

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Nepal in turmoil

Reforms needed to stem the rot

NEPAL, no stranger to political instability, is in turmoil again after violent anti-government protests forced Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli to resign. His exit came in the wake of a brutal police crackdown on protesters that left at least 19 dead. It was a controversial ban on social media sites that unleashed the fury of the youth-led Gen Z group, which has been campaigning against alleged corruption in the highest echelons of power. The young brigade had used popular online platforms to claim that children of ministers and other dignitaries owed their extravagant lifestyles to ill-gotten wealth. The alleged bid to suppress freedom of speech backfired badly. Stung by the backlash, the government did not take long to revoke the ban, but that did not help to cool frayed tempers.

The escalation in violence — Parliament, Supreme Court, offices of political parties and ministers' houses were targeted on Tuesday — is worrisome. The protesters want nothing less than a complete overhaul of the government and strict action against corrupt leaders. They are also demanding that those responsible for the deaths in police firing on Monday be given exemplary punishment.

Amid the chaos and anarchy, the Mayor of Kathmandu Metropolitan City, Balen Shah, has emerged as an influential stakeholder. The 35-year-old ex-rapper has won the trust of Gen Z by backing the agitation against corruption and the social media ban. He has sought dissolution of Parliament, followed by talks between the military authorities and the protesters. The immediate challenge for the Nepali Army and security agencies is to bring the volatile situation under control and restore a semblance of normalcy. Resolving the crisis through dialogue should be the way forward, along with discussions to work out a roadmap for systemic reforms. The failure of the old guard — represented by Oli and his predecessors — to stem the rot has fuelled frustration and disillusionment among the youth. Nepal has been much damaged over the last two days. It desperately needs a fresh start.

Aadhaar as ID

Judicial push for inclusivity in Bihar's SIR

THE Supreme Court's directive to the Election Commission (EC) to accept Aadhaar as valid proof of identity in Bihar's ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) marks an important step in balancing inclusivity and electoral integrity. By recognising Aadhaar as the 12th identity document — alongside ration cards, passports and other proofs — the court has responded to concerns that millions, particularly migrants and the marginalised, risk exclusion for want of cumbersome paperwork. The court's intervention also exposes troubling lapses in the EC's functioning. Despite earlier judicial directions, booth-level officers reportedly continued to reject Aadhaar, even penalising those who accepted it. Such defiance not only contradicts the rule of law but also fuels suspicion about the impartiality of electoral management. The EC must issue clear instructions to ensure that its staff do not turn discretion into arbitrary exclusion.

Yet, the ruling comes with a critical caveat: Aadhaar cannot and must not be considered proof of citizenship. This distinction is crucial. While Aadhaar has near-universal coverage and is indispensable for welfare and banking, it was never designed to verify nationality. Conflating identity with citizenship would undermine both the law and democratic legitimacy.

At the same time, the responsibility lies with policymakers to strengthen mechanisms that distinguish eligible voters without creating fresh hurdles. Citizenship is determined by birth and statutory criteria, not by a single card. That reality must be explained more clearly to the public to prevent confusion or political exploitation. As Bihar heads toward elections, the judgment should serve as a broader precedent. Voter rolls are the bedrock of democracy. The SC order is a nudge towards an electoral process that is both fair and accessible. The onus is now on the EC to implement this dexterity in spirit and in practice.

ON THIS DAY...50 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

CHANDIGARH, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 1975

Goods for the masses

The simple remedy for the shortages of essential commodities is more production. This would 'checkmate' the prices. To the common man, it makes all the difference whether he has to pay less or more for his daily necessities. Viewed in this context, the Government's intention of "entering the manufacturing and processing fields" of certain essential items needs to be welcomed. Union Minister of Industry and Civil Supplies AC George said at Visakhapatnam on Monday that the Central Government was considering the manufacture of at least eight more essential commodities like soaps, toothpaste and razor blades in the cooperative sector to end the "exploitation of brand names." Household utensils, kerosene and cooking soaps, woolen and ready-made garments are also on the cooperative card. At present, a sort of jungle law prevails in the production and sale of some popular items. Some manufacturers overplay the brand names by exaggerated claims and thus hoodwink the masses. As the minister himself pointed out, a popular brand of toothpaste costs only 20 per cent of its selling price. Where does all the profit go? It goes either to feed the fat executives or the intermediaries, or in sales campaigns and other administrative overheads. The expenses on these counts can be cut by about one-half without harming the basic interest of the companies. The companies are certainly entitled to reasonable profits, but no responsible government can allow a situation whereby the consumer is made to pay heavily for a product and is then left guessing about its availability.



RANJIT RAE
FORMER AMBASSADOR TO NEPAL

THE situation in Nepal today is unprecedented, unimaginable, very serious. It is a demonstration of the anger, the revulsion and the fury of the people, which has spilled out into the streets.

The lynching of senior politicians, the burning of government property, of the new Parliament built by the Chinese, of the official home of the Prime Minister, called *Baluwatar*, of the home of President Ram Chandra Poudel, of private homes of former and current prime ministers, is something I have not seen in my living memory anywhere in the world — not in Bangladesh, not in Sri Lanka, not in Indonesia.

This is much worse than the situation in Bangladesh just over a year ago, when the protests led to the flight of the former prime minister Sheikh Hasina. It is much worse than the situation in Sri Lanka in 2022, when the homes of several politicians were burnt down, but politicians weren't attacked.

In Kathmandu on Tuesday, former prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and his wife, foreign minister Arzoo Rana, were beaten up. They are lucky to escape with their lives. Former PM Jhulanath Khanal also suffered the same fate; his wife has been burnt — some say she was burnt alive.

The fact that the Nepali Army has taken all the top politicians in its security is good — a fact is, today, they have no alternative but to seek shelter under the umbrella of the Nepali Army. It is too unsafe for them to be anywhere else.

And yes, the Army must step in



UNPRECEDENTED: There is a deep sense of alienation that Nepal's young people feel about their political parties. **PI**

and control the situation. It is, potentially, the only stabilising force in Nepal today. It has a very critical role to play. The country needs to return to some law and order.

What has happened in Nepal over the last two days is largely a home-grown uprising. The intensity of the violence is directly linked to the 19 people killed in the protests. If the situation had been handled better yesterday, if political steps had been taken, if Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli had announced his resignation earlier, Nepal would not find itself in the state it is right now.

The disenchantment in Nepal that has manifested in this utter chaos has several causes. The younger generation, the so-called Gen Z, is in despair. They've lost hope. It was a foolhardy decision to ban social media apps, there should have been other ways of ensuring that these companies abide by Nepalese laws. The malaise is very deep in Nepal.

There is huge corruption in high places. Worse, no investigation is being carried out in these scams, which allegedly involve top leaders of political parties. Nepalis believe that the unholy coalition between the Nepali Con-

The young people leading this spontaneous uprising are protesting against what they call "nepo kids", the children of rich politicians who flaunt their luxurious lifestyles on social media.

gress and the Communist Party of Nepal, UML, between Nepali Congress leader and former PM Sher Bahadur Deuba and UML leader (and just resigned) PM Oli exists because it was meant to stop investigations into corruption allegations between its top leaders. And that these two big

parties came together to squeeze all the opposition inside Parliament.

The second key reason for the despair in Nepal is unemployment. There are no jobs. Large numbers of young people are leaving the country for menial jobs in the Gulf that don't even pay well.

So when the armed police on Monday tried to stop the young protesters and even used live ammunition against them, it unleashed a fury in Nepal that was never seen before. I have seen pictures of young children in school uniform bleeding from shotgun wounds.

This anger against the political parties is manifesting across the board — the Nepali Congress, CPN (UML), the Communists. It points to a deep sense of alienation that Nepal's young people feel about their political parties and the kind of governance they provided.

Significantly, this is an aimless, faceless kind of agitation. Unlike the 'jan andolan' or 'people's movement' of 2006, when the political parties as well as the Maoists led the charge against the monarchy, one doesn't really know who the leaders of this

'andolan' are or what their demands are.

Significantly, the young people leading this spontaneous uprising are also protesting against what they call "nepo kids" or "nepo babies", the children of rich politicians who flaunt their luxurious lifestyles on social media. That has caused a lot of resentment amongst the Nepalese. These young people travel in fancy cars, live in palatial bungalows while the poor — well, the poor have nowhere really to go.

