday.

Brazil's all-time record scorer underwent an MRI

scan on Monday which showed he is "making good progress in his treatment" amid hopes that he will be able to play a part for Carlo Ancelotti's side in the United States.

"He will continue to follow the recovery schedule and fitness programme as

planned by the Brazil team medical staff," the Brazilian Football Confederation said.

Neymar was diagnosed with a calf injury late last month and has since been in a race to recover fitness for the tournament, with Brazil kicking off their

campaign against Morocco at the MetLife Stadium in New Jersey on Saturday.

He did not take to the field with his teammates for Monday's workout at Brazil's base, the new training ground of MLS outfit New York Red Bulls, around 50 kilometres (30

miles) west of Manhattan. Instead he stayed inside to work in the gym.

Now 34, the former Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain superstar has been an integral part of Brazil's last three World Cup campaigns. — AFP

— AFP

— AFP

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— AFP

INTERNATIONAL EDITORIALS



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EDITORIALS

Is the US redistricting war slowing down? Or is it an arms race with no foreseeable end?

The most encouraging redistricting news of the year came from two states that did nothing.

Illinois lawmakers adjourned without drawing new congressional maps. South Carolina legislators, including Republicans, rejected a President Donald Trump-backed remap that would have tilted the political playing field. Better yet, it was a bipartisan move — Republicans joined Democrats in opposition.

Given this news, we were left hoping the mid-decade redistricting wars were slowing down.

But just when it looked like the mid-decade redistricting wars were cooling, New York reminded everyone that the next battle may already be underway.

Last Wednesday, the New York's Democratic Party-controlled legislature advanced a proposal that would significantly weaken New York's current independent redistricting system and give the legislature much more control over drawing political maps. Under current law, New York's constitution explicitly prohibits drawing districts to favor or disfavor political parties. If ultimately approved by both chambers of the legislature and New York voters, the proposal could clear the way for mid-decade congressional redistricting before the 2028 election, leading to more seats for Democrats.

New York voters approved an independent commission in 2014 to help draw congressional and legislative districts and to limit partisan gerrymandering. Now, voters may have to decide if they want to undermine that commission.

As California Gov. Gavin Newsom in February said of the



A person opposed to the redistricting plan reacts as she leaves the Louisiana House chambers after the plan to eliminate a majority-Black congressional district, in response to a U.S. Supreme Court ruling, was passed in Baton Rouge on May 28. **GERALD HERBERT/AP**

Democrats, "we need to fight fire with fire."

But we view things more along the lines of Republican New York Assemblyman Josh Jensen.

"If another state manipulates its maps for partisan gain, that doesn't make it virtuous," he said. "If Republicans somewhere do something wrong, Democrats doing the same thing doesn't make it right."

Still, it's hard to ignore the number of states that have engaged in the redistricting war. The National Conference of State Legislatures has been tracking which states have made — or attempted to make — changes to district maps between the 2020 and 2030 redistricting

cycles, beginning in late 2025. Nearly 20 states have considered mid-decade redistricting, with 10 successfully following through, by the NCSL's tally.

Virginia voters in April approved a similar voter-approved constitutional amendment that would've advantaged Democrats, which the state Supreme Court rejected in May.

Republican legislatures and Democratic legislatures alike are increasingly treating district maps as political weapons that can be redrawn whenever circumstances change. That's a bad thing.

The battle kicked off in Texas last August when Lone Star state legislators approved a new map

that massively favors Republicans.

California fired back, adopting a map via ballot measure last November that would give Democrats five more House seats.

In May, Tennessee adopted a Republican-tilted map. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis also signed into law last month a new map that favors the GOP, and was sued in short succession.

Georgia state legislators are expected next week to consider redistricting legislation during a special session.

Given that so many of the states that have moved to redistrict have done so to benefit Republicans, we understand Democrats' instinct to respond in kind.

But as the libertarian Cato Institute put it, "good gerrymandering can't cure bad gerrymandering." And as California and New York have proven, Democrats aren't exactly innocent bystanders.

Some experts have argued the only solution to this problem is to implement some sort of federal limits to partisan gerrymandering. And yet the federalist structure of our government — largely giving states the power to determine their own fates — complicates that idea. Others suggest that pursuing term limits could be a natural antidote to longtime incumbents tempted to gerrymander.

In our view, the best solution is still to leave it to the states, which should have independent commissions create maps based on geography, not politics.

That would require something increasingly rare in U.S. politics: People willing to do the right thing.

It's not an impossibility, as South Carolina proved. So, too, did Indiana, when that Republican-controlled state last December defied the president's wishes that the Hoosiers adopt a GOP-friendly remap.

The partisan redistricting wars weaken our democracy, and once redistricting becomes untethered from the census, every election cycle becomes a potential redistricting cycle. We've written before that the redistricting war is a form of political mutually assured destruction. If maps can be redrawn whenever one party thinks it can gain seats, what exactly is the limiting principle?

Americans already endure endless campaigning. They should not have to endure endless redistricting, too.

Stacey King, who died Sunday, was the soundtrack of the Chicago Bulls

When Stacey King hung up his sneakers in the late 1990s after a solid if unremarkable professional basketball career, including as a member of the Bulls' first three championship teams, there was no way to predict what he would become on Chicago's sports scene.

But he found his calling as the voice of the Bulls for 18 years and attained a status bestowed on only a few in this town: the likes of Harry Caray, Ron Santo and Mike Ditka.

We were among the Bulls fans shocked and deeply saddened to learn of the death on Sunday of King at the age of 59. As the team finally had turned the page from a desultory era and hired a young new general manager and improbably landed the fourth pick in the upcoming NBA draft, we looked forward to hearing Stacey King soundtrack the upcoming era in the style only he possessed.



Bulls analyst Stacey King, right, and play-by-play announcer Adam Amin meet before a game against the Magic at the United Center on April 10. **JOHN J. KIM/TRIBUNE**

King was probably best known for his large assortment of catchphrases. "Give me the hot sauce" became the title of his podcast. "You can drive home safely, Chicago, beep beep" after Bulls wins was silly but somehow endearing. When Jimmy Butler was playing for the Bulls, King

dubbed him, "Jimmy G. Buckets, the G stands for gets." There are countless others.

His exuberant personality made even the disappointing Bulls teams of recent vintage worth watching. There are a ridiculous 82 games in an NBA regular season. That means plenty of clunkers, even when teams are decent.

Coupled initially with longtime Bulls play-by-play man Neil Funk and then with the excellent Adam Amin, King was the rare sports analyst who could make a subpar affair entertaining viewing.

"I guess nobody's irreplaceable, but he was pretty close," Funk said Monday morning in a moving remembrance of King on WSCR-AM 104.3 The Score. Funk recalled how he truly understood he was just "a passenger on the Stacey King bus" after King's call of one of Derrick Rose's most impressive dunks that countless

accounts on X reproduced following news of King's death.

But his on-air presence wasn't the only reason King was loved. He habitually would stay for an hour or longer after Bulls home games to meet and talk with any fans who wanted time with him. Check out King's X account. Many of his posts (and there were many) were positive responses to people who wanted to meet him after the game, often with their children.

Few celebrities offer so much of themselves to the public.

There was so much more to this great man, beginning with his primary qualification for his job — a wealth of knowledge about the game. King took a backseat to no one in the broadcast business on that score, clearly describing defensive lapses (and there were many, unfortunately, in recent years for the Bulls) as well as offensive sets.

Of all the catchphrases he had,

our favorite was maybe his most basic: "It's a simple game."

King, a post player in his playing days, celebrated big men in basketball. And when a center on the Bulls (in recent years, it was Nikola Vučević) would get in a mismatch and pin a smaller defender on his back, King would plead for guards to get him the ball so he could score easily. Oftentimes, to King's chagrin, Bulls guards would fail to do so, hoisting up three-point shots instead. But, when they fed Vooch the ball, we would exult along with King.

"It's a simple game." Joni Mitchell sang it back in the day: "Don't it always seem to go, that you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone."

Unlike Caray and Santo, whom we knew we would lose soon before we actually did, we just assumed we would have many more years of Stacey King.

His loss stings.

ON THIS DAY 46 YEARS AGO THE LATEST RTA CRISIS

The reaction of most Illinoisans to the Regional Transportation Authority's new plea for state help is easily predictable. It will be anger and frustration. We can expect the RTA to be portrayed as a swollen bureaucracy with an insatiable appetite for cash ... as the focal point of a conspiracy to rob downstate and suburban taxpayers for the benefit of Chicago.

All this has about the same relation to reality as a political cartoon does: It makes a point by leaving out all the facts that make the situation complicated. Angry people can do that. Government officials and decision-makers had better not — and that includes Gov. Thompson, whose transportation policies have unintentionally done much to put the RTA in its present bind. ...

... The result, it appears, is that the RTA is facing a \$140 million deficit next year — the difference between what it expected to have and what it will have. Revenues from the sales tax are lower than expected; costs have risen sharply ...

Whatever the RTA's shortcomings may be, it is clear that the state created this situation and has some obligation to rectify it.

The immediate alternative is to raise the Chicago Transit Authority's basic fare to 70 cents — which would be the highest in the nation

... To make up the entire deficit expected next year, fares would have to go to 90 cents.

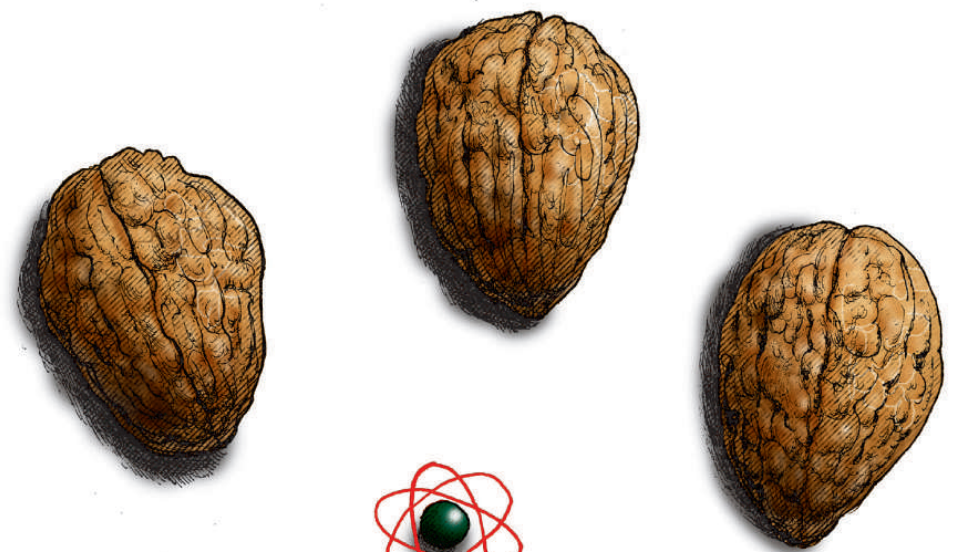
... What should be done? The RTA's annual money crises, which are as predictable as the seasons, show a deep-seated financial instability that will not be remedied by short-term infusions of cash. Last year's massive transportation package has failed to solve the problem and needs to be redesigned — but how? And while the state is figuring that out, what will keep the RTA afloat?

A possible answer is this: Let the state and the RTA split the difference in making up the deficit — the RTA by raising fares, the state by granting half the amount being requested. Then let us have a thoroughgoing, expert, and public analysis of what the RTA needs to function effectively ... whether some mechanism for balancing costs with revenues can be found.

Illinois has no lack of experts in transportation, government, public financing, and cost-effectiveness. It's time their talents were concentrated on solving a problem that otherwise seems fated to go on producing at least one financial crisis a year for the state.

Tribune editorial board,
June 9, 1980

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IRANIAN NEGOTIATIONS

MICHAEL RAMIREZ

OPINION

Iran and Israel have put Donald Trump in a rough spot



Daniel DePetris

Ever since the United States and Iran signed a ceasefire to suspend hostilities and explore a diplomatic way out of the conflict, the Middle East has been on tenterhooks.

The mystery and suspended animation have only been compounded by President Donald Trump's tendency to blurt out to the media whatever he's thinking. On some days, Trump insists a deal to end the war is only a matter of days or even hours. On other days, he's angry about the state of talks and threatening to resume the bombing if the Iranians don't blink on sending their stockpile of enriched uranium out of the country. One hour, Iran's leaders are "nuts"; the next, they're "rational."

The 24 hours between Sunday and Monday made an already puzzling situation even more head spinning. Iran and Israel, which stopped attacking each other in early April, resumed their volleys of fire, putting the entire diplomatic process at risk. After Israel bombarded Hezbollah infrastructure in southern Beirut in retaliation for the Lebanese terrorist group's rocket fire into northern Israel, the Iranian military responded by launching dozens of ballistic missiles into Israel. The missiles did little damage, but the Iranian attack nevertheless put extreme pressure on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to hit Tehran militarily. One man who didn't want Israel to pull the trigger again was Trump, who called Netanyahu and urged him to hold his fire. It didn't work; the Israeli air force bombed Iranian petrochemical facilities and air defenses. For a moment, Trump looked like he was merely a spectator to his own war of choice.

By Monday morning, after several rounds back and forth, Israel and Iran relented. The Iranian military stressed that it wouldn't launch any more missiles if Israel stopped striking Lebanon. The Israelis, too, suspended further military plans.

Trump, meanwhile, has called on Iran to continue negotiations to clinch a deal that he insists, for the umpteenth time, is close to being finalized. The deal on offer is less a comprehensive agreement



People check destroyed apartments that were hit by an Israeli airstrike in Dahiyeh, Lebanon, on Sunday. HASSAN AMMAR/AP

and more of a framework that begins to dig the United States out of a hole of its own making: Iran would reopen the Strait of Hormuz to maritime traffic, the U.S. Navy would drop its blockade of Iranian ports, and both sides would buy time to get into the finite details on how to dispense with Tehran's nuclear program.

To say we're out of the woods, though, would be taking optimism to new heights. Events are moving frenetically, and not even the most well-respected foreign affairs analyst could say how all of this is going to pan out. The possibility that Washington and Tehran will put signatures on an agreement is still very much there — Trump himself wants a deal, even if he sometimes has difficulty articulating what he expects Iran to sign on to.

Yet given the events of the past week — Iranian drones loitering over civilian shipping in the Strait of Hormuz; Iranian missiles screeching into Kuwait and Bahrain; the U.S. hitting Iranian

radar sites along the Iranian coast; Israel and Iran chucking missiles at each other — a return to war is also very possible.

There are other scenarios as well, from an indefinite extension of the April 8 ceasefire to a U.S.-Iran peace deal that eventually breaks down over the nuclear issue.

However, there are some things we can say with some clarity.

First, the war has made Iran more emboldened, not less. This is the exact opposite of what Trump envisioned when he decided on Feb. 28 to plunge the United States into another war in the Middle East. Fresh off a military success in Venezuela months before, Trump thought the conflict with Iran would be over in a matter of weeks. He also believed the outcome was preordained: Iran, its military capacity eliminated and its economy in the gutter, would sue for peace on U.S. terms and give up its entire nuclear apparatus.

This scenario, which some

would describe as fantastical, simply hasn't been realized. Despite the significant damage inflicted on Iran's military infrastructure in the first five weeks of the U.S. air campaign, there's little evidence that Tehran's strategic calculus has changed.

Indeed, that Iran mastered the strategy of asymmetrical warfare, using cheap attack drones and missiles to effectively shut down one of the world's most crucial chokepoints for energy supplies, means that a country whose armed forces are no match for the U.S. military in conventional terms still has leverage of its own. The high energy prices and subsequent fall in the polls back home are further incentivizing Trump to find a face-saving way out of this conflict, a reality he likely didn't anticipate when he embarked on the war.

Second, Iran's ambitions have grown as well. The latest exchange between Israel and Iran has demonstrated that Tehran's Revolutionary Guard and its

new supreme leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, are more aggressive as it pertains to protecting what's left of the nation's regional proxy network. The Hezbollah of 2026 might not be as strong as the Hezbollah of 2020, but the Lebanese militia movement remains Iran's most important nonstate asset in the region. The Iranians have no intention of sitting on the sidelines as this asset gets pummeled by a superior foe. The Revolutionary Guard warned Israel to cease its attacks on southern Lebanon, and when Netanyahu refused, it responded with a coordinated attack that aims to deter further Israeli operations there.

Fortunately, the Trump administration's negotiations with Iran haven't collapsed after all this. Still, a breakdown becomes much likelier the longer an agreement remains elusive.

Daniel DePetris is a fellow at Defense Priorities and a foreign affairs columnist for the Tribune.

What the New Republic got right — and wrong — about free speech at my university

By Jonathan Zimmerman
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

The University of Pennsylvania is hostile to free expression. It has imposed a series of new speech restrictions, especially upon critics of Israel. The campus is eerily silent, even as Israel attacks Lebanon and the United States bombs Iran.

That's the theme of an excellent piece published in May in *The New Republic* by journalist Jordan Heller. Caving to conservative donors and Penn alum Donald Trump, the university has targeted anti-Israel faculty members and students. Now most of them bite their tongues instead of raising their voices.

But Heller ignores the other group of people at Penn who don't feel like they can speak out: political conservatives. They're not his people — or mine — so they don't count.

And that highlights the biggest problem for free speech on American campuses. We all want to see our own speech protected, but we turn a blind eye when our opponents get silenced.

I arrived at Penn in September 2016, just two months before Trump won the presidency for the first time. Like the overwhelming majority of my colleagues, I voted for Hillary Clinton. But I also urged students who supported Trump to speak up in class, so we could learn from them.

That never happened. My handful of Trump-friendly students came out to me in my office, with the door shut. If

anyone found out how they voted, they told me, they would be canceled.

So they keep their opinions to themselves. According to the most recent national survey by the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, conservative college students are about three times more likely than their liberal peers to self-censor.

One reason might be to remain in their teachers' good graces. In the same FIRE survey, 37% of very conservative students said they hide their beliefs from professors to get a good grade, as compared with just 6.5% of very liberal students.

But almost everyone is disguising what they think, just to stay on the safe side. In a recent study of undergraduates at Northwestern and the University of Michigan, 88% said they had pretended to hold more progressive views than they really believe to "succeed socially or academically."

The most commonly hidden opinions are about gender. Over three-quarters of the students said they disagreed with the idea that "gender identity should override biological sex" in sports and healthcare, but that they would never admit that to anyone else.

I watched that dynamic unfold during the controversy over trans female swimmer Lia Thomas at Penn. In public, almost everyone on campus supported her right to compete on the women's team. Privately, however, many students told me they thought otherwise. They were just too scared to say so out loud.



A 1987 Benjamin Franklin statue by George Lundeen on the campus of the University of Pennsylvania, shown in 2025. TOM GRALISH/THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

Last year, under threat of losing \$175 million in federal funds, Penn stripped Thomas of her individual records. As Heller notes in his *New Republic* piece, that marked the start of "Penn's capitulation to Trumpism." We're afraid the Trump administration will come after us again, so we're clamping down on anything that could put us in its crosshairs — especially speech that might be seen as antisemitic.

The administration has subpoenaed Penn for a list of some of its Jewish employees, as part of an investigation of antisemitism on campus. The last thing we want to do is give it more ammunition.

So we drafted new "open expression" rules, which allow Penn to prohibit speech that "targets individuals or groups" on the basis of religion and race. If

the university thinks what you're saying is antisemitic, it can shut you down.

Or it can try to silence you via Title VI, which bars institutions receiving federal funds from engaging in discrimination. As Heller reports, one professor was summoned to our Title VI office for wearing a Palestinian flag on her garment at an off-campus event. Another was questioned about why they assigned a reading about a Palestinian who suffered trauma at an Israeli checkpoint.

Given this context, I understand why some opponents of Israel are afraid to speak up. And I'm grateful to Heller for highlighting Penn's cowardly assault on their free speech.

But we also need to acknowledge that other members of our community — especially political

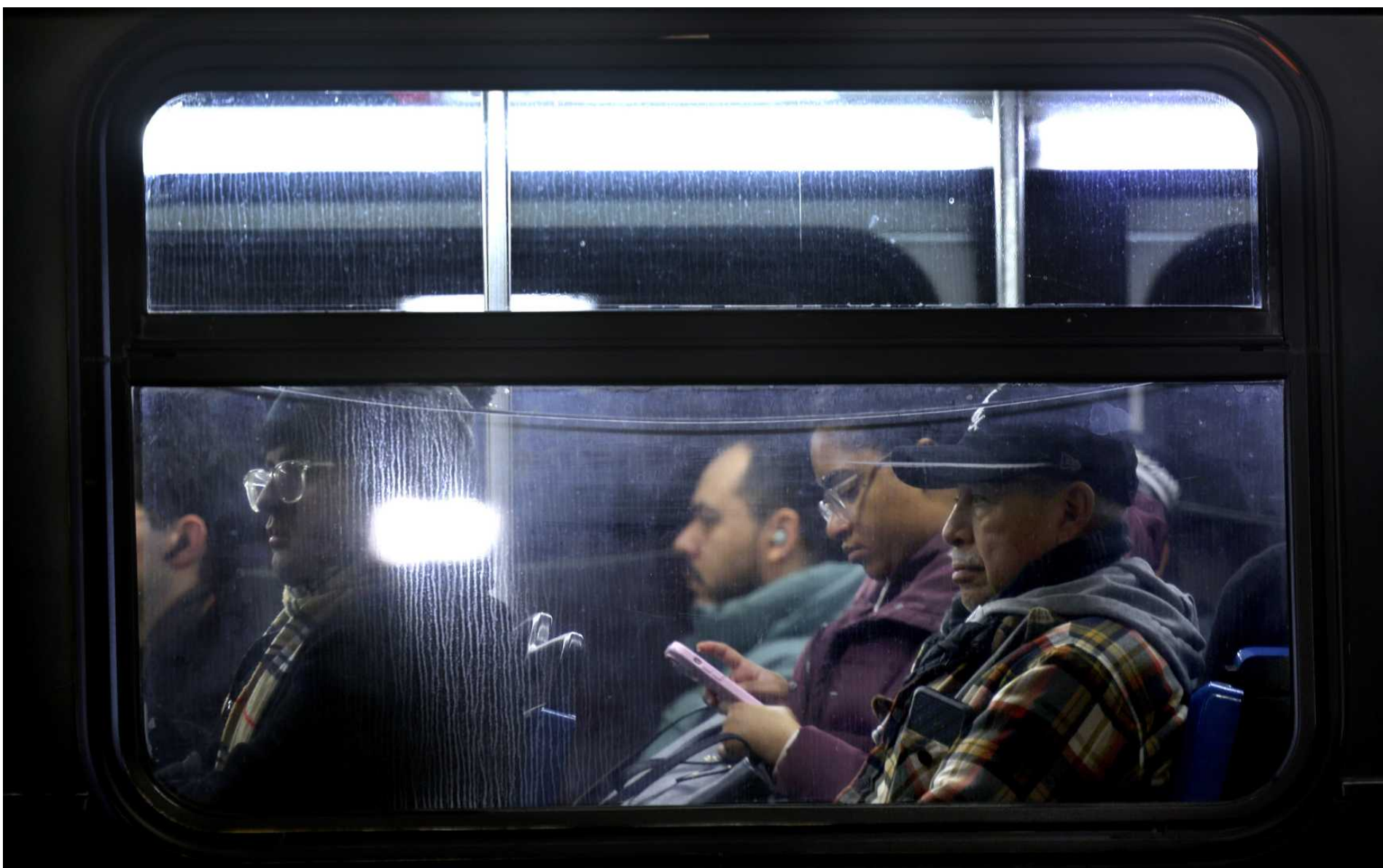
conservatives — feel muzzled, too. Anything less will betray the principle that we claim to hold dear.

To be clear, I don't think the university is actively suppressing right-wing speech in the same way that it has tried to censor critics of Israel. But both groups of people are walking in fear. So we should raise our voices on their behalf, whether we agree with them or not.

Either you believe in free speech for everyone, or you don't believe in it at all. We need to repeat that, over and over, until we know it by heart.

Jonathan Zimmerman teaches history and education at the University of Pennsylvania and serves on the advisory board of the Albert LePage Center for History in the Public Interest.

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE



Commuters check their cellphones as a CTA bus does its morning route in Chicago on March 4. ANTONIO PEREZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Editor's note: We asked you to submit letters about what's great about the CTA and what's frustrating. We published a selection of your letters on Monday. Here are more of your thoughts.

CTA gives me freedom

I write to express my deep, glandular passion for the CTA. Yes, the stories of violence on public transit grab headlines, and it should mortify our leaders that so many folks call the CTA home. Overwhelmingly, though, the CTA takes millions of people where they need to go, day and night, safely, at a price even a poor person can afford.

I lived most of my life in suburbs that lacked so much as Metra access. I know what it is to need to drive everywhere. To be stranded if I had car trouble. I remember paying \$50 or more to park my car on the rare occasions I ventured into the city. Rare because, wow, parking was expensive if you could find it.

But I love Chicago. Have always loved Chicago. Give me the funky odors and technicolor characters of the CTA over the sterile loneliness and claustrophobia of suburban roadways any day.

I feel free here. The city is mine to explore with the CTA. And I never have to drive the train or park the bus.
— Jennifer Companik, Chicago

Slow zones on the Blue Line

As a veteran of more than 10,000 CTA rides, I'd like to see a real investment in current CTA infrastructure.

While the Red Line is being extended (at an escalating cost measured in billions), the Eisenhower section of the Blue Line has featured slow zones for years and years. I first contacted the CTA about it back in 2022 and was referred to the "slow zone elimination" section of the agency's website. These extensive slow areas continue to exist on the western portion of the Blue Line to this day, painfully extending everyone's commute. Slow-moving cars on the Ike, caught in their own tortuous crawl, still often pass our CTA train.

"Rapid transit," it is not.
— Jerry Ostergaard, Oak Park

Why do buses still bunch up?

What happened to the system that was to direct buses? This system was to automatically recognize when too many buses were going in the same direction on any given bus route. This happens — maybe not routinely nor often, but it sure is frustrating when you see it. The system was to notify the CTA so that the CTA could reverse a bus or two.

This system was something talked about in 2015. Maybe only talked about. I don't know. Sure is agony to watch back-to-back buses going in the opposite direction of my travels while I monitor the 41411 system only to see that I still have a 15- to 20-minute wait.

In fairness, if there are too many buses going in my direction, I'll wait for the second bus in hopes of getting a seat.

In double fairness, I'll sometimes take a chance and wait on a third bus.
— Ron March, Chicago

My reintroduction to CTA

One of the most significant outcomes for me resulting from President Donald Trump's conflict with Iran, the closing of the Strait of Hormuz and the increase in gas prices has been my reintroduction to the CTA.

When gas prices skyrocketed into the stratosphere, my morning commute to work via my personal vehicle went from \$65 a week, all the way up to \$80. And fortunately, this price shock was enough

for me to begin looking into other transportation options. This search brought me back to an old friend I had abandoned years ago for the luxury of driving: the CTA Red Line.

I discovered that for \$100 a month, I could go back and forth to work to work, read a real book again, and fully avoid the jittery increases in fuel costs, sitting in traffic gridlock and vehicle wear and tear, simply by starting my day a little earlier. Furthermore, this pivoting to public transit has also allowed me to save hundreds of dollars a month in fuel payments.

And while there are still the challenges of homelessness, riders with mental illness, and the occasional acts of crime and violence, the CTA is still by far the best economical option for getting to both Midway and O'Hare airports and moving quickly throughout the city and some suburbs, and it still remains a much cheaper option today than a ride-share.
— Ephraim Lee, Chicago

Thankful and frustrated

I'm grateful to have CTA trains to ride one or two days a week, sometimes more, mostly between Skokie and the Loop. Mostly it serves me very well, but sometimes it frustrates me, such as when:

■ The northbound Red Line stops near Jarvis "waiting for signaling" just long enough for me to miss a Yellow Line connection.

■ That same northbound Red Line comes in on the southbound side, with or without an announcement, so I have to get my bearings, go into the station and cross over, which again can take just long enough for me to miss a Yellow Line connection.

■ A train sits at Howard with the "line" sign off, so I can't tell if it's Red Line or Purple Line or northbound or southbound (see previous item), and the sign doesn't come on until "doors closing" for the train to depart, so it's tough to know whether to board.

■ A train disappears ghost-like from the display of incoming times.

■ I've reported any of these frustrations to the CTA, and I haven't heard back.

Otherwise, I've enjoyed having the "L" for my entire life. Over the decades, I've appreciated the addition of air conditioning, clear recorded announcements and the aforementioned displays of incoming train times, as well as how much quieter the subways have become. (See "decades.") I've enjoyed one particular weekday morning "L" operator's cheerful welcoming stories, though I haven't heard him lately.

And I'm glad to be able to read, relax, and avoid the headaches and expenses of driving and parking downtown. The fare hasn't changed for several years, and it feels like a bargain, especially since I now get to use a senior pass.

I can handle a little frustration.
— Bill Page, Morton Grove

Many great CTA workers

The CTA has been a genuine part of my life from high school through the present day. I have very fond memories of how it could be. On one bus ride, I discovered that I didn't have enough money for the fare, but the driver allowed me to ride, saying that I could pay him next time, which was very gracious.

Another time while I was riding the bus, a storm was moving in, and even though the sky turned green and opened up into a severe hailstorm, the driver never lost his composure, kept the bus steady and got us all to where we needed to be.

It is always pleasant to sit and take in

the scenery going by. Recently, I took the "L" to ride down to the Lyric Opera House. The CTA representative was so helpful when the ticket machine didn't issue me a card upon paying, buzzing me into the waiting area and also checking on which stop was closest to the Lyric.

Through the years, I have met and experienced people who didn't merely do a job but truly brought the best of themselves to it. The CTA has a lot of great people working for it; the agency has provided a true service to Chicago and the suburbs.
— Mandy May, Skokie

Trash at bus stops, on buses

Everyone who uses buses and trains in the city and suburbs expects a certain amount of wait time. That said, can the CTA do a better job in seeing that the shelters and stops are clean and free of debris while we wait?

I live in a very nice, relatively safe suburb, but still, I am appalled at the bottles, cans, newspapers, plastic containers, cigarette butts, wads of gum and half-eaten food left behind at some of my bus stops. Critters like mice, squirrels, birds and ants are keen on entering the shelters while humans wait on the sidewalk to avoid getting filth on the bottoms of their shoes. Sitting down on the bench next to bottles and cans is only for the brave and for the elderly person too frail to stand for a long time.

Yes, there are metal barrels right there for people to put their trash. But of course, it's so much easier for the always-unseen barbarian just to throw junk on the sidewalk or underneath the bench.

The only answer, then, is a no-nonsense public transit sanitation service that keeps our buses, bus stops and train stations clean and appealing in both city and suburbs. This service should be regular and ongoing, not hit-and-miss. Riders should be able to call and report a situation that needs attention, and the problem should be dealt with in a timely manner.

Chicago public transportation can and must be reflective of a world-renowned city.
— Kathleen Melia, Niles

Enforce rules on violators

What frustrates me the most about the CTA is that it refuses to enforce its own rules for passengers, especially violations by "continuous riders": sleeping, laying across multiple seats, and riding back and forth on "L" trains on a single fare. Effective enforcement has to include removing these violators from the system, not just from the train they're on at the end of the line. People who do not exit the train at the end of the line with everybody else should be put on the other side of the fare turnstiles.

The CTA can show compassion for people it thinks are homeless by arranging for a seamless transfer of them to social service agencies and organizations at the ends of "L" lines where these violators are ejected.

The CTA's refusal to enforce its own rules effectively proves it puts violators above passengers who ride by the rules.
— Jean SmilingCoyote, Chicago

CTA technology at work

I love that the CTA has put technology to work on the transit system. On buses, it is fantastic to see the stops displayed, bus arrival times and train departure times. Any route changes are noted. That makes using the CTA much easier to use.

Now, it would be great to use tech to reduce bus bunching.
— Lee Berenbaum, Chicago

Reinforce code of conduct

I'm sure I have nothing new to add here, but I take the Blue Line O'Hare branch downtown four days a week. Most of those eight trips (unless I'm in the very front car) will have either people who are homeless sprawled out over several seats, preventing commuters from sitting down (most common in the morning); the stench of cigarette or pot smoke lingering in the air, if not some actively smoking (most common in the afternoon); garbage, usually food wrappers strewn on the floor; and/or a ranting person, sometimes saying they're going to hurt someone. Oh, and let's not forget the music aficionados who decide everyone should hear what they are listening to.

Occasionally, a police officer will enter the car, check that the sprawled-out people aren't dead and move on. I have seen them let the ranters remain onboard to continue frightening the rest of the passengers. You can't switch to another car at the next station, because they walk back and forth between cars while the train is moving, and you're back at square one. Still, the trains do usually show up around the time you expect them to, and it is faster and cheaper than driving every day.

I realize that the police officers who work and will be working this detail rightfully want to focus on the violent criminals, but when you have nobody enforcing an even minimum code of conduct, it makes for a thing we commuters have to endure every day and not a thing that the city should feel proud to offer residents and visitors.
— Cheryl Arvio, Chicago

A better CTA, a better city

First, what I'm grateful for. The CTA helps me and my fellow Chicagoans and Illinoisans move around our great city. It's powered by the dedicated work of everyone from operators and drivers all the way up to an acting (who should be permanent!) president. They deserve more appreciation than we give them.

What frustrates me is when the CTA isn't there. Trains or buses that never arrive and disappear from the schedule. Routes that could exist and leave me wondering if I should drive or just stay home. Fellow riders who opt for other means of transportation because they fear who else might be on that train.

Truly what frustrates me about the CTA is that we could all have so much more! A better CTA, a better city even, is there for us if we want it.
— Michael Indrelunas, Chicago

Inconsistent wait times

I am often frustrated by the CTA's inconsistent wait times and frequency. The Blue Line near me sometimes comes every five to seven minutes, which makes it easy to simply walk to the station without needing to check a schedule. It is dissuading to show up and see the next train is 15-plus minutes away on the second busiest route on the system.

I am grateful, however, that the train does run 24/7, so I can easily get downtown or to the airport on some late nights or early mornings.
— Daniel Gentile, Chicago

Note to readers

The Obama Presidential Center is opening on June 19. Do you have memories of former President Barack Obama you'd like to share? (Sincere thoughts only.) Send a letter of no more than 400 words by Thursday, June 11 to letters@chicagotribune.com. Include your full name and city/town.

OPINION

The Perils of a Cuban Collapse



GLOBAL VIEW
By Walter Russell Mead

Cuba's communist regime is grappling with perhaps its worst crisis since the fall of the Soviet Union. Many MAGA supporters believe the dictatorship will collapse, shoring up diminishing confidence in President Trump's conduct of foreign policy and boosting flagging Republican popularity.

Life may not be this simple. The Cuban government is more resilient than many of its opponents comprehend, and its fall could complicate rather than simplify the lives of American policymakers.

Cuban communism is a survivor. Many observers in the 1990s believed that the communist collapse in Central and Eastern Europe would spread globally. But Moscow's failure wasn't universally contagious. In Cuba and North Korea communism survived. In China and Vietnam, it even thrived. While retaining tight state controls, both Beijing and Hanoi instituted enough market-friendly reforms to pursue versions of the export-oriented development strategies that powered the rise of many Asian countries.

North Korea, believing that Chinese-style economic reforms would endanger the absolute control of the Kim dynasty, built up a nuclear

arsenal to shore up the regime's power indefinitely. So far, this strategy has worked, though at immense cost to the country's people.

Fidel Castro and his supporters concluded that Cuba was geographically too close to the U.S. for the Chinese or North Korean path to work. Opening the floodgates to foreign investment would rapidly lead to an American-dominated Cuban economy, and even the most supine American administration was unlikely to let Havana become a nuclear power. Cuba's communists would have to find another way forward.

The Cuban plan combined brutal control of the domestic population with a program of limited openings to investors and business. It permitted foreign investors (like Canada's Sherritt International and Spain's Meliá hotel chain) to enter under strictly controlled conditions. The Cuban military was given essential authority over the tourism industry. During economic crises, the regime would crack the door open to small businesses like shoe-repair places and tourist services. When conditions improved, the thumbscrews came out and the nascent private sector would be ruthlessly repressed.

Havana also learned to exploit the Cuban diaspora as a source of hard currency. On the island, dissidents were a messy nuisance. In Miami or Madrid, they became indus-

trious exiles, sending remittances back to their families in Cuba. Whereas East Germany built a wall, the Cubans erected a toll booth. Currency from abroad would be spent in government-owned stores, alleviating internal tension and providing the state with desperately needed foreign exchange. Some of the regime's bitterest enemies in Miami became its de facto financial supporters as they sent their grandparents money without which they couldn't survive.

Political instability and economic chaos could ensue if the Havana regime falls.

Cuban medical workers, and to a lesser extent mercenaries and security personnel, also became financial assets for the regime. The salaries of Cuban doctors and soldiers on international assignments were paid directly to the Cuban state, which kept the lion's share and doled out subsistence money to the hapless workers.

This system wasn't pretty, and Cuba stayed desperately poor, but the communist regime survived. In 2000 Hugo Chávez's socialist Venezuela began to support Havana with subsidized oil and other aid, but it was only a temporary fix. Even before the U.S. in-

tervention this January ended oil shipments to Cuba, Venezuela's economic distress drove Caracas to scale back its support.

With oil subsidies gone, tourism collapsing and foreign investors pulling out, Cuba is in dire shape. Remittances from exiles and expats, most of whom loathe Cuba's tyrannical government but don't want their families to starve, are the regime's main surviving support.

But Havana still retains important assets and, so far, the political elite has resisted the kind of divide-and-rule tactics Washington used in Venezuela. We shouldn't underestimate the resolve or the ingenuity of a regime that has been fending off U.S. pressure since Dwight Eisenhower was in the White House.

We also shouldn't underestimate the potential for social and economic chaos if the regime falls. Except for its organs of repression, the Cuban state has largely rotted away. Many of the island's best and brightest now live abroad. Regime collapse could trigger waves of emigration and open the door to drug cartels and other bad actors. Political instability could make American intervention hard to avoid.

The Trump administration has engineered a crisis in Cuba. Whether it can help the Cuban people put their country on the road to a free and prosperous future remains to be seen.

BOOKSHELF | By Michael Patrick Brady

Advice From Ancient Greece

Since You're Mortal . . .

By James Romm
Norton, 176 pages, \$24.99

It is estimated that roughly 1,500 plays graced the theaters of ancient Greece. There, the theatrical arts were an important centerpiece of civic life and, according to the classicist James Romm, a medium through which the entire polis could collectively wrestle "with vital questions of ethics and politics, through the vehicle of inherited myth."

Of these plays, only 46 or so have survived into the present. Most of the rest fell victim to the judgment of late-Roman scribes who, when faced with having to determine which works should make the leap from fragile papyrus scrolls to the newer, more durable (and more expensive) vellum, opted to prioritize the canonical works of Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Euripides and Sophocles, leaving the rest to rot.

But not everyone had such a low opinion of these discarded works. In "Since You're Mortal . . .," Mr. Romm gives readers a sneak peek into a much larger project being undertaken by Oxford University Press—the first-ever English translation of a remarkable anthology compiled in the fifth century A.D., a multivolume work that contains a treasure trove of excerpts and quotations from many of the ancient Greek dramatic works long thought to have

been lost to time. Gathering together some of the anthology's pithiest and most striking quotations, Mr. Romm's book is an intriguing and occasionally frustrating aperitif that doesn't fully satisfy but is nonetheless stimulating.