It is important to note that this agitation is taking place across Nepal, in the Kathmandu valley and in the Terai, which shows the extent of alienation in the country.

Certainly, the callous manner in which this people's agitation was handled speaks of a disconnect between the leadership and the led. It is a worrying undercurrent that the young believe that the system, the 2015 Constitution that was crafted after years of Maoist insurgency, Madhesi agitation and endless debate, is not delivering.

This was supposed to be a federal democratic, secular, inclusive republic of Nepal. But because the peace and prosperity dividend has not been forthcoming, people are questioning not just the people who implemented the Constitution, but the very Constitution itself.

Naturally, India is watching the situation closely. We have an open border between our two nations, more than 2000 km-long, along the states of West Bengal, Bihar and Uttarakhand, so security along the border has been tightened and travel across some districts completely shut down.

India has always been on the side of the aspirations of the people of Nepal. If you look at India's role in Nepal since 1950, this has always been the case. I trust that India will continue to support the aspirations of the Nepali people.

(As told to Editor-in-Chief Jyoti Malhotra)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Those intoxicated with power can never willingly abandon it. — Edmund Burke

Look before you take the yoga leap

COL RS NARULA (RETD)

IN December 2006, we — a group of Army and naval officers — were attending a short course at the Institute of Technology Management, Mussoorie. A post-lunch session on 'knowledge management' was particularly soporific. The topic was theoretical, the instructor was speaking in a monotone and most of the officers were dozing off. But I was determined to stay awake, though my eyelids were getting heavier.

Desperately, I recalled a yoga technique I learnt during a Baba Ramdev-inspired session. You sit upright, spine straight, chest out, hands on knees, eyes wide open, etc. to stay awake.

Mimiculously, I felt alert. My head stood tall above a sea of drooping ones. The instructor looked at me with a hint of appreciation, probably assuming that I was the most attentive student in the classroom. Suddenly, the lecture seemed to get interesting. He gave an example of how to apply knowledge management for procuring forklift trucks and introduced a guest speaker: Nicole Harrison from Gammon Forklifts Pvt Ltd.

Nicole walked in like a breeze — tall, elegant, dressed in a cream blazer over a light pink shirt and black trousers. With her crisp British accent, sharp features and radiant blue eyes, she seemed like a BBC newsreader moonlighting as a corporate executive. My drowsiness disappeared instantly.

Strangely, my classmates remained slouched in their chairs. What a tragedy, I thought. I decided to ask a question just to attract her attention: "What's the turnover of your company?" She smiled charmingly, promised to reply over pastries during high tea and called me "my dear sir." All this gave me goosebumps.

After the lecture, we moved to the lounge where company brochures and snacks were laid out. Nicole came over, smiled and said, "Your face looks familiar." We talked playfully.

Then, as she guided me toward the pastry table, she held my arm softly. But soon, her grip became firmer. Then painful. And then unbearable. Suddenly, I was jolted awake.

It was Arun, my course mate, shaking me violently. "Wake up! You've been sleeping upright like a statue for half an hour! The instructor kept looking, hoping I'd wake you up."

In shock, I looked around. No Nicole. No forklift trucks. No pastries. Just a classroom full of sleepy officers and an instructor wrapping up his lecture. I had dozed off somewhere after "we'll understand this with an example..." And all that followed? It was just a dream.

Later, I confirmed with Arun — there was no Gammon Forklifts Pvt Ltd; the only 'Gammon' we knew was a construction company. Over dinner, we laughed heartily.

Lesson learnt: Never try a yoga exercise in public unless you have practised it in private — especially the part about moving your toes. This was the step I had forgotten to perform. And yes, thank you, Baba Ramdev, for one of the most entertaining naps I've ever had.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Time for world to unite

Apropos of 'A throwback to the age of monsters' in the backdrop of wars in Gaza and Ukraine, where tens of thousands of lives have been lost, it is time for the world to wake up and stand united against wars. Any escalation for long can lead to a nuclear trigger that will push humans back to the Stone Age. The world must work together as one unit to ensure complete nuclear disarmament. How can this important issue be addressed effectively? This Urdu couplet sums up the crisis, 'chand par baad mein jaana jahan vaalo, pehle dharti pe to chahne ka salaqa seekho'.

SINI GANDHI, FEROZEPUR

Justice hostage to rich criminals

Refer to 'Out of reach'; the editorial rightly exposes the glaring injustice in handling economic offenders. Fugitives like Mehul Choksi, Nirav Modi and Vijay Mallya exploit loopholes in the legal system of foreign countries and their expected standards of human rights. However, in stark contrast, ordinary undertrials languish in overcrowded jails in India. The government along with the authorities concerned must ensure that such offenders are not able to escape in the first place. Without strong border vigilance, proactive legal measures and timely action, justice will remain hostage. The government must treat rich and poor criminals alike to uphold justice.

CHANCHAL S MANN, UNA

Hockey team's winning streak

Refer to 'Hockey heroes'; the Indian men's hockey team won back-to-back Olympic bronze medals in 2021 and 2024, besides the Asian Games gold and the Asian Champions Trophy. The team has now won the Asia Cup after a wait of eight years. The retirement of legends like PR Sreejesh and Lalit Kumar Upadhyay did create a vacuum, but players like Abhishek Nain, Sukhjeet Singh and Sanjay are trying to fill in their big boots. The junior World Cup is a few months away and the Sultan Azlan Shah Cup in November will be a prelude to the World Cup as top teams like Belgium and Germany will participate.

BAL GOVIND, NOIDA

Youngsters taking game ahead

With reference to 'Hockey heroes'; though cricket has elicited more interest, the revival of hockey over the years can't be ignored. India winning the Asia Cup has again underscored the resurgence of the game in the country. Under head coach Craig Fulton's guidance and Harmanpreet Singh's leadership, the players have shown world-class skills. It is heartening to see that youngsters are taking the sport to new heights. This victory shows how far India has come after decades of hard work and attempts at regaining glory of yesteryears. The all-important question is: Will such wins translate into an Olympic gold or a World Cup title?

PI SINGH, BY MAIL

A testament to hard work

By defeating South Korea 4-1 in the Asia Cup final, the Indian men's hockey team not only regained the prestigious title after eight long years but also qualified for the 2026 World Cup. This victory is a testament to the hard work, dedication and fighting spirit of our players and coaching staff. It also heralds a renaissance in hockey, a sport that has given the nation countless moments of glory in the past. The win is even more special as it came on home soil, lifting the spirit of hockey lovers across the country.

RUKMA SHARMA, JALANDHAR

No flood relief for urbanites

Refer to 'Saini: Rs 326 cr sanctioned as reserve fund for districts'; most of the relief measures announced by the Haryana Chief Minister are meant for rural folk and farmers. No relief has been announced for urbanites whose houses, shops and industrial units got inundated with floodwater. The e-Kshatpatri portal is deceptive and superficial exemplifying 'all show and no substance'. Only farmers are going to benefit from it, not urban flood victims. A similar portal was launched by the Haryana government after the 2023 floods. It proved to be of no help as conditions for availing compensations were too harsh and unrealistic to fulfil.

VINAY KUMAR MALHOTRA, AMBALA CANTT

When Gen Z said 'enough is enough' in Nepal



DINESH KAFLE
TEACHER, SCHOOL OF ARTS,
KATHMANDU UNIVERSITY

MONDAY marked the bloodiest day in the democratic history of Nepal as security forces unleashed terror on Gen Z protesters who were speaking out against corruption, nepotism and social media ban.

Nepal Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli's barbaric vulgarity was on full display in front of the country's parliament as his men rained bullets on unarmed youths, killing 19 of them. This is as many as those committed by Gyanendra Shah during the movement for the restoration of democracy in 2006.

The despotic former king's murderous credentials have now been dwarfed by the democratically elected Prime Minister, who oversaw the cold-blooded murder of his citizens in broad daylight right outside the temple of democracy.

I fear, my dear compatriots, that when you read this after a long, sleepless

night, the death toll might have risen, for many among the 350 injured were hit with bullets on their heads and chests.