The author of the original anthology was a man named Johannes who hailed from the Macedonian town of Stobi. Known to posterity as "Stobaeus," he lived in a time of turbulence, when "the Roman Empire was collapsing in the West but holding up better in the Greek-speaking East." Amid this upheaval, he wanted to be sure that his son, Septimius, inherited the wisdom of the ancient Greeks—but doubted whether Septimius would have the patience to wade through a vast corpus of 1,000-year-old works.

"For his son's sake," writes Mr. Romm, "he began compiling quotes from those texts, drawing on works of all types, both poetry and prose." Over time, what began as a kind of late-antique study guide grew into a massive, multivolume anthology, featuring the thoughts of hundreds of Greek poets, philosophers, statesmen and playwrights, organized into an ethical program that speaks to the challenges faced in each stage of life. "Since You're Mortal . . ." focuses on the playwrights, and represents the first time any part of Stobaeus' anthology has been published in English.

Taking his cues from Stobaeus, Mr. Romm has divided his book into neat little sections that focus on a particular vice, virtue or common aspect of the human condition, such as friendship, lust, politics and death. While each quotation provides something to muse over, the whole thing might be best summed up by a line from the comic poet Alexis: "The entire human condition's completely insane."

A fifth-century A.D. anthology of Greek writing, originally collected by a father for his son, offers wisdom and insight into the human condition.

In the face of such insanity, Stobaeus seems to be prodding Septimius toward a classically Epicurean style of living, one that accepts the finality of death and recognizes the importance of taking pleasure in what the world has to offer while one can. "When one can lie down next to a beautiful woman and grab hold of two jars of wine from Lesbos, this is the 'wise man,' this is philosophy's 'Good,'" says the playwright Baton. Mr. Romm notes that though the Roman Empire in Stobaeus' time was largely Christianized, there's little evidence of that in the anthology. "Stobaeus offers his son a strictly pagan view of the afterlife, as a grim and joyless eternity spent underground."

Stobaeus knew that neither he nor the writers he quoted had all the answers. He often purposely selected quotations in opposition to one another, creating a dialectic through which his son could come to his own conclusions. Mr. Romm emphasizes this through close juxtapositions: From Diphilus, a fourth-century comic writer, we learn that "time is a strange craftsman; it refashions all of us but makes us always worse." But in the next line, his contemporary Menander asserts that though it may rob us of our vitality, time nevertheless "adds to our acuity of mind."

More than a few of the quotes featured in "Since You're Mortal . . ." are crushingly banal. One can imagine poor Septimius rolling his eyes at his earnest father's attempts to bridge their generational divide with suggestions like "living's a fine thing, provided one learns how to do it" or "ignorance is a misfortune we bring on ourselves." And while it's certainly nice to have a compendium of sayings from the forgotten playwrights of the past, it's perhaps no surprise that it's the more familiar writers featured in the book whose passages tend to stand out, particularly Euripides, whose vivid language helps elevate his quotations. "May they all die an evil death," he writes, "those who take joy in kingship and the rule of the few in the state. Freedom's a word that's worth everything."

"Since You're Mortal . . ." occupies an awkward space. As a *précis* to a larger, more scholarly work, it lacks the depth and historical context that many enthusiasts of classical drama may be hungry for. It's clearly vying to be shelved alongside the sententious Stoic self-help books that have become trendy among seekers of meme-able ancient wisdom in recent years. Mr. Romm complicates matters further by adding quotes from other sources to Stobaeus' selections, diluting the book's ability to show us the anthologist's true intent. But to seek perfection here may be missing the point. "There's nobody who's happy in all things," according to Nicostratus, paraphrasing Euripides. "By Athena . . . you've put all life compactly in one line."

Mr. Brady's book reviews appear in the Journal and various other publications.

In Newark, the Mayhem Is the Message



MAIN STREET
By William McGurn

The most obvious truth about Delaney Hall—the private building in Newark, N.J., where Immigration and Customs Enforcement holds people who entered

the U.S. illegally—is that the protests outside its gates aren't about what the protesters say they are about.

They say they're concerned with improving conditions for the detainees. Indeed, what now looks like nightly riots began with reports of maggot-infested and spoiled food. That was the most vivid example of complaints designed to promote the idea that ICE was running a hellhole. Some even call it a concentration camp, evoking (what else!) Nazi Germany.

Over the weekend border czar Tom Homan went to the facility on an unannounced visit to see for himself. In the cafeteria, he ate a big plate of spaghetti, which he pronounced fine. It didn't matter. The real goal of these protests has always been to shut the ICE facility down.

The protesters cheerfully admit this. So do leading New Jersey Democrats. On her official X feed, Gov. Mikie Sherrill has pinned a post that reads: "I am going to keep working for better conditions inside

Delaney Hall until it is closed for good."

She has plenty of company. Attorney General Jennifer Davenport is suing the GEO Group, the private firm running the ICE detention center, demanding access. Ras Baraka, mayor of Newark, is likewise attempting to shut the facility down via the courts.

But the protests put them in an awkward position. Democrats such as Gov. Sherrill don't want to end up like Gov. Tim Walz, who was rendered weak and hapless by the breakdown of law and order during ICE protests in and around Minneapolis. So New Jersey's Democrats have to pretend the real cause of the unrest around Delaney Hall is ICE, not protesters who throw rocks and vandalize cars leaving and entering the Delaney facility.

"Their goal is—and they've said it, the governor said it, the mayor said it—this is about shutting down that facility, and [to] the politicians on the Hill, it's about abolishing ICE," Mr. Homan said last week.

It's "mostly peaceful protests" all over again. Meanwhile, the clashes make for vivid television. But it's a combustible mix. In Minneapolis in January, two clashes with immigration officers proved fatal: for 37-year-old mother of three Renee Good, and 2½ weeks later for nurse

Alex Pretti, also 37. That's what happens when protesters aggressively disrupt law enforcement.

At Delaney Hall, nothing much happens while the sun is out. In the early evening, protesters trickle in, shouting slogans and harassing drivers.

The protesters seek confrontation, not better conditions for ICE detainees.

It's like watching stage actors rehearse the same lines they recite every night.

The setting is inconvenient. Delaney Hall is in the industrial section of Newark, close to a massive NJ Transit bus garage. It isn't hard to get there by car, though Newark police have the entrance on Doremus Avenue blocked off to traffic. It's less than 2 miles from Newark Liberty International Airport.

As Mr. Homan and others have made clear, the administration is determined not to let protesters stop them from keeping this facility running. The border czar says the protesters are organized, well-supplied and busy feeding the media allegations of abuse that are long on sensationalism and short on names and details that can be investigated.

Delcy Rodríguez Invades My Home

By Leopoldo López

My children and I watched a video on a phone screen last week: Venezuelan officials cut a ribbon at what used to be our family home in Caracas. They were applauding, announcing a social program for the elderly. My son, Leo, 13, put it simply: They stole our home. My daughter Manuela, 16, was silent and in tears.

I am not writing to ask for sympathy. I am writing because what happened to that house is the most honest statement Venezuela's current government has made about the rule of law. Anyone thinking about investing in Venezuela deserves to read it.

I spent nearly seven years as a political prisoner, sentenced to 14 years on the absurd charge that I had sent subliminal messages to the Venezuelan people. The judges who presided over this travesty are still on the bench.

When I publicly supported the military operation that led to Nicolás Maduro's capture late last year, the regime's reply was immediate: Officials

entered our home, took everything, demolished walls and ceilings, and killed our dogs.

This isn't a new story. Exxon Mobil lived through it when Hugo Chávez nationalized its projects in 2007 and spent years in international arbitration recovering pennies on the dollar. Since then farms, factories, radio stations, livestock and thousands

This loss is personal, but it should also be a warning to investors.

of family businesses have been expropriated. Venezuela has carried out one of the most systematic destructions of private wealth ever in the Western Hemisphere. Not one expropriation has been genuinely reversed.

There is optimism in some financial and diplomatic quarters, and I understand why. Mr. Maduro is gone. The U.S. has real leverage. Venezuela sits on the largest proven oil reserves in the world. The will of the Vene-

zuelan people to rebuild isn't in doubt.

But the person now running Venezuela, Delcy Rodríguez, didn't arrive from outside the machine. She helped it. As foreign minister and vice president under Mr. Maduro, she designed and defended the apparatus of expropriation: the politicized judiciary, the repressive infrastructure that has unlawfully detained, imprisoned, tortured or killed nearly 18,000 Venezuelan citizens over the past 12 years and still holds hundreds of political prisoners.

The rule of law is no abstraction. It is the foundation on which every investment rests. You can't drill a well, build a factory, or extend credit without certainty that your contract will be honored and what you own today will be yours tomorrow. Venezuela offers none of those certainties.

In the coming weeks, new Supreme Court justices will be named. If those appointments followed the same logic—political loyalty over legal competence and integrity—the mes-

sage will be clear: The regime has changed its face, not its character.

Venezuela's potential is real. The oil, the energy capacity, the diaspora of millions who want to return and build. But the CEO of Exxon Mobil was right when he told a White House meeting earlier this year that Venezuela is, under these conditions, uninvestable. It will stay that way until there are independent courts, enforceable contracts, real property protections and a genuine democratic transition leading to free and fair presidential elections.

The U.S. has more leverage over Venezuela's economic future than at any point in a generation. Washington can demand the legal architecture that makes investment sustainable and democracy possible rather than legitimize a government that just held a ribbon-cutting in my living room. My house is gone. Investors thinking about Venezuela should understand what that means.

Mr. López is a founder of the World Liberty Congress.

OPINION

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Israel Fights While Trump Talks

Iran's weekend missile attack on Israel was its latest act of war amid the cease-fire, another attempt to impose a new strategic reality on its neighbors. It went differently this time because the Israelis didn't make excuses for Iran's regime in reply.

After Iran first fired 11 ballistic missiles at Israel on Sunday—it would fire nearly 30 in all—Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hit back with air strikes. Israel struck reconstituted Iranian air defenses, missile sites and a major petrochemical complex used by the Revolutionary Guard. President Trump had loudly opposed any Israeli response, but the Israeli strikes arm U.S. diplomacy. They clear the path for military action should Tehran deny Mr. Trump the deal he seeks.

Hezbollah ignored the first Lebanon cease-fire negotiated by Mr. Trump in April and on Thursday it rejected the President's latest. Israel had refrained from attacking Hezbollah in its Beirut stronghold, and the deal was to continue that forbearance if the terrorists would stop firing on Israeli towns.

Early on Sunday Hezbollah launched another such barrage and Iran said it would strike Israel if it retaliated in Beirut. That isn't a strategic equation Israelis can tolerate. Jerusalem responded with a single strike in Beirut.

As Iran's regime weighed its options, consider that Mr. Trump had dismissed its prior attacks on U.S. forces as "a trifle" amid the cease-fire, responding with what he called "love taps." Mr. Trump didn't respond to Iran's attacks on U.S. Gulf allies, excusing the 30 missiles and drones fired on Kuwait and its airport Wednesday as "not a big deal," a tit-for-tat.

Iran took U.S. inaction as permission to escalate, an assessment Mr. Trump soon vindicated, with shades of Joe Biden. "The Iranian strikes didn't hurt anybody," he said, giving the regime cover behind the success of Israeli air defenses. "I am going to call Bibi right now and tell him not to retaliate," the President added. "Each of them had their fun. Israel had its strike, and Iran had its strike. We don't need another one."

But Israel hadn't attacked Iran. It had struck Hezbollah in Lebanon, where faraway Iran has no business. Mr. Trump's logic would grant the Iranians a right of response there—in essence

a veto on Israel's self-defense. Even if it weren't election season, no Israeli leader can assent to that on his border or let an Iranian ballistic-missile salvo go unanswered. Such weakness would also hurt the U.S. in nuclear talks.

Mr. Netanyahu surely made these points to Mr. Trump on their Sunday call, and the President reportedly advised keeping any retaliation limited. Meanwhile, Mr. Trump's earlier statements kept him aloof from Israel's reply. He could then be seen staving off a large-scale Israeli follow-up Monday morning, when Iran needed a water break. As Mr. Trump later put it, "I said, 'Bibi, you better be careful, or you will be on your own very soon.'"

All of this creates the appearance of a U.S.-Israeli split, and Mr. Trump is keen to preserve talks with Iran, which he keeps insisting will bear fruit any day now. "I would say an agreement would be signed on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday," the President said Sunday. "And now this takes place." But is Iran's regime really on the brink of signing?

The regime has made a Lebanon cease-fire a prerequisite for a nuclear deal, but it also controls Hezbollah, which is refusing to cease fire. That's what brought about this military exchange. Iran ordered Hezbollah into this war and could order it out. That Iran doesn't do so should tell Mr. Trump it prefers the excuse to delay a deal and push for greater advantage.

If the regime won't make a deal that meets U.S. objectives, Mr. Trump needs an alternative—and soon. The war has now passed the 100-day mark, and the Strait of Hormuz is still closed. The U.S. has been helping sneak vessels through while its own blockade punishes Iran. But the regime has also gotten away with repeated attacks while it drags out talks and rebuilds its military arsenal. In recent weeks the U.S. position has been eroding.

That changed on Sunday and Monday as Israel rolled back some of what Iran had advanced during the cease-fire. Mr. Trump now can seize the opening by giving the regime a hard deadline and empowering Israel to enforce the cease-fire against Iranian violations. Or he can continue restraining Israel in the hope that Iran gives him an escape from the war in a few more days, just a few more days.

union members or risk bankruptcy.

Democrats are using the law to undermine the Supreme Court's 2018 decision in *Janus v. AFSCME*, which found mandatory union dues unconstitutional. Oregon passed legislation in January giving unions a private right of action in state court. The New York bill goes further by letting the state attorney general act against anyone distributing communication in New York, "whether or not the person is within the state."

The AG is "authorized . . . to issue subpoenas in accordance with the civil practice law and rules." This means unions can run to Attorney General Letitia James to subpoena the think tank and make life expensive and miserable until it gives up. Ms. James is running for re-election this year and every union campaign dollar counts. Here's hoping Gov. Kathy Hochul doesn't sign the bill.

New York state has hundreds of thousands of unionized public workers, and the Freedom Foundation says nearly 7,500 of them have used its materials to submit membership cancellations, including more than 1,400 this year. No wonder unions are desperate to shut down the Freedom Foundation.

The FISA Hostage Takers

Can America's political class still muster the maturity to protect against foreign threats? That's an open question as both President Trump and Democrats imperil a crucial intelligence-gathering tool. America's adversaries are laughing in happy disbelief.

Mr. Trump's ham-handed contribution was to name housing regulator Bill Pulte as acting Director of National Intelligence (DNI). Talk about self-sabotage. Mr. Pulte has no national-security experience and used his power to target Mr. Trump's opponents while regulating Fannie Mae.

The President dropped the Pulte smoke bomb in the middle of the House and Senate debate over reauthorizing Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. That law lets the U.S. eavesdrop on foreigners living overseas and is set to expire on June 12.

The nomination has handed Democrats an excuse to hold Section 702 hostage, and on Friday they opposed a procedural vote to move the bill forward for debate. Mr. Trump then made things worse by saying he had appointed Mr. Pulte to fire people.

"I'd like to see it smaller. I think there are a lot of people in there that shouldn't be there," he said. He's right that the DNI needs to be shrunk, if not eliminated on the merits as redundant and too often political. But Mr. Pulte's partisan record at the housing regulator makes him the wrong man for the job.

The usual suspects are now exploiting all this to make another run at hamstringing or killing Section 702. Such Congressional critics as Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D., Mich.) and Sen. Mike Lee (R., Utah) claim the law allows for spying

on Americans. But this isn't true.

The law lets the intelligence community gather information from foreigners overseas and store it in a database. That database can then be searched for communications on matters of national security. If Hezbollah fighters in Lebanon start texting a New Jersey phone number, the New Jersey number is worth a follow-up.

All information in the database is legally gathered, and in 2024 Congress added safeguards against abuse. All queries for American information need prior bureaucratic approval and receive regular audits. The Senate's proposed renewal, the Foreign Intelligence Accountability Act, adds even more protection, including criminal penalties for abuses.

There is also new supervision for U.S. query terms to require approval by FBI attorneys, an audit by the U.S. Comptroller General, and an annual report to the Congressional intelligence and judiciary committees on sensitive queries that will be publicly released each April. The bill also narrows the list of electronic communications service providers who provide data access to exclude those related to "places of worship, educational institutions . . . and entertainment venues."

Recent audits show Section 702 database queries have a 98.6% compliance rate, and the exceptions include typos and small errors. This legislation ought to have bipartisan support, and it once did. Mr. Trump's problem is that he muddies every serious matter of governance with his politics of personal retribution. But if Democrats boycott FISA to protest Mr. Pulte, they will be doing the same thing, with potentially tragic consequences.

The U.S. demands more restraint from an ally than it does from Iran.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Remember What They Did to Dean Phillips?

It would probably have been hard for Joe Biden's inner circle to encourage his departure in 2024 even if they were so inclined. As Barton Swaim notes in "Why Jill Biden Didn't Say No" (Unruly Republic, June 4), the intellectual bankruptcy of the American left mandates a fawning allegiance to any ideological ally in power no matter what his personal faults.

So it was that in 2024 the American Political Science Association rated Mr. Biden the 14th greatest president in U.S. history, ahead of Andrew Jackson and James Monroe and tied with John Adams. If biased assessments masquerade as honest analysis, Democrats are doomed to be led by substandard candidates.

THOMAS F. BERNER
Yonkers, N.Y.

Ms. Biden's new book has refocused attention on her questionable judgment and motivation in the run up to the 2024 presidential election. While of concern, I care quite a bit more about Kamala Harris's decision-making than Mrs. Biden's.

Prior to the election, then-Vice President Harris famously denied observing

any diminishment in the president's mental capacities. This tells me she is either remarkably unobservant or willing to mislead the public.

GARY NUDD
Scottsdale, Ariz.

Democratic politicians were surely uncomfortably aware of Mr. Biden's decline, but remained silent out of party discipline. This was certainly reinforced by the universal condemnation heaped upon then-Rep. Dean Phillips (D., Minn.) when he showed the temerity to call out Mr. Biden's decline and to challenge him for the party's presidential nomination.

ALBION M. URDANK
Los Angeles

Given the seeming inevitability of Ms. Harris becoming the Democrats' replacement, Mr. Biden didn't get out too late, he got out too early. Had he waited longer to drop out, Ms. Harris's honeymoon with the electorate could have extended past Election Day. She might well be in the White House today.

ROME ARNOLD
Southampton, N.Y.

Why Iran Today Isn't the '70s All Over Again

Daniel Yergin's analysis of the worldwide oil market in his op-ed "Energy Markets Limit the Hormuz Shock" (June 3) is right on target. Diversification of energy sources, together with normal supply and demand responses, is limiting the Hormuz shock. We are experiencing pain, but this is clearly not, as many have claimed, a historic energy crisis. Today's oil prices, adjusting for inflation, are more than 15% below their peak four years ago, indicating that markets worked then and are working now.

Two implications follow. First, whatever Iran's degree of control over the strait going forward, its incentive will be to keep oil flowing. Continued restrictions on shipments through the strait will erode Iran's future influence on energy markets, much as the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries' clout diminished after the shocks in the 1970s. Second, the priority must be eliminating Iran's nuclear capability rather than reopening the strait: Closing the strait is causing a temporary energy shock, whereas a

nuclear-armed Iran would pose a permanent global threat.

EDWARD A. SNYDER
William S. Beinecke professor of
economics and management
Yale University
New Haven, Conn.

What Mr. Yergin highlights, how the world's supply of fuel is much more diversified than it was during the energy crises of the 1970s, is often an unappreciated point today. But there are still more opportunities to be more diversified and resilient to such crises in the future. Build more refineries that can process America's vast supply of light crude, which many of our refineries now aren't able to handle, having been originally built to process imported heavy crude.

Still, imagine how much worse an energy price shock would be today had we maintained the energy policies of Presidents Obama and Biden. It'd be a lot closer to the '70s.

KARL MILLER
White Plains, N.Y.

The 1776 Fund Problem Goes Beyond Trump

Regarding your editorial "Republicans Can Kill the Retribution Fund" (June 3), congressional Republicans have railed against judgment-fund settlement abuse for over a decade. One of their main, and correct, arguments has been that the executive branch can't appropriate funds to favored classes of people via collusive settlement because it strips Congress of the power of the purse. It's an argument we made constantly to then-Attorney General Merrick Garland and his lieu-

tenants when I was in charge of nominations for the Senate Judiciary Committee Republicans. After questionable judgment-fund appropriations or attempted appropriations by Presidents Obama and Biden, Republicans would be wise to pass legislation making clear this is off limits for the executive. If they simply kill President Trump's attempt, they implicitly establish that the practice is fine unless Congress says otherwise. This would have the effect of giving the legal greenlight to Democratic slush funds going forward. The solution is to use bipartisan outrage to ban all collusive monetary settlements by the Justice Department—whether Donald Trump is in the White House or not.

MICHAEL A. FRAGOSO
Washington

Try My Omelette Principle

William A. Galston's "Where Conservatives and Liberals Can Agree" (June 3) is a reminder of something increasingly overlooked: America's strength doesn't come from agreement on policy but agreement on the principles that govern our disagreements. I often explain this with my Omelette Principle of Discernment. An omelette may contain many ingredients: bacon, cheese, tomatoes. You can argue endlessly over the best combination. But remove the eggs, it's no longer an omelette. These days we spend more time debating particular ingredients than preserving the core element that has defined our nation for 250 years. Foreign policy, immigration or healthcare are all omelette add-ins—legitimate subjects for debate. The eggs are the constitutional principles that define our nation: liberty, equality before the law, free speech, due process, self-government and the rule of law.

Debate ham versus mushrooms all you want, but don't toss the eggs.

ERNIE LOYNAZ
Palmetto Bay, Fla.

Free Expression

From WSJ OPINION

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Pepper ... And Salt

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



"There's always a bright side.
It's just that sometimes
it's not the side facing you."

OPINION

Taiwan Needs U.S. Arms Now

By Seth G. Jones

By dragging its feet on a \$14 billion arms package to Taiwan, the U.S. risks emboldening China and undermining American deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. Taiwan desperately needs these air-defense systems, missiles, drones and other weapons to defend itself against China. Even more concerning, there is an additional \$30 billion backlog of U.S. approved arms to Taiwan that need to be delivered—fast.

China presents the most serious threat to the U.S., as the Trump administration's National Defense Strategy concludes. President Xi Jinping is bent on expanding Chinese power throughout the Indo-Pacific and beyond, not only swallowing up Taiwan. To do this, China is rapidly arming, expanding its global network of bases, and building weapons at a massive scale in all the major domains of warfare—air, land, naval, space, cyber and

Washington is dragging its feet on delivery, weakening deterrence and amplifying the threat from Beijing.

nuclear capabilities. China also presents a serious ideological threat. The Communist Party's core principles and values are antithetical to those of the U.S. and its democratic allies. Beijing stifles democracy, brutally represses dissent and eviscerates freedom of speech.

U.S. policymakers have long insisted that China and Taiwan need to agree mutually and peacefully on a resolution of the status of Taiwan. The Taiwan Relations Act, which Pres-



A People's Liberation Army honor guard marches in Beijing, May 12.

ident Jimmy Carter signed into law in 1979, legally commits the U.S. to provide "such defense articles and defense services in such quantity as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability." While China wants to reunify with Taiwan, the situation has become complicated because Taiwan is democratic, its government supports freedom of the press and religion, and its people increasingly view themselves as culturally and politically distinct from China.

But Mr. Xi has been bellicose about the island. The People's Liberation Army has conducted exercises that rehearse a blockade and invasion of Taiwan involving missiles, drones, ships, bombers and fighter aircraft. Last month Mr. Xi warned President Trump that any U.S. missteps on Taiwan could lead to war. Chinese leaders have also indicated that one of their top requests of the Trump administration is to prevent additional U.S. arms sales to Tai-

wan—particularly if Washington wants a closer trade and diplomatic relationship with Beijing.

Beijing's approach is blatant extortion: a promise of greater trade in exchange for U.S. appeasement on Taiwan. This threat may be working. The U.S. has held off announcing a critical \$14 billion arms deal for Taiwan that includes PAC-3 air defense missiles, National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems, counterdrone systems and other materiel crucial for Taiwan's defense.

America's \$30 billion backlog of arms deliveries to Taiwan dates at least to the Biden administration. The backlog includes Harpoon coastal defense systems, M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, F-16 fighter jets and Altius drones. Taiwan's National Defense Ministry reported this year that out of 23 main U.S. defense items promised over the past 10 years, five have been completely delivered, three

have been partially delivered, and 15 haven't yet been delivered.

The failure to deliver key defensive systems undermines a core logic of preventing war in the Indo-Pacific, known as deterrence by denial, which involves convincing China that it can't achieve its military or political objectives through war. Deterrence by denial hinges on providing Taiwan with the weapons and other equipment it needs to defend itself—and thus deter Chinese aggression.

In addition, arms sales and deliveries are a tangible signal of U.S. political commitment to Taiwan and U.S. credibility in a region where countries are worried about China's growing capabilities and intentions. U.S. delays have caused concern in Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines and other regional countries about U.S. commitment.

Mr. Xi and the Communist Party have ordered the People's Liberation Army to be ready to conduct a successful invasion of Taiwan by next year. The U.S. is delivering roughly \$4 billion of arms to Taiwan a year, which means that it could take a decade at the current pace to deliver all promised aid. That is too late to help Taiwan.

The solution is straightforward. The Trump administration needs to approve the \$14 billion arms package and accelerate delivery of the promised \$30 billion in arms sales to Taiwan. Otherwise, the U.S. will undermine deterrence in the region and increase the prospect for war.

Mr. Jones is president of the Defense and Security Department at the Center for Strategic and International Studies and author of "The American Edge: The Military Tech Nexus and the Sources of Great Power Dominance."

When '60 Minutes' Is an Hour Too Long



Will America survive the murder of "60 Minutes"? Will the world?

The brutal homicide of America's longest-running television newsmagazine was reported last week by its immaculately coiffed and richly compensated

frontman Scott Pelley. For the crime of exposing this act of violence against journalism, truth and freedom, Mr. Pelley was shown the door after 37 years at the Tiffany network. These are dark days. If they can eliminate in plain sight an institution as central to the survival of the republic as Mr. Pelley and his carefully chewed spectacles, surely no one is safe.

First they came for the preening, powdered popinjays of television news, but I did not speak out because I am not a popinjay.

Forgive the sarcasm. Perhaps Mr. Pelley and his long career deserve more respect. But can we at least be proportionate and, unlike much of what he and his colleagues have been for so long, objective for a moment?

Mr. Pelley's hysterical reaction—and that of many of his friends in the media—came in response to some editorial changes made by a new team at CBS News led by Bari Weiss, its president, whose sin is to want a different sort of journalism from that practiced at CBS and almost all other traditional media organizations for decades. The reaction should—but sadly won't—be studied by journalism schools as an unwitting testament to the failure of the business. It is a revealing example of the tiresomely familiar sanctimony and self-absorption of our media elites. More important, it is evidence of how astoundingly ill-informed they are about the role they play in American life and how and why it has changed so dramatically.

This towering self-unawareness is widespread among media types. Someone on X, mourning the alleged demise of a TV show started in 1968, 177 years after the ratification of the First Amendment, described it as "the historical leader of the free press." We are all prone to recency bias but this is quite something. It will have come as a surprise to read-

ers of newspapers like this one, started in 1889, or our sister paper, The New York Post, founded by Alexander Hamilton in 1801, and others that predate even these.

The alarm about "60 Minutes" is a quaint throwback to an era when it exercised an outside influence on the minds of the American public. In its heyday in the 1970s, a third of the total television viewing audience tuned in on Sunday evening, not all of them having simply left the TV on after the football. These days, though still a ratings success in relative terms, "60 Minutes" averages about nine million viewers, or 3% of the adult population. Audience size isn't everything; good journalism can have an impact well beyond its immediate reach. But if you think the traditional news networks have anything like the role they had 50 years ago, you're living in a fantasy. The reasons for that decline are the whole point that the media people themselves miss.

In some ways it is regrettable that we no longer live in a country where the bulk of the population gathers each week (or night) to absorb news from commonly trusted sources of information, rather than the disaggregated "choose your own news"

model we have today. But why is this democratic informational utopia no more? The people who killed it are the same people who cry bloody murder about attempts to make long-overdue changes to these decaying institutions. For decades they promoted a patently one-sided "journalism" that much of the audience came to understand as partisan.

Scott Pelley's hysterical self-indulgence illustrates what's gone wrong with the American news media.

I'm not crazy about corporate bosses cringing before political power to advance their own interests, as may be happening with CBS. It is a further sign of America's rapid slide into banana-republic territory, as a creeping crony capitalism favors those who can get closest to the government. But again, have a sense of proportion about the reality of our media landscape. You may not like the method, but any obeisance to President Trump is producing only

High-Tech Seeks Skilled Tradesmen

By Dina Powell McCormick And Mike Rowe

Americans have been told a fable about our economic future. Construction and manufacturing were giving way to a digital economy based on knowledge alone. Skilled labor was outdated. Shop class was defunded. Four-year degrees were idolized. Blue-collar job losses and brittle supply chains were the price of progress.

This myth assumed that high-tech and the trades were alternatives, even rivals. In fact, they are interdependent. For 250 years, America has claimed the lion's share of the world's greatest inventions. But it was generations of American workers who strung the telegraph wire, laid the railroad tracks, and built the interstate highways and buried the fiber. They shared in the prosperity that resulted.

The artificial-intelligence revolution shows that America's technological progress and skilled workforce are still inseparable. To maintain our technological edge, we need to build infrastructure at scale and with great speed. This requires better pathways into high-paying trades for Americans hungry for opportunity.

The skilled trades and Silicon Valley need each other—and America's future needs them both.

That's why Meta and our partners, including the Associated Builders and Contractors and the National Urban League, are announcing the launch of America's Workforce Academy, the largest private-sector commitment to the skilled trades in American history, beginning with a \$115 million commitment in the first year and committing hundreds of millions over time.

AWA will reject the failed approach that asks workers to pay for their own training and hope to be rewarded with a job. The men and women who enroll will be paid for their time. Parents won't be blocked from learning tomorrow's skills because they need to put food on the table today. Courses will take weeks and leave graduates with industry-standard certifications in high-demand fields such as electrical work, mechanical systems and plumbing. Every graduate will be guaranteed a job on a Meta partner's construction site. AWA, we believe, is the start of a revolution our economy needs.

Practically every major industry is desperate to hire more skilled workers. The mikeroweWORKS Foundation has spent years sounding this alarm. At Meta alone, we anticipate needing thousands more workers as

incremental shifts in the wider media picture. The American news environment is vast and expanding. If viewers think they can no longer trust CBS News, they can read, watch or listen to literally thousands of other TV shows, podcasts, newspapers, social-media influencers and more. It is vanity in every sense of the term to think they are somehow less trustworthy than a superannuated news organization dominated by one political viewpoint.

Mr. Pelley was still at it this weekend, expanding his weird homicide analogy. In an interview with the New York Times, he described the firing of some of his colleagues as being like the murder of close family members. It was another example of the solipsistic specialness these media pandrums possess. Millions of Americans lose their jobs every year because of corporate decisions, and most of them don't provoke it by criticizing their employer. When it's a TV personality, it's a crime scene.

There was something unconsciously fitting about it all: the spectacle of one old media company offering a platform to an icon of another to say something unbridled, self-obsessed and divorced from reality.

We build infrastructure to empower students, families and small-business owners.

There is no lack of Americans eager to learn and work. Earlier this year, Meta launched LevelUp, a smaller training program focused on fiber installation. In the first seven days, we received more than 35,000 applications for 1,000 openings. Demand isn't the problem. What has been missing is a practical bridge linking America's workers to America's needs. AWA will be that pathway.

A new program will pay workers as they train and promise them jobs building new digital infrastructure.

Skilled workers electrified rural America one pole at a time. They manned the factories that built the arsenal that won World War II. Now a new generation will pour the foundations and lay the fiber that secures American economic strength for a new age. The AI revolution is bringing change and uncertainty, but also historic opportunities.

Americans don't flinch from challenges. When opportunity shows up as a hard hat or a pair of overalls, we put them on and get to work. That's always been our story. AWA will help us write the next chapter—one where the future is for everyone.

Ms. McCormick is president of Meta. Mr. Rowe is CEO of the mikeroweWORKS Foundation and host of the Discovery Channel's "Dirty Jobs."

A Historian Who Loved America

By Jack Butler

John Adams's last words, on July 4, 1826, were "Jefferson still lives." In the literal sense, he was wrong. Thomas Jefferson, his friend turned rival turned friend again, had died hours before. The two presidents—Jefferson defeated Adams in 1800—and drafters of the Declaration of Independence died on the same day, 50 years after that document's adoption.

This is the sort of fact that Gordon S. Wood, the great historian of early America, could recall with ease across his many-decade career. But Wood, who died in a car accident Sunday at 92, was far more than a chronicler of this country's founding. He did more than any other academic, and perhaps more than anyone in the past 50 years, to sustain the memory and importance of the Revolution and its principles.

Gordon S. Wood's work sustained the memory of the Revolution and the founding principles.

Wood was born in Concord, Mass., where one of the first battles of the American Revolution was fought. He became known to the world in 1969 with his first book, "The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787." It won the Bancroft Prize, one of the history profession's highest honors.

With 1991's "The Radicalism of the American Revolution," Wood achieved a popular renown unusual for an academic. His thesis, defended in careful, scholarly and erudite fashion, is also right there in the title and spelled out early and plainly in the Pulitzer Prize-winning book. Our revolution "did not just eliminate monarchy and create republics; it actually reconstituted what Americans meant by public or state power and brought about an entirely new kind of popular politics and a new kind of democratic officeholder."

Wood took his discipline seriously, striving for and achieving the sort of objectivity that became unfashionable in the academy. As he told me when, as a high schooler, I called in to a C-Span program on which he was appearing, "I had no intention of writing for one party or another when I wrote my history or when I am writing my history." His goal was to "translate that stuff that is going on among the historians into a language that can be read by an educated public."

This scrupulousity primed him to recognize the singular nature of what the Founders had achieved. Around the time of the American Bicentennial, he declared that the Revolution created in America a "new republican consciousness" that meant "only the people," not any of the aristocratic or monarchical forms that had dominated human civilization up to that point, would rule. Earlier this year, he called "all men are created equal," that famous coinage of the Declaration, the words that "came to define America's culture." In his view, "no phrase could have been more radical, more momentous." It created a nation that, soon after its creation, was the world's "most egalitarian," and "remains so today."

The American Revolution did emerge out of our particular national context. Wood's work helped make that event and its consequences accessible to the public. It also clarified how, in a philosophical sense, the inheritance of the founding was accessible to more than the direct posterity of the Founders. Against "1619 Project"-style radicals, who view America as corrupt from its conception due to the original sin of slavery, Wood stressed that slavery was taken for granted around the world for millennia—"until the late 18th century and the American Revolution." And against "Heritage American"-style exclusionists, who would rate authentic Americanness by how long one's family has been in the country, Wood argued that what makes America unique—and radical—is that "to be an American is not to be someone, but to believe in something."

That does mean actually believing in it. As America approaches its 250th anniversary, there are worrying signs that Americans are forgetting—or actively rejecting—what makes this nation great. Gordon S. Wood did much to contest these baneful trends. It's a tragedy that he won't be around for this July 4. But if those who still believe in this country, its founding and its greatness work to keep those things alive, then Jefferson, Adams and Wood will still live, too.

Mr. Butler is deputy editor of WSJ Opinion's Free Expression newsletter.

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COMMENT

Editorials

Strategic guidance keeps China-DPRK ties advancing with times, achieving new progress

General Secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and President Xi Jinping's state visit to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on Monday and Tuesday presents an opportunity to strengthen top-level planning and strategic guidance for China-DPRK relations in the new era.

The visit has not only preserved the legacy of China-DPRK relations as good neighbors, good friends and good comrades but also helped lay out the practical priorities for the future development of relations.

During his meeting with Kim Jong-un, general secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea and president of the State Affairs of the DPRK, in Pyongyang on Monday, Xi put forward four proposals for advancing bilateral relations: The two sides should be guided by the high-level exchanges and consolidate the foundation of political mutual trust; stay committed to the goal of delivering benefits to the people and elevate the level of practical cooperation; uphold the inheritance of friendship as a driving force and strengthen the bonds between their peoples; and uphold fairness and justice as a guiding principle to enrich the substance of strategic coordination.

This provides strategic guidelines for the healthy and stable development of China-DPRK relations.

High-level exchanges have long played an important role in the development of China-DPRK relations. As the 65th anniversary of the China-DPRK Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance is commemorated this year, increased interaction at all levels between the two sides will help consolidate political trust and generate sustained momentum for bilateral cooperation.

Both countries are pursuing their respective development goals and have broad opportunities to deepen cooperation in economic and social fields. China stands ready to work with the DPRK to strengthen the alignment of development strategies, and expand practical cooperation in such areas as economy and trade, agriculture, construction, science and technology, and health care, to bring greater benefits to the two peoples.

Xi called on both sides to leverage the opportunity of the full reopening of border crossings and the resumption of civil aviation flights and international passenger trains to increase people-to-people exchanges and foster mutual interaction.

Equally significant is the emphasis placed on carrying forward the traditional friendship between the two peoples. The traditional friendship between China and the DPRK, forged in blood, is a valuable shared asset of the two peoples. Today, educational cooperation, youth exchanges, cultural programs and academic engagement are helping ensure the friendship continues to flourish.

As regional and global dynamics become increasingly complex and volatile, it is imperative that the two sides strengthen their strategic coordination on international and regional affairs to safeguard their common interests and promote stability. In doing so, the two countries can better safeguard their respective sovereignty, security and development interests, and jointly promote regional peace and development.

Xi said in a signed article published by Rodong Sinmun, the official newspaper of the DPRK, ahead of his visit, that the two sides should uphold the international system with the United Nations at its core and the international order based on international law. In the process, they should oppose hegemonism and power politics, and reject any scheme or action aimed at reviving militarism and undermining regional security and stability.

No matter how the international situation changes, the CPC and the Chinese government's firm stance on highly valuing the China-DPRK traditional friendship will not change, the firm support for Kim in leading the DPRK's socialist cause will not change, and the firm commitment to safeguarding the shared interests of the two countries and preserving a favorable strategic environment will not change, Xi said in the meeting.

The two sides should make concerted efforts to translate the important consensus reached by the two leaders during the visit into concrete actions and tangible outcomes to keep bilateral relations advancing with the times and achieve greater progress.

Jin Ding



Opinion Line

Who bears cost for unbearable weight of resource-hungry AI?

Given the boom in artificial intelligence, the industry has been made to look like it is weightless and comes without cost. But there is no such thing as a free lunch.

A growing body of research is shedding light on the uncomfortable reality that AI is emerging as one of the world's most resource-hungry industries. According to a recent report by the United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health, by 2030, AI-driven data centers could consume 945 terawatt-hours of electricity annually — roughly triple the combined electricity consumption of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nigeria. Their water use could also reach levels equivalent to the basic needs of 1.3 billion people.