In murdering the starry-eyed 20-somethings in broad daylight right in front of the parliament building, Oli, aided by his unscrupulous lieutenant, (since resigned) Home Minister Ramesh Lekhak, has shaken the conscience of the nation.

As if being governed by imbeciles were not enough, Nepal on Monday saw first-hand what it feels like to be ruled by barbarians. And Oli's barbarian act will haunt generations of Nepalis for the sheer scale of violence a democratically elected leader can unleash on his people.

Songs of protest

The march from Maitighar to New Baneshwor was for most Gen Z youths the first protest of their lives. In the crowd were nervous teenagers in their school and college dresses who had bunked their classes because, for at least one day, their rights as citizens of this state trumped their obligations as students. There were excited officegoers who had taken a half-day leave from their offices to offer solidarity to their fellow youths. There were well-meaning millennials who had joined the protests just so that they



BARBARIC: In murdering the starry-eyed 20-somethings, Oli has shaken the conscience of the nation. *PHOTO BY AP/WIDEWORLD*

could cast protective eyes on their younger siblings. And then there were the patriots who had just shown up to offer their moral support.

This was the protest that would bring the keyboard warriors of the new generation onto the streets for the real fight — because enough was enough.

In their social media posts, the protesters had all along been very particular about their commitment to a peaceful march.

This is not a protest
against nepotism or
corruption
anymore; it is a
struggle to save our
democratic rights
and our humanity.

No matter the provocation from vigilantes, they would, they emphasised, commit no act of violence or vandalism.

All they would do was sing the songs of protest, paint the picture of resistance and let the government know that they were watching.

And sing they did — the anthem of protest their grandparents and parents had sung during the peak of anti-monarchy protests in the 1980s and the 2000s:

"Gaun gaun bata utha, basti basti bata utha (Rise up from every village, rise up from every town)."

Alas! What awaited them at the barricades in Baneshwor was a murderous lot even their seniors hadn't seen.

Democracy's nemesis

In at least the past decade, when Oli has been at the centre of national politics, there has hardly been any doubt about his undemocratic credentials. His disregard for democracy was evident in his twin coup attempts against parliament in December 2020 and May 2021 in cahoots with a rubber-stamp President, Bidya Devi Bhandari. The second coup attempt came right in the middle of the pandemic as citizens in ill-equipped hospitals gasped for oxygen.

The Achilles' heel of democracy is that the ilk of Oli can slither back into the hallowed halls of parliament despite poisoning the very system that has nurtured their ambitions. And so, here we are — wretches of the earth, condemned to see the flowers of the future nipped in the bud.

Make no mistake, the barbarians at the top got ever so emboldened due to our culpability, our failure to fulfil the citizen's dharma. For at least the past two decades, we have kept

believing in the lie that we were becoming good citizens by continuing to pay our taxes while giving a free hand to the politicians.

Finally, Gen Z, whom we thought was too busy creating content on the internet, said 'enough is enough' and came on the streets and paid the price of our complacency.

Rage on!

As we struggle to process the grief and rage emanating from an unprecedented national tragedy, as our Gandhian ideals of non-violence seem insufficient to tackle the atrocity committed on the citizens, we must continue to believe in our ability to denigrate the barbarians through democratic means.

Unfortunately, for the barbarians at the top, no barrel of the gun has ever been built as powerful as the hearts of the people seeking justice. And so, fight we must, with all our might, to retain our power as citizens of this nation.

This is not a protest against social media ban, nepotism or corruption anymore; it is a struggle to save our democratic rights and our humanity.

As our slain compatriots rest in rage, we must roar across the mountains and the plains, the villages and the towns, with the clarion call to save the soul of this nation.

Courtesy The Kathmandu Post

GST reform just a first step to making it good and simple



SUSHMA RAMACHANDRAN
SENIOR FINANCIAL
JOURNALIST

THE overhauling of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) after a lag of eight years is a welcome reform. The only fault in the exercise is that it has been delayed too long. The GST system has been in dire need of simplification and rationalisation. Originally conceived as a single tax that would replace the multiplicity of levies comprising the indirect revenue structure, it ended up becoming a tangle of red tape.

While the GST collections have been increasingly buoyant over the years, there has been an equally rapid rise in complaints by small and medium enterprises over harassment by zealous tax authorities.

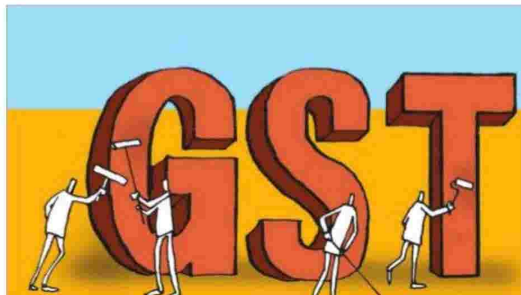
Disputes over minute issues arising from the complexity of the tax structure should be dealt with as minor economic offences rather than criminal acts. One can only hope that the current restructuring will also ensure an end to the harassment of trade and industry.

The big bang reform this time is the reduction of tax slabs from the original four — 28, 18, 12 and 5 per cent, respectively — to only two — 18 and 5 per cent. This is expected to shrink the revenue collections by as much as Rs 48,000 crore annually. The hope is that the cuts will spur consumption sufficiently to launch a virtuous cycle of higher production and investments.

There is no doubt this will stimulate the economy. The only question is: to what extent, and whether this will be sufficient to make up the revenue shortfall to Centre and states.

State governments, whether helmed by the BJP or other parties, are naturally apprehensive over the prospect of reduced finances despite having voted unanimously for the measures in the GST Council. But the political gains from supporting price cuts on virtually the entire range of essential goods has not escaped their notice.

Despite the potential revenue loss, cutting the number of tax slabs makes eminent sense. The 28 per cent slab should not have been created in the first place even as having four tax rates created enormous complexity. Even now, a punitive 40 per cent has been created for so-called 'sin' goods. So, effectively there are still three tax slabs.



ONE TAX: By placing the entire category of food into the lowest 5 per cent slab, it no longer matters whether popcorn is sold in the salted, caramel, packaged or loose versions. *SANDEEP JOSHI*

There are also multiple versions of GST. There is integrated GST on interstate supplies of goods and services, and there is central, state and union territory GST, imposed on intra-state supplies.

Till now, there has also been a compensation cess meant to cushion states from the loss of revenues, having sacrificed their own levies in favour of this tax. Fortunately, this is now being done away with in the next few months.

The imposition of GST on health and life insurance should also not have been introduced in the first place. Given the need to expand the insurance coverage throughout the country, this

should not have been chosen as an avenue to raise revenue. With private health-care costs rising rapidly, insurance is the only way to shield those at the bottom of the pyramid from crippling medical expenses.

On the other hand, one of the big positives in the entire exercise is the effort to reduce the inverted duty structure created in many sectors. An inverted duty means that raw materials or inputs are taxed at a higher rate than the finished product. It has been corrected, for instance, in the textile sector with manmade fibre and yarn being brought down from 18 and 12 per cent, respectively, to a uniform 5 per cent.

The task must now
be to make it
simpler and easier
to use so that it truly
becomes the long-
awaited Good and
Simple Tax.

On the other hand, anomalies remain, with steel being taxed at 18 per cent while many finished products are at the lower 5 per cent.

The inverted duty structure creates huge complications for business as they pay greater tax on inputs than is being collected from the output. The tax authorities must iron out all these wrinkles and ensure there is genuine ease of doing business.

The classification of goods, which had created multiple disputes and sparked prolonged litigation, has now thankfully also been eased to a great extent. By placing the entire category of food into the lowest 5 per cent slab, it no longer matters whether popcorn is sold in the salted, caramel, packaged or loose versions. Similarly, other classifications have been made much broader, making compliance easier.

The next step being talked about is whether trade and industry will pass on the benefits of the tax cuts to consumers. This is not an issue that should be considered as another way to penalise trade and industry. Business associations have already pointed out the process of shifting to the new system will not be an easy one.

It is for revenue agencies to help enterprises to make the shift a relatively painless one, rather than adopt a punitive approach. There are bound to be some enterpris-

es seeking to defraud consumers, but the fact that tax rates have been brought down has been widely publicised, ensuring that the general public is educated well on the issue.