For years, Silicon Valley sold the digital economy as a cleaner alternative to heavy industry. The internet was supposed to dematerialize economic activity. Instead, AI is rematerializing it. The cloud turns out to be made of steel, concrete, copper, electricity and water.

The challenge is that AI companies currently enjoy a remarkable privilege: they are allowed to externalize a significant portion of their environmental costs.

When a data center is built in a drought-prone region, local residents often pay the price through strained water supplies and higher utility bills. When electricity grids require upgrades to accommodate massive

computing clusters, the costs are frequently socialized while the profits remain private. Gains accrue to shareholders and technology executives; infrastructure burden falls on everyone else.

It is astonishing that many AI companies disclose model capabilities in meticulous detail while revealing comparatively little about the electricity, water and land footprints of their systems. The European Union is already moving toward mandatory sustainability disclosures for large data centers. That should become the global norm. People have a right to know how much water a chatbot consumes, just as consumers know the fuel efficiency of a car.

Economists have long argued that markets work best when costs are visible. If an AI model requires vast computing resources, that expense should be reflected in its business model rather than hidden in public utility bills. By extension, AI companies should pay the full costs of grid expansion, water extraction and environmental mitigation associated with their operations. Governments should reward efficiency rather than scale alone. The industry's current incentive structure resembles an arms race in which larger models automatically attract more investment. Yet UNESCO research suggests that smarter design and model optimization can dramatically reduce energy consumption

without sacrificing performance. The future of AI should be measured not only by intelligence per parameter, but by intelligence per watt.

Policymakers should resist the temptation to frame this as a choice between innovation and regulation. It is neither. Aviation did not flourish because governments ignored safety. The pharmaceutical industry did not gain legitimacy by avoiding oversight. The most successful technological revolutions have always combined entrepreneurial dynamism with public guardrails.

AI's environmental footprint is not an argument against AI. Indeed, the technology may help optimize power grids, accelerate scientific discovery and improve climate forecasting. But those benefits will lose legitimacy if communities conclude that they are sacrificing water, land and affordable electricity so that technology companies can train ever-larger models.

The defining question for the next decade, therefore, is not whether AI will become more powerful. It almost certainly will. The question is whether society can ensure that the industry's resource bill is paid by those generating it, rather than by everyone else. If AI is to become humanity's most transformative technology, it must first learn a very human lesson: there is no such thing as a free kilowatt-hour.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

Drawing from the past for the future

The second World Conference of Classics is being held in Athens, Greece, on Tuesday and Wednesday. With the theme "Dialogue between Ancient and Modern: Contemporary Inspirations from Classical Wisdom", it brings together leading scholars in classical studies, as well as experts in civilization, culture and archaeology from China and other countries, to discuss issues related to classical civilizations and promote academic exchanges and consensus-building in global classical studies.

The event serves as a timely reminder of the importance of cultural exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations in an era marked by geopolitical tensions and deep-seated mistrust.

It has long been realized that ancient Eastern Mediterranean civilization is not the only form of civilization, nor is it the best. There is a heritage of civilization all over the world, and the acceptance of that heritage is important for countries to get along.

There is a misconception about classics that we study ancient times to gain certain wisdom or practices that can be directly borrowed. But the real significance of classics is that they help us understand the causes of some of the most consequential decisions in history. They provide practical food for thought for political theory and political thinking today.

For instance, the Thucydides trap is much talked about today. Knowing its origins helps us better understand if it is relevant today and, if so, how it can be avoided.

Civilizations are wellsprings of wisdom, embodying a vast repository of rational and practical knowledge about understanding and transforming the world. They have always thrived through exchanges and interaction. The ancient Silk Road, for instance, was not merely a trade route but a conduit for cultural, technological and philosophical exchanges between the East and the West.

All this underscores the potential of civilizational dialogue to foster mutual understanding and cooperation, two things the world is in dire need of today.

The public goods China has put forward in recent years — such as the Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, Global Civilization Initiative and Global Governance Initiative that are foundational for the building of a commu-

nity with a shared future for humanity — are frameworks deeply rooted in the traditional Chinese notion that common challenges require collective action and shared solutions. Their resonance comes from the belief in ancient times in an ethical community — a group of individuals who share common ethical values and principles, working collectively to maintain social harmony and justice. In ancient times, these communities were often localized, such as within a village or kingdom, where shared values and norms governed behavior.

The importance of an ethical community lies in its ability to foster cooperation, mutual respect and a sense of belonging among its members, which are essential for societal stability and well-being. It is thus easy to see why China's proposals have been widely accepted by those countries hoping to build a more harmonious world. From the Belt and Road Initiative to the Global Governance Initiative and through mechanisms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, China is steadfastly striving to foster a sense of interconnectedness and a more ethical and collaborative global community based on mutual respect and the pursuit of shared development.

Mutual understanding and respect are crucial for the success of a harmonious global community. By engaging in cultural exchange and dialogue, nations can gain insights into different civilizational frameworks and work toward common goals. China's emphasis on harmony and reciprocity in international relations, influenced by Confucian values such as the importance of moral and righteous behavior and the cultivation of virtues, can serve as a foundation for building trust and cooperation among diverse nations.

Such classical wisdom offers inspiration for enriching societal values and addressing pressing global issues, as the cultivation of mutual understanding and respect is essential for building a harmonious world and finding solutions to the common challenges humanity faces.

As scholars from different countries convene in Greece, they will walk where Plato taught and Aristotle spoke. But their deeper task is to make it clear that ancient wisdom can still guide modern action. As we look to the future, the lessons of the past can continue to illuminate the path to a more harmonious and interconnected global community.

What They Say

SCO cooperation narrowing regional digital divide

Editor's note: The inauguration of the China-Shanghai Cooperation Organization joint laboratory for digital and intelligent applications and the China-SCO computing power industry alliance in Tianjin marks a significant step forward in the SCO's digital development. People's Daily Overseas Edition spoke to Zhu Shuai, a researcher at the China Center for Information Industry Development, and Xiao Bin, a researcher at the Institute of Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian Studies in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, to discuss this development. Below are excerpts of the interview. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

The establishment of the laboratory and the alliance addresses two critical elements of the global digital transformation: computing power and scenario applications. This is not only an upgrade in technological cooperation, but also the materialization of a new generation of regional digital infrastructure.

The SCO's digital cooperation initiatives increasingly focus on data and computing power, strengthening the foundation for regional industrial collaboration. Progress in digital infrastructure has accelerated, with cross-border fiber-optic networks, big data centers and 5G facilities extending further into Central and South Asia. This helps narrow the region's digital divide.

At the same time, thanks to the integration of industries and trade, technologies such as smart customs systems, electronic clearance services, Silk Road e-commerce platforms and digital freight train services are making cross-border trade more efficient and reducing transaction costs.

Years of security and economic cooperation have fostered a high degree of political trust within the SCO, creating favorable conditions

for cross-border data flows and cybersecurity cooperation.

Also, the diversity of SCO members generates strong complementarities. China has emerged as a major player in areas such as computing power, large artificial intelligence models and embodied intelligence, while countries in Central and South Asia have rapidly growing markets, pressing digital transformation needs and demographic potential.

The SCO's digital cooperation is guided by the principles of equal consultation and respect for the data sovereignty of its member states.

Additionally, the SCO's digital agenda is increasingly aligned with the Belt and Road Initiative, gradually forming a cooperation framework that combines platforms, laboratories, alliances and projects. This model promotes coordinated progress in areas ranging from data connectivity and regulatory alignment to talent development.

For regional economies, digital and intelligence cooperation can help modernize traditional sectors such as energy, agriculture and logistics, foster new drivers of growth and

enhance the resilience of regional industry and supply chains.

From a broader international perspective, this cooperation reflects an open, inclusive and mutually beneficial approach to digital governance. It demonstrates that countries at different stages of development can work together through consultation and cooperation to build a secure and transparent digital ecosystem, offering valuable experience for global digital governance.

Efforts will continue to strengthen regional digital infrastructure connectivity and develop data markets. Greater emphasis will be placed on integrating digital technologies into economic and social development and advancing coordination on cross-border data governance.

Cooperation in digital talent cultivation and green digital transformation is also likely to expand, ensuring that digitalization and sustainable development progress in tandem. By focusing on practical cooperation and enhancing technological capabilities, the SCO can support economic growth, regional prosperity and long-term development across its member states.

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VIEWS

Sophia Papaioannou

From argument to accord in ancient debates

The rhetorical traditions of ancient China and ancient Greece are among the most influential systems of communication in world history. Although both cultures developed sophisticated theories of persuasion during the same periods in history, they differed significantly because they emerged from distinct philosophical, social and cosmological assumptions.

The study of Pre-Qin (221-206 BC) rhetoric of Wei Yongkang, a scholar from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, identifies three defining features: harmony, self-effacement and paradox.

These characteristics contrast sharply with the argumentative, individualistic and logical orientation of Greek rhetoric associated with Aristotle, Plato and later Roman theorists such as Quintilian.

A major difference between the two traditions concerns the purpose of discourse. Greek rhetoric was fundamentally agonistic, developing within democratic city-states where public debate, legal disputes and political competition shaped civic life.

Aristotle defined rhetoric as the ability to discover the available means of persuasion in any situation, emphasizing effectiveness, argumentation and intellectual victory.

Pre-Qin Chinese rhetoric, by contrast, sought primarily to preserve harmony rather than to win debates. It focused on expressing one's position without creating disruption or social conflict.

Rooted in Confucian and Daoist thought, communication was understood as part of a broader ethical and cosmic order. The rhetor's task was therefore not simply to persuade but also to maintain proper social relationships and align discourse with the Dao.

These differing aims produced contrasting ideals of the speaker. Greek rhetoric elevated the individual rhetor, stressing visible authority, confidence and personal distinction. Aristotle's concept of ethos emphasized the persuasive force of character, while Roman rhetoric celebrated the eloquent statesman. Public speaking in the Greco-Roman world was often performative and self-assertive.

Chinese rhetoric instead cultivated humility and restraint. Wei describes this quality as "self-effacement", with the speakers avoiding overt self-assertion and minimizing the intrusion of personal ego into the discourse. Scholars such as Geoffrey E. R. Lloyd have contrasted the "agonistic Greeks" with the "irenic Chinese".

Whereas Greek and Roman rhetoric encouraged individual advancement, Chinese rhetoric prioritized social harmony and collective stability. Legitimacy depended less on originality than on alignment with accepted moral and cosmological principles.

The distinction also appears in rhetorical structure. Greco-Roman rhetoric generally favored deductive organization: a thesis was stated clearly and supported through systematic argument. This reflected the Greek commitment to analytical reasoning and logical progression.

Chinese rhetoric, on the other hand, was indirect and inductive. Ideas emerged gradually, and their meaning depended heavily on context, implication and shared cultural assumptions.

Direct confrontation risked damaging social harmony, so the discourse tended to appear subtle, elliptical, or understated from a Western perspective.

The philosophical foundations of the two traditions also diverged. Greek rhetoric developed alongside formal logic and philosophical inquiry. Thinkers from the Sophists to Aristotle explored questions of truth, reason and epistemology, and persuasive speech was judged according to coherence and argumentative rigor.

Pre-Qin Chinese rhetoric did not reject logic — Mohist thinkers demonstrated considerable logical sophistication — but it did not treat logic as the highest source of knowledge. Chinese thought emphasized holistic and relational understanding rather than strict deduction. Consequently, rhetoric relied heavily on analogy, paradox and contextual meaning. Daoist texts such as

the *Dao De Jing* illustrate this tendency through statements that challenge linear reasoning.

The idea that "good men do not argue" reflects a rhetorical ideal in which persuasion can arise through non-assertion.

This paradoxical approach marks one of the clearest contrasts with Greek rhetoric. Greek practice generally assumed that persuasion required active argument and explicit proof.

Daoist rhetoric, however, promoted the principle of *wu-wei*, or "action through non-action". In rhetorical terms, this meant persuading indirectly rather than overwhelming audiences through forceful reasoning. Ambiguity and openness were treated not as weaknesses but as deliberate strategies encouraging reflection and participation.

The two traditions also differed in their understanding of truth and authority. Greek rhetoric often centered on discovering or defending the truth through debate.

Chinese rhetoric, especially within Confucianism, linked effective speech to sincerity, ritual propriety and moral trustworthiness. Pivotal is the principle that rhetoric should be oriented toward establishing trust.

Credibility depended less on individual reputation than on one's place within a moral and social network.

Despite these differences, the traditions shared important similarities. Both recognized language as a powerful force capable of shaping society and influencing human behavior. Both attached ethical significance to communication and viewed rhetoric as

more than ornamental language.

Both traditions also emerged during periods of political instability and intellectual pluralism. The Warring States Period (475-221 BC) in China and the democratic experiments of classical Greece each stimulated reflection on persuasion, governance and social order. In both civilizations, rhetoric developed as a practical response to conflict and the need to influence others.

Ultimately, the comparison reveals two complementary visions of communication.

Greek rhetoric privileges individuality, logical demonstration and persuasive mastery, while Chinese rhetoric emphasizes harmony, contextual sensitivity and relational balance. Greek rhetoric seeks victory through argument; Chinese rhetoric often seeks understanding through subtlety and restraint.

In today's globalized world, studying these traditions together offers valuable insights into intercultural communication.

Greek rhetoric highlights the importance of clarity, reason and public debate, whereas Chinese rhetoric emphasizes humility, relational awareness and the ethical responsibilities of discourse.

Together, they broaden our understanding of rhetoric and demonstrate the diversity of human communicative practices.

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SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

Jin Fangting

Civilizations illuminating one another through dialogue

The second World Conference of Classics is being held in Athens, Greece, on Tuesday and Wednesday, under the theme "Dialogue between Ancient and Modern: Contemporary Inspirations from Classical Wisdom".

Since the inaugural conference convened in Beijing in 2024, the joint hosting of this event by China and Greece, together with the establishment of the Chinese School of Classical Studies at Athens, has created a new platform for the exchange and mutual civilizational learning between China, Greece and the broader international community alike.

A joint initiative titled "Illuminating Humanity's Path Forward with Classical Wisdom" is to be announced at the conference, alongside the launch of the "Global Scholar Residency and Exchange Program" of the Chinese School of Classical Studies.

Following the conference, participants will be invited to visit the Angelokastro archaeological site, the first joint Sino-Greek archaeological project, moving from discursive dialogue toward substantive collaboration in joint archaeology and youth exchange programs.

Classical studies is an epistemological and methodological key capable of moving civilizational exchange from surface-level dialogue to genuine mutual understanding.

But to achieve this depth of mutual learning, Chinese classical scholarship must go beyond the passive acceptance of existing academic frameworks and establish a comparative discourse that reflects China's own scholarly subjectivity.

Comparative research between ancient China and ancient Greece is precisely the arena in which such a discourse can be built, tested and refined.

The World Conference of Classics is reshaping the overall landscape of comparative and mutual learning research between ancient China and ancient

Greece in the following respects.

First, testing comparative discourse through joint archaeology and substantive collaboration.

One of the most defining transformations of the Second World Conference of Classics has been the forging of a closer bond between academic discourse and fieldwork practice.

The Angelokastro Archaeological Project was officially launched in April, marking the first time Chinese scholars have taken a leading role in an archaeological project at the very heart of Western classical civilization.

The project focuses on the Aetolian region of Greece, which during the Hellenistic period served as a nexus of extensive cultural exchange across the Eurasian continent.

Archaeologists hope that excavation will bring to light early evidence of long-distance trade networks.

This collaborative venture signals a broader shift: the comparative study of civilizations is moving beyond textual analogy toward an evidence-based dialogue rooted in material remains.

It is hoped that joint archaeology will serve as a catalyst for building a comparative framework — one grounded in China's own scholarly traditions yet fully engaged with Greek and international academia — where discourse and fieldwork reinforce and validate each other.

Second, talent development in Sino-Greek comparative studies — equally versed in Confucius and Plato.

These words speak directly to the most tangible human foundations sustaining Sino-Greek comparative research.

Over more than two decades, classical education in China has established well-structured training programs at Peking University, Tsinghua University, Renmin University of China, Sun Yat-sen University and Chongqing

University, among others.

A new generation of young and mid-career scholars, deeply grounded in Chinese classical literature and internationally minded, has risen rapidly, making substantial strides in their command of ancient Greek, Latin and other classical languages, as well as in the close reading of classical texts.

Third, building an equal and open comparative dialogue across civilizations.

Classical studies can serve as a powerful bridge in international cultural exchange, bringing together scholars from different countries to deepen mutual understanding through shared inquiry, built on respect for each other's heritage.

To truly achieve this, we must move beyond the long-standing practice of interpreting Chinese civilization solely through borrowed frameworks.

Building a comparative discourse that reflects China's own scholarly voice calls for the principle of "two-way interpretation" — treating the core concepts and modes of thought within Chinese civilization as an independent knowledge system, and thereby offering the global classical studies community a truly dialogic comparative framework.

This effort both enriches existing comparative paradigms and meaningfully advances the vision of civilizational dialogue.

In this sense, classical studies hold the key to deeper exchanges between civilizations precisely because it does not merely study their differences, but asks how civilizations can speak to one another across those differences — and illuminate each other through dialogue.

With this in mind, we call on the scholarly community to take a more proactive stance: systematically mapping China's existing body of Sino-Greek comparative scholarship from its

own perspective; continuing to examine homegrown comparative concepts such as "the dao and the Logos" and "the Kingly Way (*wangdao*) and democracy"; and exploring diverse approaches — from broad comparisons of historical philosophy and civilizational patterns to close readings of key concepts and intellectual history.

The goal is to gradually build a comparative theoretical framework that is firmly rooted in China's own scholarly traditions yet capable of deep engagement with the international classical studies community — one that is continuously tested across different civilizational contexts and remains vital and generative over time.

To understand the civilizational character of contemporary China, one must truly grasp the unique fabric of historical China — and to grasp historical China, one must engage in dialogue with other classical civilizations, such as ancient Greece, in order to see more clearly what makes Chinese civilization uniquely its own.

As the Sino-Greek joint archaeological project and the youth exchange program advance steadily, and as the second World Conference of Classics opens in Athens, this is a moment of exceptional opportunity for the deeper development of comparative ancient civilizational studies.

Drawing on a century of Chinese scholarship in comparative ancient civilizations, and using that legacy to establish China's own voice in classical studies, this is both a timely intellectual mission and China's meaningful contribution to civilizational exchange across the world.

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Kang Bing

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Turning the tide on tap water quality

China's revised Water Supply Regulations, issued by the State Council, or the Cabinet, late last year and effective from June 1, may seem like a technical policy document. Yet their impact could flow directly into the lives of ordinary people. Designed to strengthen water security and improve services, the regulations aim to ensure a safer and more reliable water supply for 1.4 billion citizens across the country.

China's history of tap water stretches as far back as that of many Western countries. British businessmen built the country's first modern tap water plant in Shanghai in the 1880s.

But for much of the population, clean water supply remained a luxury until China launched reform and opening-up in the late 1970s.

Fifty years ago, tap water was available in my home city Xi'an, Shaanxi province. Yet, hundreds of families still depended on a single public tap installed at a street corner. Lack of funds meant that water pipes could not be extended into every household.

As a result, people of my generation became skilled at carrying water home using shoulder poles fitted with baskets at either end. In rural areas, the situation was even more difficult. People had to fetch water from rivers, rainwater pools or wells. In my father's village, located 50 kilometers east of where the Terracotta Warriors were buried, residents depended on the only 100-meter deep well for drinking water. Life was hard.

Over the past decades, however, huge investments have transformed the country's water supply system. Thousands of reservoirs have been built. Massive diversion projects now carry water across hundreds of kilometers to cities facing water shortages. Deep wells have been drilled using modern technology while extensive efforts have been made to clean polluted rivers and improve water sources.

The regulations make governments at all levels responsible for water supply security and require the same standards for water quality in both urban and rural areas.

According to the Ministry of Water Resources, by the end of 2025, tap water penetration was 96 percent in rural areas and 99 percent in urban areas. The implementation of the new regulations is expected to consolidate these achievements and further improve both the quantity and quality of the water supply.

The regulations make governments at all levels responsible for water supply security and require the same standards for water quality in both urban and rural areas.

If fully implemented, these regulations could prove to be a big blessing for rural residents, many of whom get tap water of varying quality.

In cities and towns across China, tap water is usually supplied by State-run plants and subjected to strict quality control as part of municipal responsibilities. In rural areas, tap water supply is often provided by a mix of villages, towns, nearby factories and private investors. Such fragmentation can result in inconsistent standards and inadequate water security.

The new regulations seek to change that. Relevant departments of local governments will be required to inspect water quality regularly and establish full-chain management systems covering every stage of supply. With the screws tightened by administrators, stricter supervision and greater investment are expected from both governments and operators, helping ensure cleaner and safer tap water for rural residents.

Urban residents stand to benefit too. For years, disputes have arisen between consumers and suppliers over various charges.

Now that millions of residents live in high apartment buildings, insufficient water pressure has become a persistent headache for those living on upper floors. Installing high-pressure pumps costs money. But while residents on higher floors are willing to pay for more powerful pumps, those living on lower levels often see no reason to share the expense for a problem that doesn't bother them.

Another challenge lies underground. Water pipes in houses built decades ago have become worn or rusty with age.

Replacing them is the only viable solution, but such projects require cooperation from all residents. Who will organize the work? Who will pay the bill? For many urban residents, these questions have remained stuck in the pipeline.

The new regulations could help break the deadlock. They stipulate that suppliers can charge only those fees approved by local governments for water consumption and a few other services. Other costs, including the upgrading of water supply equipment and facilities, must be shouldered by suppliers.

As China shifts its focus from expanding access to tap water to improving quality and service, citizens of the country are keeping their eyes and mouths open for clean tap water.

Opinion

The New York Times

Behind Every Dad Bod Is a Healthy Dad Brain

Darby Saxbe

A clinical psychologist and professor of psychology at the University of Southern California.

FOR more than a decade, my research lab at the University of Southern California has studied how fatherhood affects men's brains, bodies, health and relationships. Although there's plenty of evidence that fatherhood matters for kids and for moms, we've rarely put the spotlight on dads themselves.

We already know that the children of engaged fathers show advantages across a variety of domains, from their self-regulation abilities to their social skills and educational attainment. We also know that hands-on dads relieve stress on mothers, improve their partners' relationship satisfaction and can even buffer the risk of postpartum depression in mothers.

But as I discovered when researching my new book, becoming a committed father also directly benefits men. Men who prioritize fatherhood may lose some sleep, gain some extra weight and enjoy less free time, but they can also discover a richer life with greater meaning, purpose and connection. And when it comes to brain health and mental fitness, becoming a father is one of the best things you can do.

IF YOU LOOK at the data, men are not uniformly heeding the call of the manosphere to embrace hustle culture and eschew family life. Asked about their priorities for the future, Gen Z men ranked marriage and children higher than Gen Z women did.

Men's child care time has quadrupled in the past few generations. Millennial dads are now spending about as much time with their kids as baby boomer moms once did. The parenting time for fathers has been trending upward for decades, but the pandemic was an inflection point that brought more dads into intensive daily contact with children, and the uptick in father engagement seems to have persisted.

Similarly to many contemporary trends, modern fatherhood shows a class-based divergence: Highly educated dads are investing more time and energy into parenthood, while non-college-educated fathers are spending slightly less time with kids than they did in 2003.

In 2003 college-educated fathers devoted over two more hours to child care per week than non-college-educated fathers (7.9 hours versus 6.2 hours), whereas in recent years, college-educated men have put about twice as much time into fatherhood as non-college-educated men (10.2 hours versus 5.9 hours).

This educational divide is especially pronounced when it comes to interactive activities, like reading to children, playing and talking. The widening gap in paternal engagement can compound existing class divides and give the most privileged children an even greater leg up in life.

This gap can also affect men's health, because thriving family relationships promote men's well-being. One of the world's longest studies of adult life, the Harvard Study of Adult Development, supports this. Researchers found that at age 50, men's satisfaction with their family and community relationships predicted their physical health several decades later even more strongly than their midlife cholesterol levels did.

Parenthood forces us to deepen relationships not just with our immediate family members but also with our extended family



RICH WELLS

Prioritizing fatherhood helps men find greater meaning in their lives.

and the community around us. As sociologists say, weak ties — community ties beyond close friends and family, the kinds of ties you might form with your kids' classmates' parents — are fostered by repetition and proximity. Having kids can give you both. If they're young, you might be on the playground or play-date circuit. If they're older, school drop-offs and sports practices might throw you into daily contact with other families.

There are, of course, many ways to form community and build social skills without having children, but making common cause with fellow parents can accelerate connections. You're all in the same boat, and you land in the same places at the same times enough to foster weak ties. Because men often struggle more to make friends in adulthood, these social connections may be especially meaningful for dads.

WHEN IT COMES to the brain, parenthood may be better than Botox for preserving our youth. Children inspire us to exercise our social brain, improve our connections with others and pursue healthier lifestyles. As anyone who has talked a 3-year-old out of an epic tantrum knows, raising young children requires us to hone our negotiating skills and cultivate patience.

An emerging body of research is finding that fatherhood can protect men's brains as they get older. The neuroscientist Ann-Marie de Lange and her fellow researchers

used data from the U.K. Biobank, a repository of brain scans of thousands of participants across Britain, to test whether parents showed different trajectories of brain age in middle age and beyond. The brains of the participants with children looked younger — a relationship that emerged for both fathers and mothers.

A complementary study led by researchers at the University of Southern California also found younger-looking brains in men and women with children compared with those without. Men with two children had an estimated brain age that was 0.6 years younger than their childless peers had, and for men with three children, it was 0.7 years younger. That's similar to the brain benefit associated with exercising 2.5 hours a week.

A study of the aging brain led by the neuroscientist Edwina Orchard focused on a different type of brain health marker, a resting-state scan. Researchers can identify patterns of correlated blood flow across different parts of the brain, giving us a sense of which regions talk to one another. Her team found that participants with more children showed livelier patterns of brain connectivity, with more disparate regions of the brain in communication. In particular, more connections appeared in parts of the brain that integrate sensory and motor information and memory, perhaps reflecting the importance of these regions to the physical caregiving of children.

There's growing evidence that fathers may get an even greater cognitive benefit from children than mothers do. Another U.K. Biobank study, reporting on participants ranging in age from their late 30s to their mid-70s, looked at men's and women's performance across five domains of cognition. Men with children showed a cognitive advantage over nondads, scoring better on all five domains. Results for women were more mixed.

The greater cognitive advantage from fatherhood dovetails with evidence that fathers enjoy parenting more than mothers do and find it more satisfying. In part that's because dads have traditionally gotten more leeway to do the fun parts of parenting, like playing with kids, while moms usually tackle the tedium of everyday child care. But that is changing, too. Not only are men increasing their daily time with kids, but they're also increasing their physical caretaking of children, including activities like feeding, bathing and dressing them. In a study from 1982, 43 percent of British fathers had never changed a diaper. By 2010, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that 90 percent of American fathers who lived with children under 5 helped with tasks like changing diapers at least several times a week.

As men take on more quotidian child care tasks, it's possible that they will also shoulder more of the downsides of parenting. New fathers are more likely to report symptoms of depression and anxiety than men in the general population. They can experience some physical health fallout, too, like lost sleep and extra pounds. (Dad bod is real.) It can take time for men to reap the longer-term rewards of parenthood, but first they have to weather the hard parts.

SOME MEN ARE forgoing family life entirely. Parenthood, once the default choice for many young people, now feels more optional. The marriage rate has declined in the past few decades. In 1980 only 6 percent of 40-year-olds in the United States had never been married; by 2021, this had risen to 25 percent. Young couples are delaying parenthood in rising numbers or choosing not to become parents. The fertility rate in the United States has been declining over the past half-century and hit a record low last year.

In the hands of hustle culture and wellness influencers, the ideal male lifestyle depends on careful control. While focused on crafting the best possible self, these men may miss the mark on this goal, given the evidence of fatherhood's benefits for longevity and brain health. You can perfect your body fat percentage and your productivity at work, but you can't optimize your way into a caretaking bond with a young child.

In learning how to care for children, fathers develop their empathy, build their brains and cultivate skills that can enhance their organizations and communities. Ultimately, the traits of a good dad are also the traits of a good man: strength coupled with a willingness to look out for the young and vulnerable, to teach but also listen, to lead by example, to tackle daunting challenges and to persevere with grit.

When we celebrate these traits, not only do we build a healthier brain and a more satisfying old age, but we also elevate a positive, prosocial version of masculinity that provides an alternative to the lone wolf, the secular monk and the darker, crueler visions of manhood that the manosphere is serving our boys.

In Russia, Rage Is Boiling Over

Andrei Zakharov

A Russian journalist based in Bulgaria.

OVER the past year, Russian authorities have been blocking popular messaging apps and coercing citizens to migrate to Max, a new state-endorsed messenger platform. The messages there are presumed to be fully accessible to the F.S.B., the state security agency that succeeded the Soviet K.G.B. A recent joke from a comedy show on Channel One, Russian television's largest outlet, went like this:

"Why are you writing to me in a private chat: 'Hey everyone!'"

"Well, that's how it works on Max!"

That such a joke aired on Channel One — a significant stake of which belongs to Yury Kovalchuk, who also has strong ties to Max and is a friend of President Vladimir Putin's — speaks to the animosity the people of Russia have toward the new app.

Usually the Kremlin faces dissent only from the small, liberal, perpetually-opposed-to-Putin part of society. But the state's latest policies — blocking the internet on people's phones, social media and internet messaging apps and running pro-Max programming around the clock on many other broadcasts on Channel One — are generating criticism among the core of people who favored the war against Ukraine. Exacerbating frustrations at the rising costs of the war — in mid-May, Moscow was hit by a record-breaking Ukrainian drone attack — these internet restrictions have left everybody angry, and the rage is boiling over.

Mr. Putin and his cronies have been trying to restrict Russians' access to the internet for a long time. The bans are always carried out using the same playbook: While de-

nying people access to a service, the authorities offer them a Russian alternative, owned by people close to the Kremlin. If you can't use Facebook, just use VK, whose chief executive is the son of Mr. Putin's curator of domestic policy. If you can't use YouTube, just use VK Video. These transfers are actively encouraged by the state-controlled media, which loudly accuse Western services of not complying with Russian law.

Only opponents of the regime were sounding the alarm when the government blocked independent media and platforms such as Twitter, popular mostly among urban freethinkers. Since the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, however, the restrictions have grown much tighter. Now, most international social media platforms with audiences of tens of millions are blocked or slowed down: Facebook and Instagram in 2022, YouTube in 2024 and, most recently, Telegram in 2025.

Restricting Telegram seems to have been a bridge too far for many Russians. Telegram, which combines private messaging and news channels, had essentially become the top Russian media app for both services. After the invasion of Ukraine, the audiences of pro-war Telegram channels grew to millions of users, and the channels became a central means of communication for Russian soldiers at the front line.

Today, the pro-war audience is not happy. In their posts, members are even using the word "grandpa," a derogatory nickname for Mr. Putin that was previously used mainly by the opposition. It refers not only to his age, 73, but to his relationship with modern technology. The Russian president does not use a smartphone, and only watches television and reads written news reports.

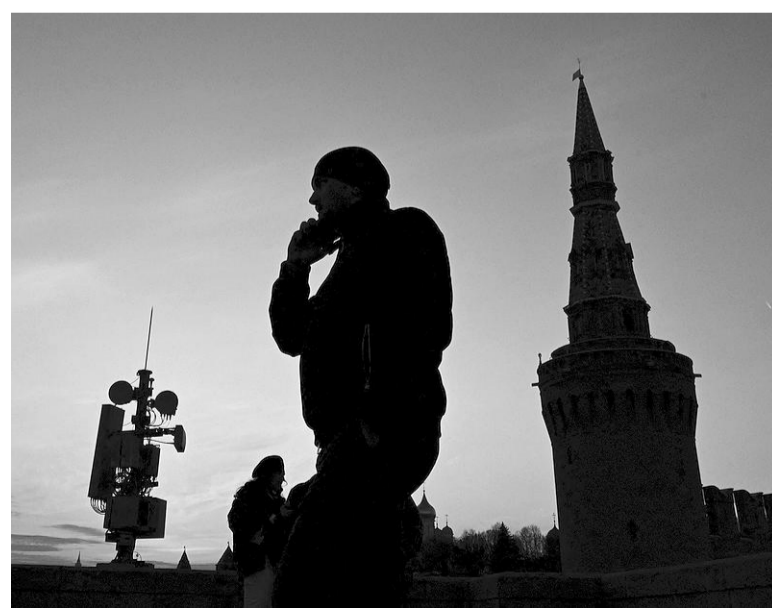
Why have Russians taken the banning of Telegram so personally? Being cut off from both Telegram and WhatsApp seems to

have broken the social contract that people made with Mr. Putin's regime many years ago: As long as the people stay out of politics, the Kremlin will stay out of people's private lives. Many in Russia viewed the deal as affording a degree of material comfort in exchange for their political loyalty.

For the modern world, unfettered internet access is just as important as a good car or new clothes. Only the Kremlin's grandpas, who don't use the internet themselves, seem not to understand that. Along with the app bans, there have been frequent internet shutdowns in the past year across the country. When a shutdown happens, you can gain access only to sites on the so-called white list, the collection of websites and services preapproved by the government.

The official reason for the shutdowns is to minimize the consequences of Ukrainian drone attacks. In practice, they have had no effect on the attacks' success; one recent wave in March managed to briefly disrupt ports on the Baltic Sea, through which up to half of Russia's oil exports pass. Many Russians believe that this is a part of the state's bigger strategy of building a sovereign internet, a corner of cyberspace completely controlled by the Russian state. They also suspect that such internet shutdowns will eventually become the norm. In some regions, especially those near the border with Ukraine, they already have.

Many people are resisting silently, installing V.P.N. services — tools that redirect a user's traffic through foreign servers and help bypass restrictions. V.P.N. usage in Russia is ubiquitous, with some estimating that roughly 60 million Russians are familiar with V.P.N.s and that around 40 percent of internet users rely on one. Lately, the Kremlin has begun making attempts to suppress these efforts, too: The Russian authorities are putting pressure on Apple to re-



IGOR IVANKO/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

Putin has broken a longstanding social contract with the public.

move V.P.N. apps from the Russian app store and are investing nearly \$300 million with the goal of blocking 92 percent of V.P.N. apps by 2030.

Does all of this mean Russians will take to the streets to protest the shutdowns? It's unlikely, though at least one demonstration, led by young people, did take place in Moscow at the end of March. The authorities responded in their usual way, with repression. Some of the organizers hastily emigrated. Others were arrested.

Still, the fact remains that the Kremlin has broken a longstanding compact with the Russian people. Only a grandpa like Mr. Putin could fail to see that in destroying what remained of a relatively free internet, he was destroying a central foundation of his own power.

Can Veterans Restore Honor to Government?

Frank Bruni

A contributing Opinion writer who was on the staff of The Times for more than 25 years.

WITH JD Vance as vice president and Pete Hegseth as defense secretary, now probably isn't the best time to argue for more veterans in public service.

But Rye Barcott wants to make the case anyway. It's a persuasive one.

He points out that as a general rule, Americans who've served in the military have forged bonds with and learned to respect people from diverse backgrounds and different places. The uniform can unite those who wear it as much as anything else divides them.

Broadly speaking, they have had certain positive values, such as discipline and teamwork, drilled into them.

"There's also a degree of humility that military service instills," Barcott, a 47-year-old former Marine, told me during a two-hour conversation in North Carolina, where we both live, just over a week ago. "You have served something that is larger than yourself." And you've done that, he added, at potential risk, having accepted the idea that the public good may demand personal sacrifice.

Imagine America if more politicians genuinely endorsed and acted on that principle.

Barcott has written a thoughtful, hopeful book, "Courage Can Save US: Ten Extraordinary Americans and the Fight for Our Future," that's being published this week. It profiles current office holders — half of them Democrats, half of them Republicans — and suggests that qualities honed in the military (or, in one congressman's case, the F.B.I.) positioned them to be less partisan, more independent, more civic-minded leaders.

The book also reflects Barcott's passion project. He's the chief executive officer and one of the founders of With Honor, a nonpartisan group that, since 2018, has encouraged more men and women who've worn the uniform or performed similar government service — such as defense, law enforcement or intelligence work — to run for political office. To date, With Honor has supported more than 250 such candidates with more than \$100 million across federal, state and local races. Those candidates must first sign a pledge to conduct themselves with civility, integrity and the courage to work across party lines.

I was curious about Barcott's perspective because we need more politicians with less vanity, less stridency, less pettiness. We need valor in a political landscape often barren of it. If recruiting a greater number of veterans improves the odds of getting that, I'm for it.

It might. I don't think there's any definitive proof, but there's this: On Wednesday, four House Republicans mustered the moxie to break party ranks and voted to direct President Trump to get congressional approval for the sustained engagement of American combat troops with Iran. Two of those Republicans, Tom Barrett of Michigan and Warren Davidson of Ohio, each served in the military for more than a decade. A third, Brian Fitzpatrick of Pennsylvania, is the former F.B.I. agent in Barcott's book; his work for the bureau included counterterrorism operations abroad. (The fourth dissident was Thomas Massie of Kentucky.)

Barcott's nine profile subjects in addition to Fitzpatrick are the Democratic governors Mikie Sherrill of New Jersey and Wes Moore of Maryland; the Republican House members John James of Michigan, Don Bacon of Nebraska and Dan Crenshaw of Texas; the Democratic House members Seth Moulton of Massachusetts and Jared Golden of Maine; Senator Mark Kelly, Democrat of Arizona; and Senator Todd Young, Republican of Indiana.

There are flaws, failures and disappointments aplenty among those politicians. But there's also evidence of conscience and of openness to contrary views. In aggregate,



BEN WISEMAN

they're a more impressive bunch than any random selection of 10 elected officials.

Although Crenshaw, a former Navy SEAL, has voted in line with President Trump since his return to the White House in January 2025, he publicly condemned him in early 2021 for his incendiary and bogus claims about a stolen election, and he's known for his willingness to tangle with fellow Republicans. This year, Trump refused to endorse Crenshaw's re-election bid, and Crenshaw lost his primary three months ago to a far-right challenger.

Bacon, a former Air Force brigadier general who represents a district that voted for Joe Biden in 2020 and Kamala Harris in 2024, has a bolder reputation than Crenshaw's for statements that challenge other

Imagine if politicians had values like teamwork and humility drilled into them.

Republicans, including Trump. "He's taken a stance on stuff like the renaming of the Gulf of Mexico," Barcott said. "He was the only Republican to vote against that. He basically said it was a silly idea."

The exact word Bacon used was "juvenile." Candor like that has earned him harassment and threats; at one point, Bacon's wife slept with a loaded gun within reach. He announced last year that he would leave the House at the end of this term, his fifth.

On the Democratic side, Moulton, a former Marine, sometimes quarreled with the Biden administration and has pointedly questioned Democratic orthodoxy. Kelly, a retired astronaut and naval officer, has also broken with his party at times but, more notably, drew threats from Hegseth of a court-martial, a demotion in rank and a reduction in retirement pay for participating in a 2025 video that reminded troops that they had not only the right but also the duty to disobey illegal orders.