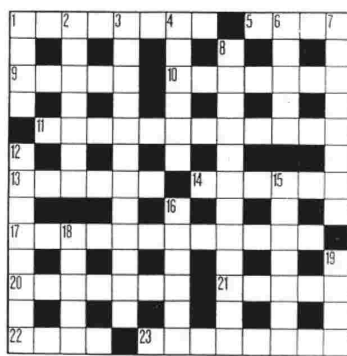
The revenue authorities should, thus, direct their energies towards assisting the majority of businesses moving towards the new system rather than trying to focus on the minority seeking to evade compliance.

While this major step towards GST reform is commendable, it must be viewed as the first in a process towards creating a simpler and effective tax. It must not be forgotten that the original concept of a single levy was expected to raise GDP growth considerably here as it had done elsewhere. It has so far been adopted in 140 countries, where revenues have risen along with GDP.

The National Council of Applied Economic Research had done a study prior to the GST implementation, projecting it would raise India's economic growth by 0.9 to 1.7 percentage points, assuming that it would be a single tax.

With multiple tax rates and cumbersome systems, it is far from the original objective. The task must now be to make it simpler and easier to use so that it truly becomes the long-awaited Good and Simple Tax.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- Biased (3-5)
- Kiln (4)
- Supply meagrely (5)
- Proposition to be proved (7)
- Aghast (6-6)
- Like better (6)
- Summon to return (6)
- Got in touch (12)
- Combat aircraft (7)
- To aim (gun) (5)
- To instance (4)
- Altruistic (8)

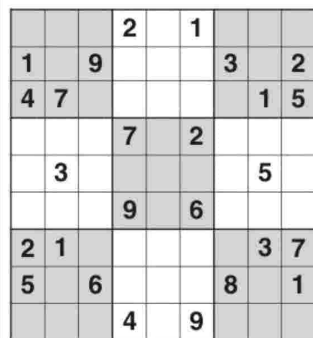
DOWN

- Supplant (4)
- Embodiment (7)
- For ever (2,10)
- Absolute (6)
- Objects of art (5)
- Blockhead (8)
- Finally have done with (3,4,2)
- Clearly defined (8)
- The mean (7)
- Break through (6)
- Great strength (5)
- Responsibility (4)

Yesterday's solution

Across: 1 High jinks, 8 Extra, 9 Scrappy, 10 Feeler, 11 Orator, 12 Subtract, 15 Original, 18 League, 20 Thrust, 21 Thrifty, 22 Range, 23 Put on hold.
Down: 2 Incur, 3 Hearth, 4 In person, 5 Select, 6 Stellar, 7 Fairy tale, 11 Out of turn, 13 Ballyhoo, 14 Vibrant, 16 Instep, 17 Banish, 19 Until.

SU DO KU



MEDIUM

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

4	3	6	1	8	5	9	7	2
1	7	5	2	6	9	3	4	8
2	8	9	7	3	4	1	5	6
8	4	1	5	7	6	2	9	3
7	6	3	9	2	8	4	1	5
5	9	2	4	1	3	8	6	7
9	2	8	4	5	7	6	3	1
3	5	8	6	4	1	7	2	9
6	1	7	3	9	2	5	8	4

CALENDAR

SEPTEMBER 10, 2025, WEDNESDAY	
Shaka Samvat	1947
Bhadrabad Shaka	19
Bhadrabad Purnima	26
Hijri	1447
Krishna Paksha Tithi 3, up to 3:39 pm	
Vidisha Yoga up to 8:32 pm	
Revati Nakshatra up to 4:03 pm	
Moon enters Ardra sign 4:03 pm	
Panchang ended	

FORECAST

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	34	25
New Delhi	34	25
Amritsar	33	25
Bathinda	32	25
Jalandhar	33	25
Ludhiana	34	25
Bhiwani	34	27
Hisar	34	26
Sirsa	34	27
Dharamsala	28	19
Manali	26	14
Shimla	25	16
Srinagar	30	15
Jammu	32	24
Kargil	24	12
Leh	21	09
Dehradun	34	24
Mussoorie	22	18



CONTRAPUNTO

One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship

- GEORGE ORWELL

After The Z-Quake

Nepal's youth uprising has left it in a flux. India should continue engaging, without appearing to influence outcomes

Nepal's social media ban didn't cause Oli's fall anymore than fruit seller Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation stirred the Arab Spring in Tunisia in 2010. Both were trigger events, but the unrest - arising from widespread discontent - had been building up for months. That Oli was busy cementing his position in his party, CPN-UML, on Sunday - to ensure a third term at its helm - only shows how out of touch he and his govt were with the youth's angst. Monday's brutal crackdown, that left at least 20 young protesters dead, made their position untenable.

Although Nepal army has taken charge of security now, the ongoing churn is a matter of grave concern for India, coming just over a year after a student revolution in Bangladesh dislodged the friendly regime of Sheikh Hasina. Nepal is geopolitically more significant as a buffer between India and China, and has largely played friend in the tense subcontinent. Although Oli is a known India-baiter, cussing up to China and raising thorny issues - CPN-UML again opposed India and China's agreement to trade across the Lipulekh Pass on Monday - India has responded cautiously. Modi on Tuesday described the violence as "heart-rending" and appealed "to all my brothers and sisters in Nepal to support peace".

Wait-and-watch is the best approach for now, because "intervention" of any kind will be resented, especially when rumours of a foreign hand in the "uprising" are rife. With China actively courting Nepal, India has traditionally been Nepal's biggest foreign investor and source of assistance. But since 2017, Chinese FDI commitments - not actual investments - have grown bigger. India no longer has a trade monopoly in Nepal. While it remains the main source of petrol and diesel, memories of 2015's unofficial trade blockade - imposed after the adoption of Nepal's new constitution - have made Nepal cautious. This year, China has grabbed the lead in Nepal's car market with EVs, pushing India to second place.

That said, Nepal doesn't seem too keen to hitch its wagon to China. It has struck a balance. For instance, joining China's BRI without taking on too much debt. It's naturally more comfortable with India, with which it has cultural, religious and linguistic ties. So, India must maintain its level of engagement, without being seen as influencing the course of events.

Losing Count In Bihar

Time is of essence for any drive to verify electorate's documents and ensure voter rolls are robust

Supreme Court's directive that Aadhaar must be accepted for claims, by Bihar's voters who were wrongly deleted, was foretold. India is struggling to synchronise two systems, paper-driven and digital-led, as it tries to transition to a tech interface between state and citizen. The scary joke is that Aadhaar is established as a flawed tech because its subcontractor layers are unregulated, but the identity's universality has made it an essential ID to simply move things along - a gas connection to a phone connection. That is not to say, as SC observed, that birth certificates or any of the remaining 11 documents allowed for voter roll inclusion cannot be forged.

With 20 days to go before voter rolls for Bihar's assembly elections are finalised, another SIR-driven exercise has created confusion - rationalisation of poll booths so each has no more than 1,200 voters, down from 1,500. Poll booths have increased to almost 91k from around 71k. Booths are re-numbered and BLOs are newly assigned. All efficiently done. But voters wanting to use Aadhaar, and those raising objections, must deal with a new BLO. The new BLO has barely 15 days to source voters' documents from his predecessor BLO. Names may be all digitised but not all documents of verification are uploaded. With poll booths re-numbered, the handover is confusing BLOs, hampering the verification drive.

It's this kind of chaos that a hurried SIR cannot avoid. As it is, EC's counsel told court that petitioners' insistence on Aadhaar and indicative of an approach more exclusionary than inclusionary. Bihar SIR has shown that digitisation/tech can't be solutions in and of themselves, and that any exercise to ensure robust voter rolls needs time for thorough review. Any SIR held mere months ahead of any polls simply risks losing count.

Out of alignment

The ins and outs of being pally with whom, when and how

Jug Suraiya



Ministry of External Affairs, MEA, sat at a desk on which was spread out a large map of the world, covered with compasses, dividers, protractors, and other gizmos, and scratched its collective head as it tried to figure out the theorems of geo-political geometry.

MEA signed a collective sigh. It had all been so simple in the good old days of Non-Aligned Movement, which was not a movement but a state of reassuring immobility.

Non-Alignment meant being not aligned, ie, not in line with America and its allies, while being doubly Non-Aligned as in being non-Aligned with Soviet Union and its satellites like Cuba and Egypt.

Then - poof! - Soviet Union vanished in a puff of smoke of dialectical materialism, India liberalised, and globalisation gobbled the world.

India became non-Aligned with America, thanks to China being a baddy-baddy for both.

Then America's baddy-buddy, India, became a 50% baddy, or a baddy-buddy, for buying oil from Russia, and so got clobbered with the bluntest instrument of 50% tariffs.

But India who'd been non-Aligned with Russia when it was Soviet Union, said oils well that tends well, and continued dealing with Moscow. India is also looking to see if it can turn China from being a 1962 baddy into being a 2023 baddy-buddy, and be at least 50% aligned with it.

This is a ticklish problem because, 1962 apart, China's all-weather baddy-buddy is nuclear sabre-rattling Pakistan, India's arch adversary, whom China aided and abetted during Operation Sindoor. Moreover, tariffs notwithstanding, India is part of Quad, an American anti-allignment against China.

MEA signed again. Maybe instead of Non-Alignment, have Multi-Alignment, like multitasking, and be aligned on Mondays and Wednesdays with America, Tuesdays and Thursdays with Russia, and Fridays and Saturdays with China, taking a much-needed Alignment holiday on Sunday.

That's the trouble with Multi-Alignment, concluded MEA. One side's Alignment is another side's Misalignment.

This Election Is About That Election

Radhakrishnan doesn't just replace Dhankhar, he increases BJP's play in Tamil Nadu, where polls are due next year. But the party has chosen short-term opportunism over long-term brand building in TN

R Jagannathan



The election of CP Radhakrishnan as Vice President of India, after the unexpected exit of Dhankhar in July, is less an elevation of Radhakrishnan to vice presidency, the most notable BJP gambit had been the discovery of a charismatic Tamil leader in K Annamalai, who almost single-handedly managed to get BJP's vote share in 2024 Lok Sabha elections into double-digits.

His selection as NDA's candidate was about putting the TN Dravidian ecosystem in a dilemma. This was quickly countered by INDIA Alliance, putting up a Telugu candidate, former SC judge B Sudershan Reddy, in the hope that NDA's allies in the state would face a similar *dharma sankat*. The election results, however, suggest that regional solidarity did not play much of a role in the final outcome.

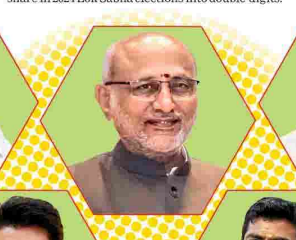
The question is whether BJP's gambit is enough to give it serious political purchase in a state that has traditionally been hostile to northern parties, India's obsession with Dravidian identity. If in Kerala the preponderance of minority communities makes a BJP political ascent without allies near impossible, in Tamil Nadu there is the added speed-breaker of anti-north, anti-Brahmin sentiment that regional parties can hope to cash in on. Local Dravidian parties have also gone to substantial lengths to deny cultural linkages with the north.

BJP under Modi sees Tamil Nadu as the ultimate challenge, and for this it has left no stone unturned to court voters. From installing the Sengol in the new Parliament building to publishing the Kashi Tamil Sangamam, an annual event to celebrate the civilisational bonds between Kashi and the Tamil people, and the PM himself offering prayers at Gangaikola Cholapuram, where a grand temple for Lord Shiva was built by Chola emperor Rajendra Chola-I, BJP has spared no effort to break through its acceptance as a significant player in Tamil politics.

Among other things promised during his Gangaikola Cholapuram visit, Modi said tall statues of Rajaraja Chola and his son Rajendra Chola would be built in the state. This claiming of the spiritual

heritage of the Cholas (incomparable temple builders, whose architectural achievements include the Brihadiswara temple in Thanjavur) is at odds with how Dravidian parties like to see the three Tamil dynasties (the Pallavas, Pandiyas and Cholas) discussed.

Before NDA's obvious edge in vice presidency, the most notable BJP gambit had been the discovery of a charismatic Tamil leader in K Annamalai, who almost single-handedly managed to get BJP's vote share in 2024 Lok Sabha elections into double-digits.



But short-term realities often undercut long-term hopes in politics. During his stint as state chief, Annamalai sought to build BJP's own base by attacking both DMK and the Eadapaddi Palaniswami-led ADMK. He did this even while bringing some of the offshoot parties of erstwhile ADMK into the NDA fold. This led Palaniswami to exit NDA before the Lok Sabha elections.

Annamalai himself lost to DMK in Coimbatore, a constituency from which Radhakrishnan was elected to Lok Sabha in the past, and which DMK converted into a prestige battle to cut Annamalai down to size at a time when his stature was growing. Now, with assembly elections looming large, BJP

chose to sideline Annamalai so it could ally with ADMK again. Keen to shore up its support in Parliament and to dent DMK in Tamil Nadu, BJP chose to make compromises to ensure that MK Stalin's party does not gain through a division of opposition votes.

However, there is now a new political force in Tamil Nadu, with actor Jeyaraj Vijay launching his own political party, Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (Tamil Victory Party). Before him, MG Ramachandran, J Jayalalithaa, Vijayakanth and Sivaji Ganesan were the other actors to try their hand at politics. Only the first two made it big, landing the chief minister's chair many times. Will Vijay make it?

Initial reports suggest he will indeed impact the next assembly elections, although we don't know at whose cost. It does seem that some sections of the church - a powerful institution in Tamil Nadu, with support in DMK as well - may go with Vijay. He has also chosen to target both DMK and BJP, which is seen as an effort to grab chunks of the core Dravidian vote along with the Christian vote. The church has been a strong opponent of BJP and the Sangh, since they oppose its conversion agenda.

Net-net, BJP has its work cut out in Tamil Nadu, with or without ADMK. Yes, widely seen as an upper caste party, it has now widened its base in western Tamil Nadu, where ADMK too finds strong support from the Gounder community. But the way other parties are able to use anti-Brahminism to keep BJP perpetually on the backfoot makes the ADMK alliance critical for its political relevance in the short term.

To make an impact on its own, BJP needs a solid base of at least 30% of the vote, which it has not even in Tamil Nadu, any alliance which can garner around 35% of the vote stands a good chance of winning a majority. BJP as of now is far from reaching that level. To grow, it needs to fight at least one or two elections on its own (along with minor allies). This can't be done if ADMK is its senior partner, which moreover refuses to even concede that BJP will be part of govt if alliance wins.

BJP has chosen short-term opportunism over long-term brand building. It needs more solo efforts, and more strong regional leaders apart from Annamalai to overcome the Dravidian mindblock.

Why Nepal's Young Are Raging. What Now For Its Old Elite?

A political class presiding over a spoils system, which spawned a group of privileged 'nepo kids', underestimated Gen-Z frustration. Around 8 lakh young people exit the country every year. Now, even Nepal's new constitutional system, adopted in 2015, is at risk, writes a Nepali journalist

Kanshya Shah



Nepal's PM KP Oli was forced to resign Tuesday amid rising pressure following state brutality against protesting Gen-Z protesters the day before. His exit raises serious questions about the relevance of Nepal's leadership and the new political system established through the 2015 constitution.

It's clear the power-wielding trioka, comprising Oli of CPN-UML, Nepal Congress president Sher Bahadur Deuba and Maoist chief Prachanda, is facing the worst wrath of the Nepali youth, exasperated by the political leadership's lack of accountability in governance and rampant corruption. What comes next is the big question. It feels like Nepal is in uncharted territory if one goes by constitutional interpretation, all options must be explored before parliament is dissolved. Under the circumstances, a new govt can be formed from within the current parliament.

In fact, in 2021 Nepal's Supreme Court was clear on this matter. However, the anger on Nepal's streets is unlikely to brook such an arrangement. There is also talk of a party takeover. But this too is in the realm of last resort and fraught with tricky issues like the legacy of the civil war and former Maoist combatants.