Not all veterans who run for office are interested in flexing political independence or in taking With Honor's pledge, much as the impulse to join the military is, for some people, less altruistic than self-aggrandizing, less philosophical than practical, less patriotic than jingoistic. Veterans aren't axiomatically virtuous and valorous. And some have a take on military culture that's exclusion-

ary, discriminatory, censorious. Hegseth, a bellicose theocrat, has gone out of his way to marginalize Black and female officers.

"Military service also leaves some pretty deep scars," Barcott said. "Mental health issues are pretty significant across the military." That's how Graham Platner, the presumptive Democratic nominee for the crucial U.S. Senate race in Maine, has explained disturbing social media posts and other ugly behavior in his past, though he says that he is now in much better shape, and his admirers emphasize that he stepped up to serve his country and put himself in harm's way in the first place.

The prevalence of veterans in Congress has declined significantly over the past half-century, during which Americans' respect for Congress has also plummeted. In the mid-1970s, about 75 percent of senators and House members had served in the military. Now, it's just under 20 percent.

From George Washington through George H.W. Bush, an overwhelming majority of our presidents were veterans. But since then, it's the opposite.

Some potential contenders for the presidency in 2028 are veterans. On the Republican side, there's Vance, Senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas and, if the stench of his 2024 humiliation fades sufficiently, Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida. Among Democrats, there's Kelly, Moore, former Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, Senator Ruben Gallego of Arizona and — if you count C.I.A. and Defense Department work — Senator Elissa Slotkin of Michigan.

I realize there's only one woman on that list, just as there's only one woman in Barcott's book, and that's another reason not to give too many political bonus points to veterans who run for office. Given the composition of our military, veterans are more likely to be male than female, and I don't think we'd benefit at all from fewer women in Congress and statehouses.

But I'm inspired by many of the veterans in politics with whom I've interacted. I think of Senator Tammy Duckworth, Democrat of Illinois, whom I once pitched as Biden's ideal 2020 running mate. I think of Bob Kerrey, who was the governor of Nebraska and later represented the state in the Senate. I've written about his early and honorable advocacy for gay marriage.

They, like many other veterans, tempered individual ambition with a sense of common mission. I spotted the military's fingerprints in that. And I liked what I saw.

LETTERS

Trump's Eruption, and His Sycophants

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "Trump Says That He Never Promised No New Wars" (news article, June 8):

The temper and infantile nature of President Trump were on display for all with open eyes to see in his recent abbreviated interview with Kristen Welker, the host of NBC's "Meet the Press."

Ms. Welker dared to ask fair questions and to push back when the president engaged in his usual behavior of obfuscating, making charges without evidence and lying.

Any member of the news media who asks Mr. Trump questions that he does not want to answer is angrily disparaged with a variety of epithets. This time the questioner's credibility was challenged, and she was branded "crooked" or "stupid" and a member of "the fake, dirty press."

Predictably, Mr. Trump walked out of the interview,

unwilling to take any more heat.

I applaud Ms. Welker for attempting the impossible: getting honest answers from a president who is accustomed to being coddled by individuals who will never challenge him or tell him anything he does not want to hear. The leader of the free world is a coward.

OREN SPIEGLER
PETERS TOWNSHIP, PA.

TO THE EDITOR:

Do you know why Kristen Welker did not back down from President Trump's anger on "Meet the Press"? Because she is not concerned with his anger.

What we witnessed in that interview was a 1950s male entitlement and power getting pushback from a woman of 2026. President Trump was stumped because his anger is always mollified, not ignored, and he saw no alternative but to stomp out.

We have been raising our daughters to know they are the equal of any of our sons. Ms. Welker is proof that we are doing it right.

EILEEN MCCLURE NELSON
BURKE, VA.

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "Trump Is the Only Person Who Can Save America. (Just Ask His Cabinet.)" (news article, May 29):

The graphic illustrating the amount of time each cabinet member spends in meetings fawning over President Trump raises alarming questions.

Could the graphic be used by Mr. Trump to place in deep trouble the cabinet members who spend a majority of their meeting time actually focused on their jobs?

In this administration, are we safer if cabinet members are focused on their jobs, or if they are finding new ways to debase themselves in sycophancy?

MARY K. ROSNER-BAKER
COLUMBUS, OHIO

TO THE EDITOR:

Do any of President Trump's sycophants display any sort of shame, or at least murmur among themselves, hovering behind him as he goes on and on and on, doing his thing for the cameras?

STAN WASHBURN
BERKELEY, CALIF.

A \$250 Bill

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "Treasury Moves to Put Trump on a \$250 Bill" (Business, May 30):

Just when you think America can't sink any lower. Now we have the prospect of a felon on our currency. Never in my lifetime could I have imagined it.

I have doubts America can recover from any of this. And worse yet, it may not want to.

PAUL CARLBERG
GREELEY, COLO.

What Liberals Get Wrong About the Middle Class

Stephen J. Rose and Scott Winship

Mr. Rose and Mr. Winship, a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, are labor economists.

IT'S a common refrain: The middle class is hollowing out; Americans overall are increasingly falling short financially while a few are getting exceedingly rich. There's even a scoreboard of U.S. inequality on the World Inequality Database. We've persuaded ourselves that many families can no longer achieve the American middle-class dream the way their parents once did. It's a political hot button, too — both parties claim to be fighting to preserve Middle America.

But there's another, much better way the middle class can shrink — when everyone moves up and gets richer. A nation can become so much richer that the ranks of the poor, the working class and the middle class all thin out. The "hollowing out" message requires a curious definition of progress: By its logic, if everyone's income doubles, the same number of families fail to reach the middle class as in the past.

Thinking about the middle class in this way obscures progress because it mixes inequality with people's living standards, and those are two different things. In a recent report published by the American Enterprise Institute, we measured class using constant, inflation-adjusted thresholds. The "core" middle class shrank, but so did the classes below the middle — the poor, the near poor and the lower middle class.

In 1979, 36 percent of families were in the middle class. At first, it looks ominous that by 2024, a smaller number — 31 percent — could claim that status. But it's worrisome only if you overlook that over the same period, the

upper middle class grew to 31 percent of families from 10 percent. Meanwhile, the number of Americans falling short of the middle class — once more than half — dropped to 35 percent of all families.

The traditional middle class shrank because so many families became better off over time, not because more people fell short. At the same time, inequality rose, too. The higher up the income ladder a family reached, the more disproportionate the improvement. Rather than the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer, rich and poor alike grew richer — albeit at much different rates.

One objection we received to these analyses is that they would have looked very different if we had considered wealth rather than income. That's because income reflects the remuneration people receive in a year, while wealth — assets owned less debts owed — reflects resources accumulated over time. But our forthcoming research finds that the share of families whose wealth earned them upper-middle-class status increased, just as the income numbers indicate, while the proportion of families whose wealth fell short of the middle declined.

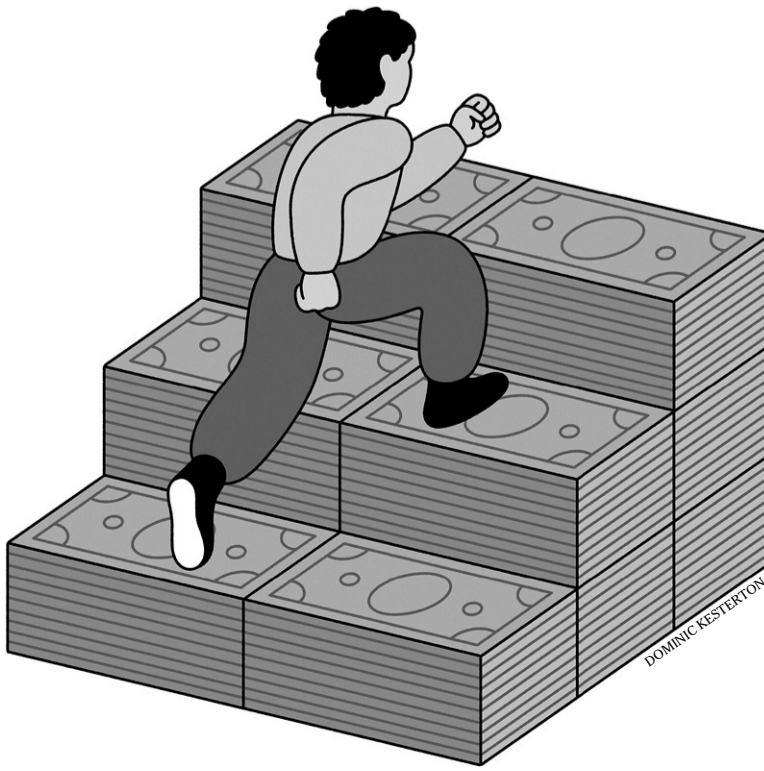
Even if you account for demographic and economic issues that can skew the data, such as the wealth of aging baby boomers, or the increased student debt loads that younger people now carry, the picture is very much the same. If you remove educational debt and focus on families headed by someone ages 35 to 54, the upper middle class grows while the less wealthy groups shrink.

Certainly, the general increase in income and wealth hasn't been experienced equally across all families. For instance, the share of wealth held by the middle class fell drastically, to 8 percent in 2022 from 24 percent in 1989. The share held by the upper middle

class also fell, to 39 percent from 50 percent. The wealthiest families, on the other hand, got a lot wealthier. The share of wealth held by the top group — just 3 percent of families in 2022 — more than doubled, rising to 53 percent from 26 percent.

The gaping inequality between the rich and the rest does not change the conclusion: The middle class has not been hollowed out or disappeared. Whether inequality has risen and whether that has been harmful are different

Rich and poor alike have gotten richer, though at different rates.



DOMINIC KESTERION

questions from what's happened to middle-income Americans.

Our conclusion may seem at odds with popular views of the economy and the politics around issues such as affordability. Consumer sentiment in April hit a 74-year low, after all. Keep in mind that this downturn in sentiment has been a recent development, reflecting elevated prices in the wake of the pandemic. Moreover, while 49 percent of Americans rated national economic conditions as "poor" in the most recent Gallup surveys, 19 percent gave the same assessment of their personal financial situation. The long-running General Social Survey indicates that roughly one in four Americans was dissatisfied with his financial situation in both 1989 and 2024.

While we might expect dissatisfaction to have declined as income and wealth rose, Gallup's polling also tells us that feelings about personal finances do not change much when the national mood toward the economy changes. People seem to reset their expectations as they become wealthier, stuck on what psychologists call a "hedonic treadmill." We always want more than we have, however much we have.

Those desires are now running into supply constraints. People who have grown wealthier want to send their kids to the best schools. But the number of "best schools" hasn't increased, although tuition sure has. Similarly, there may be more demand for bigger, nicer homes, but the housing supply hasn't kept up.

Better policymaking could assuage the affordability concerns of the middle class. But let there be no doubt: The rising tide has lifted all boats notably, even if unequally. It has not left every day Americans stranded on the economic shore.

The FT View



FINANCIAL TIMES

"Without fear and without favour"

ft.com/opinion

The incredible shrinking influence of Putin's Russia

Armenia is the latest country to leave the Kremlin's orbit

A decisive win for Armenia's pro-western leader Nikol Pashinyan in parliamentary elections on Sunday is another sign of Russia's shrinking global influence since Vladimir Putin's disastrous full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The vote was Armenia's most important since it gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. It was a plebiscite on the peace process with neighbouring Azerbaijan and on Pashinyan's push for closer ties with Europe and the US without breaking altogether with Moscow. To tilt the race in favour of the pro-Russian opposition and ensure Armenia's fealty, the Kremlin closed off imports of Armenian produce, threatened Ukraine-style intervention and deployed its standard disinformation techniques. It failed.

Putin's delusional war of conquest in Ukraine was supposed to return Russia to imperial great power status. Instead, Moscow's global reach is on the wane. It has turned supposed Ukrainian brothers into unyielding enemies. It has lost friendly or pliant regimes in Syria and Venezuela. Cuba may be next. Russian fighters are on the retreat in Mali. Central Asian states' trade with Russia has increased but their governments are also busy diversifying their diplomatic ties. Moscow's so-called "no limits" partnership with China is in reality one of increasing dependency with Russia the junior partner.

Russia's grip on its South Caucasus satellite was broken in two military defeats that Armenia suffered against Azerbaijan over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. In the second in 2023, Azerbaijani forces seized the whole of the enclave, forcing out its 100,000 Armenian inhabitants, in effect ending the conflict. Russia failed to intervene on either occasion, despite

its collective security commitments to Yerevan. Armenian voters have not forgiven Moscow for its betrayal.

The decades-long conflict had locked Armenia into dependency on Moscow and rule by a kleptocratic pro-Russian elite. Now it is over, it can pursue a less corrupt and more democratic path. To his credit, Pashinyan is seeking to make a virtue out of bitter defeat by pursuing peace with Azerbaijan, recognising its territorial integrity and opening up borders and trade, including with Turkey. Voters on Sunday endorsed his policy.

There are still perils ahead and Moscow could still try to rein Armenia back in. Pashinyan's party lacks a parliamentary majority to initiate constitutional change through a referendum. Azerbaijan is insisting that it drop references in the constitution to Nagorno-Karabakh as a precondition for normalisation. The US and EU should try to persuade Baku to drop that demand or at least delay it. They should also lean on Azerbaijan and Turkey to open up their borders and

Moscow's attempted interference in the election came late and could have been more muscular. Perhaps it is too consumed with its war in Ukraine, or keeping some powder dry

trade flows to show Armenians some of the benefits of peace.

Moscow could still make life difficult. Its attempted interference in Armenia's election came late and could have been more muscular. Perhaps it is too consumed with its war in Ukraine, or keeping some powder dry. It could impose a full trade embargo or raise the price of gas supplies. It still has a military base in Armenia and controls the country's railways. Neighbouring Georgia's slide back into oppressive one-party rule since 2024 should be a warning.

This makes it all the more important that the US and EU are fully engaged. Trump's administration helped seal a peace deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan last year and is guarantor of a new transport corridor in the region that could boost economic interdependence and prosperity. The EU should proceed with visa liberalisation for Armenians and promote trade and investment ties. Armenia is one country where Europe and the US are aligned for the better.

Opinion Media

When a film franchise forgets the big screen



Stephen Bush

recently gained an insight into what it must be like to be someone who always votes the same way. On opening day I obediently queued up to get my tickets to see the latest *Star Wars* film, *The Mandalorian and Grogu*. I did so with low expectations – which is just as well, because it was perhaps the worst way to spend two hours in a sealed dark space other than being buried alive.

It is a film that seemed to hold the idea of a moviegoing audience in contempt: it looked awful on the big screen and the dialogue was written with both eyes on someone watching at home while scrolling their phone. (The real low point came when we were told, three times in quick succession, just how one character related to another, in case we had seen a diverting TikTok while watching.)

Why did I do it? Part of the answer is

We need blockbusters to survive and thrive to keep cinemas open and the industry turning

that Curzon Cinemas' generous "Cult" membership scheme incentivises me to go to the movies at least once a week, so there was no harm. But the other, more truthful answer, is that going to see the new *Star Wars* is part of who I am: it is thanks to *Star Wars* that I learnt to love going to the movies. Without first discovering the wizardry of George Lucas, I would never have discovered Alicia MacDonald, Aneil Karia or Tarik Saleh, all of whom have delighted me this year with their own original filmmaking. Nor would I have taken the time to acquaint myself with the likes of Wim Wenders or Jacques Audiard.

For those of us who love small, brave films about the Egyptian dictatorship, or charming romantic comedies set in Manchester, or both, we need the big blockbusters to survive and thrive to keep cinemas open and the industry as a whole turning. And while a film doesn't need to be part of an established franchise to be commercially successful – particularly if it happens to be a horror movie, like the box office sensations *Backrooms* and *Obsession* – it certainly helps.

Equally importantly, perhaps, a bet on an established franchise might go wrong but fewer people are likely to yell at you if you lose money. The He-Man movie *Masters of the Universe* is a

big Golden Retriever of a movie – charismatic, a perfectly good way to spend a couple of hours, but not, in any way, intelligent – and one that is underperforming at the box office. Its history as a successful line of toys, a long-running cartoon and a panned 1987 movie adaptation didn't make it a safe bet, but it wasn't an outlandish one either. Nonetheless, the creative shortcomings of *The Mandalorian and Grogu* and the commercial disappointment of *Masters of the Universe* both raise the same alarming question for film: what kills a franchise?

There's no question that the film industry cannot flourish without reliable franchises. As any movie lover knows, every year, brilliant films prove that obeying the injunction "just be good" is not enough for success. Recent films that I remain heartbroken didn't do as well at the box office as they deserved to range from tense accounts of the Nigerian dictatorship (*My Father's Shadow*) to the romance *Eternity* to the delightful comedy *The Ballad of Wallis Island*. The only opportunity for an original film to break out is if studios are in robust health, and that depends on their "IPs" delivering the goods.

What gets audiences to come back for things like *Star Wars* are their fond memories of watching as kids or when a film is the work of a respected director, like Steven Spielberg's looming *Disclosure Day* or Christopher Nolan's forthcoming adaptation of *The Odyssey*. In such cases we trust that they will deliver the goods. But a run of failures is hard to come back from – which is why Francis Ford Coppola had to self-finance his sprawling epic *Megalopolis*. But *He-Man's* performance shows that anyone suggesting that what a tired franchise needs is to go away and rest for a bit might be kidding themselves. He-Man has rested so long that it has little remaining grip on people's affections. (I recognised almost everyone at our screening as fellow Curzon members making sure they got their weekly fix of something, anything, at the movies.)

Even if you have no time for science fiction in general or *Star Wars* in particular, if you have seen more than half a dozen films over the past half century, you'll have seen a technique pioneered in part by Lucas. The danger for *Star Wars* is that a franchise that was once defined by its love of the cinematic craft now seems to regard the medium with something approaching contempt.

Dialogue visibly designed to handhold an audience browsing a second screen at home will never get people to come to the multiplex. And without that audience, there will not only be no more disappointing *Star Wars* films, but soon no dazzling originals either.

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Letters

UK wealth exodus wave has crested but the tide has not turned

Reports that the number of UK residents relocating, or planning to do so, has fallen sharply, from 54 per cent of those surveyed by Capgemini in 2024 to 19 per cent last year are indeed correct, however I would caution against reading this as "the rich settling down", as the title on the accompanying graphic suggests.

The decline reflects a depletion of the most mobile cohort rather than any fading of the underlying drivers. The

non-doms who were always going to leave once the regime was abolished have, by and large, already gone; Lakshmi Mittal and Nassef Sawiris among the most visible. A survey that measures intention alongside action will inevitably record fewer movers once that group has departed.

What the headline ("Global flight of wealthy tax migrants slows sharply", Report, June 5) obscures is that the drivers themselves have not receded.

In our practice we continue to see a significant and steady stream of clients actively weighing departure, motivated now less by the non-dom changes than by the exposure of their worldwide assets to inheritance tax and changes to business relief, the direction of capital gains tax, and the prospect of further wealth and property levies, as well as the overriding economic outlook and the anti-business sentiment of the Labour government.

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AI allows sellers to peel away consumer anonymity

In her lucid op-ed on the phenomenon of surveillance pricing (May 26) Zephyr Teachout highlights how sellers are learning to, essentially, peel away consumer anonymity. The more information companies have about my characteristics, preferences and current circumstances – factors that influence my willingness to pay for a given product – the more of my consumer surplus they are able to extract. Great for companies. Not so great for me.

Of course, figuring out how to extract more money from customers is a game sellers have been playing since the first Mesopotamian butcher put his thumb on the scale at the first open-air market. Nowadays airlines "up-charge" for things that used to be included (luggage, seats); hotels tack on creatively named "destination fees" and American restaurants, which have long defined service charges as "tips", now add an additional service charge.