How did things come to this pass? There's no denying Oli got totally misread the situation and sentiments of Nepali youth. There are three key factors. First, Oli govt's non-tolerance of social media criticism. It's well-known Oli is not supporter of social media and has been wanting to crack down on these new-age platforms since his earlier tenure. He used a year-old Supreme Court directive to give one week's notice to all these social media channels that had not registered in Nepal to comply with govt norms. But in making this hasty decision, govt misjudged the

repercussions, mainly from the youth among whom Instagram and YouTube are highly popular.

In fact, there's a clear disconnect today between the leaders and Nepal's young people, who are now hooked on Korean, Indonesian, Japanese and other Southeast Asian cultures. Social media is vital for them. Plus, as a significant number of young Nepalis study and work abroad, social media is also a tool to connect back home. The fallout is thus a result of lack of empathy on govt's part.



Corruption is the second factor. Almost all top Nepali leaders are implicated in some corruption scandal or the other. The Bhanesee refugees scam, Giri Bandhu tea estate scandal, misappropriation of cooperative funds, visit visa extortion scandal, and the vast number of corruption cases in the construction sector among others have plagued the image of the country and the govt. This is one of the main agendas of the ongoing Gen-Z protests.

The youth is also infuriated by the lavish lifestyle of what they call the 'nepo kids' - children of politicians. This seems unacceptable in a country struggling to revive its economy and where thousands of youngsters

leave the country daily in search of jobs. As per one estimate, around 8L Nepalis leave for foreign employment each year.

Third, the Nepali leadership was reluctant to draw lessons from the region's changing geopolitical scenario in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka for example - and the fall of powerful regimes due to lack of empathy towards genuine public grievances. The repeat of the same old faces in top executive posts combined with non-delivery in terms of development reforms brought widespread resentment and condemnation.

It's unfortunate that even with the downfall of monarchy and establishment of a democratic, republican, secular order, Nepal's leadership has failed to uphold the objectives of the last two Jana Andolan (people's movements in 1990 and 2006). The mandate was for a new Nepal - one that's progressive, inclusive and people-centric. The gains of the peace process made after the bloody civil war are now in peril with Maoist leader Prachanda also under attack.

Oli govt did try to wriggle out of the situation by pointing fingers at infiltrators during Monday's agitation. Gen-Z protesters too have acknowledged that some cadre of the political opposition, other outfits and miscreants did infiltrate their protests, especially in the parliament building area. But this is being perceived as an excuse of the state to resort to brutality. Gen-Z is in no mood to relinquish the streets as anger seems out of control in the Kathmandu Valley and other cities.

Add to this the fact that Oli found himself in the middle of this turmoil after his recent visit to China - for the SCO summit and Beijing's victory parade - where he raised the issue of Lipulekh with Xi. This did not send a good signal to New Delhi. Oli's planned visit to India later this month was also abruptly called off.

As for Nepal's political democracy, it will take anger over the killing of protesters to first subside to contemplate next steps in this tumultuous journey.

Calvin & Hobbes



Sacred space

Compassion is not a relationship between the healer and the wounded. It's a relationship between equals. Only when we know our own darkness well can we be present with the darkness of others. Compassion becomes real when we recognise our shared humanity.

Pema Chödrön

Caring For Young And Sensitive Hearts

Anil K Rajvanshi

Sept 10 is observed as World Suicide Prevention Day. According to govt of India figures (National Crime Records Bureau), around 13,000 students (7.6% of the total suicides in India) committed suicide in 2022.

It is imperative to examine pressures on young minds that force them to commit suicide. And how have we come to this sorry situation where the students lose their desire to live? The young and formative minds are more prone to come under pressure. At a young age, the brain is powerful and unhampered by memory knots. This makes it sensitive, and such sensitive minds (which are also highly intelligent) easily buckle under pressures.

From early childhood, children are conditioned to excel in exams and achieve good grades. Consequently, we have become an exam-passing society, which

not only puts tremendous pressure on young minds but also suppresses their curiosity and inventiveness. Society must introspect on why we stress so much on grades. Most children are afraid of failing exams. The pressure to perform creates fear. Such strong fears created at a young age make the mind highly strong, and any trigger can break it.

Also, during young age, sexual hormones rage in the body. These energies need to be channelled. If left unattended, they create havoc in the brain and lead to loneliness. This is not a green signal for promiscuous behaviour but a warning to adults to recognise signs and help in their sublimation.

If we can create conditions that allow us to sublimate these strong desires into something positive, for example, by having children engage in

challenging physical and creative work and presenting them with interesting tasks, then loneliness may be reduced. One way to help children is to instil in them a desire and interest in reading. If children read a lot, it will be good for their mind and their development.

Reading helps create an internal mental movie, which uses a major portion of the brain. This expands the mind's horizon by allowing one to think, assimilate, and reflect on new ideas. This is far better than the information onslaught from social media and mobile phones.

physical interaction that children lack increases loneliness. In older days, there was no way to avoid physical contact; it helped in overcoming loneliness and resolving mental issues. So, how can all of us help in reducing suicide among students?

● By creating curiosity among children and making them aware that there are other things in life than those passing eyes - making them aware that there are other avenues of employment besides engineering and medicine. Parents need to spend more time with their children.

● By creating an interesting environment in school that children become interested and curious about issues surrounding them. Once their bright formative years are over, the idea, then they will vigorously pursue it. In its absence, they revert to social media and idle chat.

● By enabling development of empathy and compassion in them through counselling services or spiritual practices. Being empathetic to others and compassionate towards others people's suffering to a greater degree reduces the sense of aloofness and helps in developing resilience.



THE GOAN EVERYDAY

Obstacles are things a person sees when he takes his eyes off his goal.
E. Joseph Cossman

Digital discontent: Nepal crisis has lessons for others

The crisis in violence-torn Nepal highlights a volatile mix of youth activism, social media, government censorship, and governance issues. The government's ban on more than two dozen social media platforms, including Facebook and X, has led to violent clashes, resulting in casualties and unrest. This situation reflects a broader global challenge of striking a delicate balance between state power and individual freedoms, especially as digital platforms become the voice for the youth.

Nepal's protests, mainly led by Gen Z, demonstrate that social media is not just a communication tool but also a catalyst for political action. Young people make up a large part of Nepal's population and rely heavily on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Reddit to organise, express their dissent, and highlight issues of corruption and inequality. Their online outrage quickly gave way to street protests, demonstrating that digital spaces have become essential for political expression.

The Nepal government's attempt to limit social media activism through a ban on platforms backfired. The government claimed the ban was to fight misinformation, hate speech, and fraud, but sections saw it as censorship aimed at silencing opposition. The ban disrupted daily life, impacting businesses, tourism, and personal communications, while also increasing public anger. The protests, which resulted in multiple deaths and injuries, showed that restricting online platforms can have serious consequences.

This scenario essentially highlights two sides of social media: One about freedom of expression, and the other about guarding individual freedoms and drawing boundaries to guard against misleading information. The Nepal crisis illustrates how a simplistic regulatory approach — focused only on control — does not solve deeper issues like corruption, economic inequality, and political disenfranchisement. Governments need to understand that social media serves both as a platform for expressing grievances and as a means for dialogue and reform.

India, with similar demographic and socio-economic conditions, can learn important lessons from Nepal's experience since there is an overlap. India's youth, too, are heavily dependent on social media and have been using the platform to express themselves fearlessly. Also, like Nepal, unemployment is a major issue that India is also grappling with. While India's leadership haven't taken social media critics lightly, there has been a measured tolerance hinging on accountability without overtly resorting to extreme steps like blanket censorship.

A crucial aspect is the role of government regulation. Social media is flooded with false information and misleading narratives, sometimes threatening social unity and stoking unrest. In the guise of regulating misuse, the government cannot impose a blanket ban on what is now becoming the voice of common citizens. Yes, protecting people's dignity, privacy, and stopping misinformation are crucial, but not at the cost of stifling all voices. There is a need for extreme caution here.

The crisis in Nepal offers key lessons for India and other democracies across the world, where social media has become a part of day-to-day lives. Social media can empower youth and force a change; it has led to reforms and policy decisions and has been a crucial tool in the hands of the helpless. Governments must recognise their responsibility and listen, engage, and reform. Suppressing online dissent through bans and censorship might create a temporary façade of control, but it ultimately risks sparking larger unrest. Upholding freedom of expression, installing reasonable checks and balances, and encouraging fair dialogue are crucial steps for ensuring social stability in an expanding digital space.

OPEN SPACE >>

Inadvisable to have shopping malls near bus terminus

Nearly a decade and a half after the ambitious plan to transform the Margao Bus Stand into an ultra-modern bus terminus, the initiative has now reportedly been revived by floating a fresh tender. Margao is in dire need of a state-of-the-art transport hub which will serve the commuting people of Salcete and South Goa at large. It is learnt that the government has reportedly proposed to allocate prime land to a private player under PPP mode to set up shopping malls and hotels in lieu of building the bus-terminal and in the process may have compromised the bus-stand infrastructure. Having shopping malls near bus-terminals can have several disadvantages. Malls generate significant traffic, and when combined with a bus stand, this can lead to severe congestion and gridlock, slowing down both bus services and general traffic flow. The presence of a large shopping mall can negatively impact small, independent businesses in the area, potentially leading to their decline or closure. Shopping malls require vast amounts of space, often leading to the destruction of natural habitats and the replacement of open areas with concrete and parking lots.

ADELMO FERNANDES, Vasco

Road safety cannot ignore NH-66

If authorities can ensure that the elevated corridor adheres to the standards prescribed by law, public faith will be restored



ADV MOSES PINTO

>The writer is a Doctoral Researcher working under the Alliance of European Universities and has presented his research works at various Academic Conferences.

Road Safety Week has been a fixture in Goa's public calendar, filled with rallies, seminars, and slogans. Its declared purpose is to reduce accidents, instil discipline, and protect lives. Yet the impact of such symbolic weeks is limited unless paired with structural reform. The state's most pressing test is visible along the NH-66 elevated corridor, where breaches in planning and execution have converted a flagship infrastructure project into a corridor of hazards rather than of safety.

Statutory expectations

Road safety is not merely aspirational; it is anchored in statutory duties. The Motor Vehicles Act 1988 empowers enforcement authorities to regulate traffic, mandate safety devices, and penalise violations. The Indian Roads Congress guidelines and Ministry of Road Transport and Highways circulars prescribe standards for signage, lane demarcation, and protective barriers. The Supreme Court Committee on Road Safety has repeatedly emphasised the four-E formula — engineering, enforcement, education, and emergency care (S. Rajasekaran v Union of India, SC). When any one element fails, as in the engineering lapses on NH-66, the result is predictable: loss of life and erosion of public trust.

The case of NH-66

The NH-66 elevated corridor was projected as an artery to ease congestion and provide safer passage along Goa's coast. Instead, observations during recent petitions before the High Court revealed unfinished crash barriers, poorly marked diversions, and unsafe pedestrian access. Reports highlighted stretches without functional lighting and drainage, contributing to collisions during monsoon months. The paradox of holding Road Safety Week while allowing such a corridor to operate exemplifies a governance gap between awareness campaigns and ground realities.

The irony deepens when potholes dominate everyday travel even during the very week dedicated to safety. Editorials in the Goan press have pointed out that road users are instructed to practise discipline while authorities themselves permit surfaces to deteriorate. The citizen is penalised for not wearing a helmet, but the agency responsible for road maintenance faces little accountability when potholes cause accidents. This imbalance undermines the moral authority of awareness drives.



Road safety in Goa requires integration: engineering integrity first, supported by technological enforcement



Seasonal transition

Goa's road conditions change dramatically between the monsoon and summer months. Heavy rainfall leaves behind potholes, eroded shoulders, and weakened crash barriers. When the rain subsides, motorists suddenly face altered road geometry: temporary puddles give way to hidden craters, loose gravel emerges, and faded markings are not immediately restored. The transition period is therefore a time of heightened risk. Vehicles that adjust to monsoon caution often accelerate into summer speed, unaware that the roads remain compromised. A genuine Road Safety Week must explicitly address this seasonal hazard by mandating post-monsoon safety audits, immediate resurfacing of highways, and repainting of lane markings before summer traffic peaks. Without this bridging exercise, accident rates will continue to spike during the seasonal shift.

The state has announced plans to install AI-powered traffic cameras to detect violations automatically. Technology can indeed deter rash driving and red-light jumping. Yet cameras cannot compensate for missing crash barriers or sudden lane drops. Artificial intelligence will record the last seconds of a violation but cannot reverse the structural negligence that led to it. Road safety in Goa requires integration: engineering integrity first, supported by technological enforcement.

Pedestrians and cyclists neglected

The Global Road Safety Week theme earlier this year was protection of pedestrians and cyclists. Goa's elevated highway project has failed to incorporate adequate pedestrian crossings, cycling lanes, or refuge points. The absence of grade-separated safe passages forces vulnerable users into motorised lanes. This contradicts both international best practice and the state's own stated objective of inclusive mobility. Road Safety Week must not remain confined to drivers and riders; it must centre the most vulnerable road users.

The doctrine of constitutional tort places liability upon state authorities where negligence results in violation of the right to life under Article 21 (see Nilabati Behera v State of Orissa, SC). In the context of NH-66, accidents traceable to absence

of safety features could attract such liability. Judicial review remains the corrective mechanism when administrative assurances are not met. The High Court of Bombay at Goa has been moved in public interest petitions, reflecting the citizen's last resort to enforce accountability.

If Road Safety Week is to be more than ceremonial, it must be linked with measurable deliverables. These include: Completion of all crash barriers and pedestrian underpasses before any further inauguration of NH-66 stretches;

Independent safety audits by accredited engineers, with reports placed in the public domain. A binding timeline for pothole rectification across state and national highways; Integration of emergency medical response units along accident-prone zones of the corridor; Without such benchmarks, public campaigns risk becoming empty ritual.

Community engagement through discipline

Civil society groups such as MARG in Goa have long demonstrated that road sense can be cultivated through school programmes. The innovative concept of Traffic Yoga — treating discipline on the road as a daily practice akin to breathing exercises — can serve as a soft-power complement to hard infrastructure. By embedding mindfulness into pedestrian, rider, and driver behaviour, campaigns can create a culture where enforcement is supported by self-discipline.

Goa's global image as a tourism destination suffers when headlines report fatal accidents on highways and unsafe roads. Visitors expect not only scenic beauty but also safe mobility. Ensuring that the elevated corridor is genuinely safe will reinforce the credibility of state institutions. Tourism policy and road safety are therefore not separate silos but mutually reinforcing obligations.

The essence of Road Safety Week must evolve from mere symbolism to structural responsibility. NH-66 has become the litmus test. If authorities can ensure that the elevated corridor adheres to the standards prescribed by law, public faith will be restored. If not, every slogan raised during awareness rallies will ring hollow. Road safety is not a week-long observance; it is a daily constitutional duty.

THE INBOX >>

Why is Colva panchayat not holding gram sabhas?

I see gram sabhas held at various villages in Goa and taking strong stand/resolutions on various important matters; and then there are quite a few villages where this is not happening as per the mandated time line. Colva village panchayat in Salcete, has missed conducting the gram sabha at least 2 times this year in 2025 (April and July) and this is even more critical, as there are serious points to be addressed; including the issue of construction licences of multi housing/commercial etc being issued controversially, illegalities including in CRZ where authorities are turning a blind eye and other issues. Other than putting onus on citizens to file letter to BDO, is there no responsibility of the BDO, Director of Panchayats, Panchayat Minister Mauvin Godinho that this basic governance ensures the villages have the gram sabha as mandated? Goa CM Pramod Sawant must hand the panchayat ministry to another MLA. ARWIN MESQUITA, Colva

Let us emulate integrity of disliked colonisers

On August 5, Angela Rayner, UK's powerful leader in the Labour Party and the Deputy Prime Minister, resigned after an independent ethics inquiry found that she had underpaid tax on a recently purchased house. She resigned for having broken the Ministerial Code of Conduct by failing to obtain the advice from a specialist tax expert concerning the actual stamp duty to be paid on a property located on the south coast of England. In India, this would be considered a flimsy and frivolous reason to resign. A recent report by the Association for