Streaming services demand subscribers pay extra for ad-free viewing. The feeling you are being milked at every turn is not exactly pleasant.



AI may be a game-changer if it does, indeed, enable companies to supercharge this extraction process, much in the way milkmaids have mostly been replaced by automatic milking systems. The question is, for how long will too many of us consent to being treated like cattle? Because that is what we do by granting companies the "freedom" to squeeze consumers as

much as they can. In today's US, policies to hollow out consumer protections, deregulate or indeed block AI regulations are pursued in the name of freedom, or beating China.

In fact, these policies give "freedom" to big business and Big Tech to act as they please.

When citizens accept such policies they signal to the government: I am ready to follow and ready to be milked. I am a herd animal, so please treat me like one.

Nils Junge
Washington, DC, US

Ageism in advertising

Hooray to Pilita Clark for speaking out against generational labels ("Please stop talking about Gen Z in the office", Business Life, May 25).

The use of lazy stereotypes to generalise about a certain race, gender or sexuality causes justified uproar. So why is it acceptable for advertisers, journalists and HR departments to do so about certain age bands? Surely this is an example of blatant ageism (towards the old and young alike) that society has been fighting against?

Mary Shipley
London SW17, UK

Software coders suffer too

Many of the translators' experiences you describe (The AI Shift, June 8) are familiar from my own work.

I'm a software engineer. The article frames the challenges faced by translators as "opposite" to those of software engineers.

In fact, our jobs have also been made harder; the most creative activities of the job are being replaced by the tedium of checking machine output; and as we write less code, we feel our skills atrophy.

Compared with before, the work offers less scope to demonstrate style and originality. We also face downward pressure on career opportunities and rates of pay. It seems that large language models are having similar effects on white-collar labour across different industries and professions.

Joshua Mostafa
Marrickville, NSW, Australia

Correction

● Steve Bannon was previously Donald Trump's chief strategist, not chief of staff as wrongly stated in an article on June 8.

OUTLOOK

MIAMI

America's nostalgia for a Cuba that no longer exists



by Geoff Dyer

n Havana, the pastel facades are faded and crumbling: in Miami, they are plastic.

Many of the immigrant communities in South Florida hold festivals to celebrate their cultural heritage but the Cubans go a little further than most. For one weekend every year, the Miami-Dade County Fair Center is transformed into a replica of central Havana. The city's famous streetscapes are recreated on large sheets suspended from the ceiling which bear photographs of the original.

You can walk from Havana Cathedral at one end, along the Paseo del Prado which was once lined with elegant boutiques and theatres, past El Floridita bar where Ernest Hemingway used to hold court, to the Club Tropicana where bands played late into the night.

Even the name of the festival hints at an unusually intense emotional relationship: Cuba Nostalgia.

At a time when Havana is falling apart at the seams, the streets lined with uncollected garbage, and US pressure on the communist regime mounting by the day, the Miami festival is a window into the worldview of the American-Cuban community.

Political debate in Miami is still dominated by fierce and strident anti-Castroism. Last month, prosecutors unveiled murder charges against Raúl Castro over the gunning-down of two civilian aircraft 30 years ago – to the delight of many of the leading

voices among the Cuban community.

Little of that rancour was on display at Cuba Nostalgia. There were few political statements other than a 1957 Oldsmobile painted in the Stars and Stripes and the slogan "Freedom for Cuba". José Hernández was the only person I saw wearing a "Make Cuba Great Again" hat. We talked while waiting in the queue at Mr Pork Belly for *chicharrón*, bite-size pieces of deep-fried, crispy pork – the devil's cholesterol. He said it was "amazing news, not before time" that Castro was to be indicted. But even this was said more in weariness than anger.

Yet if politics was in the background, the emotional architecture behind that sense of bitterness was everywhere. Havana is recreated as a pristine idyll, a paradise that was lost with the revolution.

In previous years, a large map laid out on the floor allowed parents and grandparents to show younger family members where they used to live. This is the narrative that has sustained the Miami diaspora for nearly seven decades – that if only the Castros could be ejected, all would be restored.

One of the plastic facades was for Havana's Cine Payret, a beautiful art deco building. Inside, they showed documentaries about musical stars of that era, including tunes later included in the *Buena Vista Social Club*, the 1990s album that prompted a global wave of nostalgia for a certain idea of Cuba.

Mario Alvarez, a 27-year-old who moved to the Miami area after Covid,

was looking quizzically at the building. He had spent time in Havana as a student but said he did not remember the Payret. We looked it up online to see that the cinema closed down in 2008.

Cuban-American leaders often refer to themselves as an exile community, rather than immigrants – a gesture of political defiance against the regime that carries the suggestion that Florida is just a temporary home.

Beneath the surface, however, Cuba Nostalgia is really a celebration of the Miami Good Life. One shop was selling luxury handbags made from Cohiba cigar boxes. Others were promoting dental implants and insurance for boats – the ultimate South Florida status symbol. One of the most popular attractions was a giant image of Havana's waterfront, the Malecón. It was sponsored by a local health insurer advertising its plan for Medicare Advantage.

Marisol Cabrera, whose parents migrated in the 1960s, was waiting in line to take a photo in front of the Malecón. She said that a cousin once returned to see family during the brief Obama interlude, when relations between the two countries were semi-normalised, but that she had never been interested.

Would she be tempted if the Castro regime were to fall tomorrow? "I am going to be honest, I don't know anyone who would go back," she said. "Things are just so much better here."

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Opinion

Why are we still arguing about the industrial revolution?

EMPLOYMENT

Sarah O'Connor



Arguments about the past are often used as proxies for arguments about the future. It is no surprise, then, that a long-running debate about the Industrial Revolution has flared up as we begin another phase of rapid technological change.

The argument concerns whether the industrial revolution was good or bad for workers in the short run (and, by extension, which the AI revolution will be). The discourse in tech circles can be boiled down to this: "Relax: the industrial revolution led to higher real wages and more jobs". "But don't you know about 'Engels' pause'? Between 1790 and 1840, profits rose but real wages barely budged." "Ah, but don't you know that a different measure of

real wages tells a different story?" And so on.

I find this argument perplexing — not because there are no lessons to be learned from the industrial revolution, but because I don't think these databases are the right place to look for them.

For one thing, the data on that era is patchy and unreliable. For another, the industrial revolution in Britain took place against a very different institutional backdrop. There was no universal suffrage, no legal trade unions and no modern welfare state. Indeed, you could argue these were eventual social responses to the industrial revolution. It is hard to see why we should expect the wage-setting dynamics of the past (even if we could agree on what they actually were) to repeat themselves today.

But most importantly, these quantitative metrics do not capture how profoundly the industrial revolution changed the nature of work for many people, in ways both good and bad. As the historian EP Thompson puts it in *The Making of the English Working Class*, "some of the most bitter conflicts

of these years turned on issues which are not encompassed by cost-of-living series": health, working hours, child labour, security and independence.

The same is already true today, where fights are beginning to break out over issues beyond the economic realm: environmental costs, intellectual property, chatbots and child safety. When Anthropic interviewed 80,000 users of

Quantitative metrics do not capture how profoundly the period changed the nature of work

its Claude chatbot across 159 countries, it found that people were indeed worried about jobs and the economy, but they were also worried about reliability, autonomy, agency, cognitive atrophy and governance.

While the macroeconomic data does not offer much insight about how our predecessors navigated such profound change, the good news is that other

sources are available. The economist Martha Gimbel, executive director of the Yale Budget Lab, argued recently in favour of reading the great novels of the era. Books like Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*, Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* and Anthony Trollope's *The Way We Live Now* can help us to understand "what drove people to invest in technology, what it felt like for workers at the time, how society changed and how it responded (or didn't) to those who lost out," she wrote.

Aggregate employment data, on the other hand, tends to obscure the question of who gains and who loses. Many of these stories from the industrial revolution have been forgotten, with the exception of the Luddites. A recent paper by historical social scientist Benjamin Schneider excavates what happened to a group of often overlooked workers: the mostly female workforce of hand-spinners.

In a little more than fifty years, he writes, "innovations eliminated an occupation that had provided work for nearly one in six women and children, 8 per cent of the whole population." And

though the new inventions generated different jobs, they did not necessarily go to the same people. "Many [displaced] women could only find seasonal and insecure employment in agriculture, and some had no work at all," he found.

One man from the 19th century would be dispirited but not surprised, I think, that people in 2026 were still arguing about his era through the lens of statistical averages. In his novel *Hard Times*, Charles Dickens described a girl called Sissy, who was having a terrible time in her lessons. Her schoolmaster told her to imagine that her schoolroom was a nation in possession of "fifty millions of money". Wouldn't that mean it was a prosperous and thriving state?

"I said I didn't know," she relayed afterwards to a friend. "I thought I couldn't know whether it was a prosperous nation or not, and whether I was in a thriving state or not, unless I knew who had got the money, and whether any of it was mine. But that had nothing to do with it. It was not in the figures at all."

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Private equity in football can be a winning proposition

Sachin Khajuria

Now that the club season in football has ended, and before the World Cup begins, it is a good time to assess the role that private equity plays in the English Premier League.

Nearly seven years ago, Silver Lake, a technology-focused investor, committed primary equity amounting to an approximate 10 per cent interest in City Football Group, the owner of Manchester City and other clubs worldwide. This involved partnering as a minority investor with Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed al-Nahyan of Abu Dhabi as the majority owner, investing in growth and backing a world-class manager and executive team.

Over time, Silver Lake increased its stake to approximately 18 per cent. Substantial investment in top players has been central to the strategy. But cash alone is not sufficient to win prestigious trophies every year, let alone build an enduring culture or clear team identity. Manager Pep Guardiola, who left City in May after 10 successful years at the helm, repeatedly praised the stability, expertise and trust of the ownership as vital elements of the magic formula.

We should consider the private equity investment in Chelsea in this context. Four years ago, a consortium majority-financed by Clearlake Capital acquired control as part of a multi-club investment thesis. Using a mix of equity and debt capital, the consortium has since invested heavily in young talent, with the aim of using *Moneyball*-style data

Some have concluded that the Chelsea project is foundering, but this view could yet prove wrong

analysis to professionalise the club's operations.

How well is it working out? Chelsea have won two international trophies, including the 2025 Club World Cup. The club's academy in Cobham is a consistent global leader and regularly produces elite players, many of whom transition to the first team. But against the key metric for a "Big Six" club — arriving in the final competitive stages of the Premier League and Champions League with a real chance of winning — consistent progress remains elusive. Meanwhile, discontent among supporters has grown.

Some have concluded that the Chelsea project is foundering, but this view could yet prove wrong. Certainly, managerial and player mis-steps have led to underperformance on the pitch. But the same people in charge have also made some excellent squad additions coveted by rivals. And they recently recruited an accomplished manager, Xabi Alonso, who, if given enough say in a stable working partnership, is more likely to succeed than fail given his credentials.

It is possible that a new stadium will have to wait a few years for feasible economic and planning proposals. And it will be crucial to manage the capital structure carefully. But although running a club might be much harder than it looks, calibrating covenants and maintaining liquidity should be routine. The same is true of shirt sponsorship: if a lucrative longer-term deal is not forthcoming, a series of shorter-term wins could make sense.

The approach of buying emerging players in the belief that the downside case is recovering capital spent, and the upside selling for profit or performing well in the first team, now needs enhancing with proved talent. But there should definitely be enough time to get it right. One of the provisions of the takeover in 2022 was a commitment not to sell for 10 years. And there are reasons to believe that a season out of European competition could be a blessing in disguise.

Chelsea represents a more substantial bet by private equity than Manchester City. Yet the premise of the deal — that the best football clubs are undervalued relative to top US sports franchises — remains a wager that has merit. Watch out for a few more control investments of this kind in the Premier League and in Europe.

The writer is an investor in private and public markets

Netanyahu's grand strategy is coming apart

GLOBAL AFFAIRS

Gideon Rachman



War with Iran was the fulfilment of a 30-year dream for Benjamin Netanyahu. The Israeli prime minister has warned for decades that Iran poses an existential threat to his country. On February 28, he finally unleashed a full-scale attack on the Islamic republic. Better still, from his point of view, the war was a joint operation with the US.

He persuaded Donald Trump that war would bring about regime change in Iran. At the very least, he was determined to end the Iranian threat to Israel.

But Netanyahu's Iran campaign has gone badly wrong. The Iranian regime is still firmly in place and has shown that it can still fire missiles at Israel. Iran-backed Hezbollah has shelled northern Israel and is battling Israeli troops in Lebanon. And now his close alliance with Trump is under intense strain.

Iran's missile attacks on Sunday night were a response to Israeli strikes on southern Beirut. Israel has now responded by bombing Iran. But Trump seems determined to prevent further escalation. The US president told the FT: "I call all the shots. He [Netanyahu] doesn't call the shots."

Netanyahu now faces a very difficult choice. Does he call off strikes against Iran and Hezbollah — and risk looking weak in the eyes of both the Iranian regime and the Israeli public? Or does he defy Trump and endanger his alliance with America?

For all the brave words from Israeli politicians about demonstrating that Israel is a sovereign nation that makes its own decisions about how to defend itself, the reality is that the country remains very dependent on US weaponry and air defences.

The dilemma is all the more acute because the peace deal that Trump is working on seems likely to leave Iran in a stronger financial position — and still with a residual nuclear capability.

The successful closure of the Strait of Hormuz has given the Islamic republic a new and powerful tool. The fact that Tehran has also shown that it can hit US military bases and the infrastructure of Gulf states — and not be toppled in retaliation — has further strengthened Iran's deterrent capability.

Netanyahu insists that his country must have a free hand to go after Hezbollah, which has in the past forced the evacuation of thousands in northern Israel. The Israeli offensive against Hezbollah has, in turn, forced more than a million Lebanese from their homes. But Trump phoned Netanyahu last week and instructed him, in apparently abusive terms, to curtail Israel's campaign in Lebanon.

The emerging Israeli quagmire in Lebanon is part of a broader strategic



failure. Israel has now been at war for almost three years since the Hamas attacks on October 7 2023. The brutality of the Israeli campaign in Gaza has done immense damage to the country's international standing — with the International Court of Justice agreeing to consider accusations that Israel has committed genocide.

Nonetheless, Netanyahu insists that he is leading his nation to victory. In September at the UN, he boasted that Israel had "crushed" most of Hamas's "terror machine", "crippled" Hezbollah and "devastated" Iran's nuclear and missile programmes.

But these claims look increasingly flimsy. Hamas is still in place in Gaza; Hezbollah is still a powerful force in Lebanon. The Islamic republic still has Iran

By now, it should be obvious: Israel cannot kill its way to security

in its grip and can still sow havoc with its missiles and drones.

In each case, Netanyahu made the same mistake. He chose to pursue an entirely military solution to Israel's security problems — ignoring the political and diplomatic dimensions. As a result, he has mis-sold the tactical successes of Israeli military and intelligence — such as the killing of Hezbollah, Iranian and Hamas leaders — as proof that Israel is becoming more secure.

But, by now, it should be obvious: Israel cannot kill its way to security. If one group of leaders is assassinated in Gaza or Beirut or Tehran, others will emerge to replace them.

It is simpler — politically and intellectually — for Netanyahu to portray Israel's enemies as mindless fanatics who can only be eliminated, rather than to engage with the underlying issues that are driving conflict. As a result, the Israelis refuse to consider that many Palestinians, Lebanese and Iranians are likely to respond to being bombed and killed in the same way that Israelis did to October 7 — not by surren-

dering but by fighting even harder.

Anybody who talks that way is accused by Netanyahu of sympathising with terrorists. As a result, the Israeli prime minister has silenced debate rather than leading it — as a true statesman should.

By initiating an all-out war on Israel's enemies, Netanyahu aimed to restore his own reputation and to secure his political future. Victory over Iran was meant to be the capstone achievement: the final triumph over the ultimate enemy — conveniently achieved in an election year.

Instead, Netanyahu is likely to go into the elections later this year with the country's enemies alive and kicking — and with support for Israel falling sharply across the west and even in the White House. Israeli elections are almost always close — so it is unclear if Netanyahu will lose power. But security is likely to be the number one issue. And Netanyahu's vision for Israeli security has failed. He deserves to lose.

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We need to learn how to argue with AI

Vivienne Ming

Generative AI is, by design, a machine for producing the feeling of competence without the substance of it.

To see what sort of impact this is having on our ability to think, I asked a classroom of students to wear EEG headsets while they worked on the same assignment with the same AI agent. From the front of the room they looked indistinguishable: heads down, screens glowing, fingers tapping. Inside their skulls, however, two very different stories were unfolding.

In most of the students, the EEG measuring their brain activity revealed that the high-frequency "gamma" oscillations that mark cognitive effort collapsed within minutes of using the AI agent. Their neural state drifted towards something closer to watching TV than solving maths problems.

In a small few, however, the gamma lit up. These students, it seemed, were arguing with the machine, pushing back on its confident answers and forcing the AI to critique their own thinking in turn. The final essays produced might have looked broadly similar but over the course of a term it is this handful of students who would get measurably more intellectual benefit.

I have been documenting the divergence in responses to technology use for the better part of two decades and have seen the same pattern show up everywhere: two people use the same tool for the same task. One's brain gets sharper. One's brain goes quiet.

You can sort technology users into types — the "automators" who copy and paste information, the "validators" who seek confirmation bias and the "cyborgs" who spar with machines. But the taxonomy matters less than the mechanism producing it.

A Harvard study in 2019 captured this in a single, counterintuitive finding. Students challenged to wrestle with problems learnt far more than those in traditional lectures, yet they reported feeling

as if they had learnt less. Our brains mistake the smooth, fluent sensation of being told something — whether in a lecture hall or by AI — for the harder, messier process of actually learning. And generative AI is the most fluent thing that humans have ever built.

To resist that requires choosing productive discomfort: being wrong, or

For most people, active engagement with the technology's every output is cognitively exhausting

doing the unglamorous work of interrogating an answer that looks correct.

Most of us do not do that. Between 2012 and 2016, the education researcher (and my wife) Norma Ming and I worked through the discussion-forum activity of roughly 60,000 students across undergraduate and MBA programmes. The finding that stayed with me is that the students who earned top marks were those who were

"wrong" most often in the forums. They proposed, they explored, they were frequently and visibly incorrect. Those who passed safely — nine out of ten students — were far less likely to venture a claim they couldn't defend. (The failing students, if you are curious, talked mostly about weekend plans and the funny thing their dog had once done.)

This is what AI benchmarks miss when frontier labs announce near-perfect scores on coding, law or medical exams. These exams test the models in isolation, but in the field, AI works alongside a person — a radiologist weighing up its read, a junior lawyer checking its brief.

Policy is making the same mistake at scale. Article 14 of the EU's AI Act mandates "human oversight" for high-risk AI deployments and treats the requirement as a defensive checkbox: put a human in the loop and the loop is safe. But placing a human operator in a loop with a fluent, persuasive AI almost guarantees automation bias. The operator becomes a bored clerk, rubber-stamping authoritative-sounding hallucinations. For most people, the alternative —

active engagement with every output — is cognitively exhausting.

The fix is not more oversight. Britain's AI Security Institute, America's CAISI and the EU's AI Office test AI models the way labs do: in isolation. They should shift to evaluating AI's effect on the humans who use it. My proposal is a Hybrid Intelligence Index that measures whether a human-machine collaboration leaves the human user sharper or duller over time.

That means designing for friction. When I ran a version of my experiments in which the AI was instructed to respond with questions and context instead of answers, the proportion of high-gamma, actively engaged students more than doubled.

In a labour market increasingly defined by AI products, the gap between those able to argue with confident machines and those who cannot will compound. The economies that optimise for fluency risk automating away the very minds they need.

The writer is a theoretical neuroscientist and author of *Robot-Proof*