Not permitting processions unconstitutional

The South Goa collector had recently denied permission to our Muslim brethren to hold religious procession in some places in South Goa based on representation from a Hinduva organization threatening law and order situation if the procession is carried out. Denial of permission to carry out religious procession is a violation of a community's right to worship which is a fundamental right guaranteed under the Constitution of India. Carrying out processions has religious significance. Denial of permission to carry out religious procession based on the threat of a law and order situation by an organization who wants to disturb the peace and harmony in Goa and create communal tension shows the incompetence of the South Goa District Collector. Action should be taken by the Government against those organisations creating communal tensions and ban them from Goa otherwise this vice will spread to other places and every single day we will hear of communal tensions in Goa created by the same people. I would like to caution those organizations and their supporters including government officials creating communal tensions in Goa for vested interests. AVELINO DE SA, Miramar

Democratic Reforms revealed that 47 per cent of ministers in India have declared criminal cases against them. These include serious charges like murder, kidnapping and crimes against women. We may dislike our colonisers, but let us try to emulate their virtue, decency, integrity, honesty, righteousness, and uprightness. And the willingness to resign even for a 'crime' of undervaluing their property. SRIDHAR DTYER, Caranzalem

Seeking IITs even as our university ranking slips

The Goa government's efforts to establish institutions like IITs involve acquiring large areas of green land for campuses. If the goal is to improve education, one wonders why existing universities and institutions in Goa,

which are facing challenges, aren't prioritized for reform. We've seen news about our university slipping in rankings. It's notable that many seats are taken by students from outside Goa. Education should aim to nurture skilled citizens. Perhaps the focus could be more on quality and accessibility rather than on prestigious institutions and revenue. This shouldn't come at the cost of Goa's natural spaces. ALWIN FERNANDES, Benaulim

Heralding the death of a syncretic India

One of the saddest things amidst the political noise on Sanatan dharma and weaponisation of Hinduism is the eclipsing of India's non-denominational spirituality that emphasizes self-realization, social service and humanity over rituals and festivals. Shirdi Sai Baba, Guru Nanak, Yogananda, Narayan Guru, Ramana Maharishi and Thiruvalluvar are among key gurus/saints in the syncretic tradition prevalent in India. Each of them was a blessing to the country, but now fake gurus peddle pop for the ruling dispensation for majority votes rule the roost. All you hear about these days are "Hindu khatri mein hai", "Akanand Bharat", "Mughals destroyed temples", "Vishwaguru", and other such toxic rubbish. That the country has gone South due to these shenanigans is lost on no one but many choose to keep quiet out of fear of retribution. Dharma has been replaced by drama and dogma, religion by rabidity, seva by swarth, poaja by pompousness, matri by mafia and peaceful co-existence by bigoted polarization. India is a society in vicious churn about to be flushed down the dustbin of history, all thanks to the leaders of today. VINAY DWIVEDI, Benaulim



Send your letters to us at editor@thegoan.net. Letters must be 150-200 words and mention the writer's name and location

ARBITRATION IN INDIA

FINALITY DEFERRED — WHY ENFORCEMENT AGENCY REMAINS THE ACHILLES' HEEL OF INDIA'S ARBITRATION REGIME

OPINION

SIDDHARTHA KUMAR

Arbitration in India was meant to be justice on fast-forward: nimble, discreet, final. In practice, it is more like watching a slow-motion replay long after the whistle, with the ball still in dispute and the referee taking notes for a memoir.

Parties fight for years, win an award, and then learn the cruel punchline: "final" is a term of art, not of fact. The Act declares an arbitral award shall be enforced "as if" it was a decree. That "as if" is the hinge on which the whole absurd door swings.

The legislative menu has been lavish. The 2015 amendment abolished the automatic stay, forcing losers to beg for one instead of being gifted it on filing. The Supreme Court in *BCCI v. Kochi Cricket* confirmed this shift, holding that awards are enforceable unless a stay is expressly granted. It strapped a clock to tribunals twelve months for a decision as if time itself could be bullied into discipline. The 2019 upgrade paraded the Arbitration Council of India, fresh confidentiality rules, and promises of institutional rigour. The 2021 flourish, sold as a safeguard, let courts halt enforcement on a prima facie sniff of fraud or corruption. Ironically, even as the Supreme Court narrowed "public policy" in cases like

Renusagar and *Ssangyong*, Parliament widened discretion through this fraud filter undoing a decade of judicial restraint.

The trajectory of amendments tells its own story. The 2015 Act promised urgency by removing the automatic stay that once greeted every Section 34 challenge like a welcome mat, and by twelving-month clock meant to bully proceedings into discipline. But the promise faded quickly: stays re-emerged through generous judicial discretion, and the statutory clock was tamed by routine extensions until deadlines lost their sting. The 2019 Act looked bolder still, introducing the Arbitration Council of India to grade institutions, embedding confidentiality into the statute, and shifting appointments from courts to designated arbitral bodies.

Yet, in practice, the Council has remained largely ornamental, confidentiality evaporation, and institutional arbitration is still more slogan than system. Intended as a shield for integrity, it has too often been wielded as a sword of obstruction, with warmed-over allegations already dissected in arbitration resorted to delay payment.

Each of these amendments

carried the right verbs expedite, streamline, strengthen but verbs on paper are no match for habits in court. Adjournments, expansive stays, and procedural resurrection have drained the reforms of their promise. Reform without enforcement discipline is not progress; it is ceremony, and this is precisely where other jurisdictions have outpaced us, by making their amendments bite in the courtroom, not just shine on paper.

On paper, this is Singapore with a warmer climate. In reality, it is Singapore without the speed or the fear of missing a deadline.

The obstructionist's play-book is now a classic. File a Section 34 challenge like a two-month clock meant to bully proceedings into discipline. But the promise faded quickly: stays re-emerged through generous judicial discretion, and the statutory clock was tamed by routine extensions until deadlines lost their sting. The 2019 Act looked bolder still, introducing the Arbitration Council of India to grade institutions, embedding confidentiality into the statute, and shifting appointments from courts to designated arbitral bodies.

Meanwhile, the clock exacts its own toll. The award quietly chews through the award. Interest drains the victor's balance sheet. Projects go cold. Credit lines close. For a small contractor who delivered on a government job, this isn't legal theory it's a court-certified slide into insolvency.

Foreign investors are not impressed by the poetry of our amendments. They measure jurisdictions by the distance between winning on paper and seeing the money

in their account. By that yardstick, India's aspiration to be an arbitration "hub" is less a destination than a distant dream.

The Delhi Airport Metro Express award Rs. 4,600 crore and a full Supreme Court seal of approval should have been a case study in closure. Instead, it was a masterclass in how to turn victory into a sequel. At smaller scales, the choreography is identical: the loser doesn't need to overturn the award; they only need to outlast the winner.

The judiciary says the right things. It has narrowed "public policy," trimmed Section 34's reach, and repeated that enforcement is not a second trial. But philosophy, however noble, cannot outrun the diary of a busy court. If stays are handed out without demanding meaningful security, if procedural fluff is rewarded with six-month adjournments, the message is clear: delay is not an accident it's a strategy.

Elsewhere, the incentives are reversed. In Singapore, enforcement is measured in weeks, not winters; a stay often requires a deposit large enough to make the loser think twice. London corals challenges into the narrow pen of points of law, and only with leave. In Hong Kong, "pro-enforcement bias" isn't a slogan for conferences it's a courtroom reflex. Their statutes look much like ours. The difference is that they mean it.

India doesn't need another amendment to admire itself in. It needs muscle memory. Dedicated benches that live

and breathe enforcement. Timelines that hurt when missed. Punitive costs for challenges that insult the paper they're printed on. Digital tracking that leaves no petition to die quietly in a registry's dark drawer.

Public sector defendants bring their own theatre. Many awards are against PSUs, where the safest career move is to appeal everything and pay nothing. Officers know that paying today might mean answering tomorrow to some audit committee with a taste for hindsight. This culture won't shift with moral persuasion. It will change only when there's explicit safe harbor for those who comply absent a credible ground to resist, and personal consequences for those who stall without cause.

The 2021 fraud-stay rule is a lesson in good intentions weaponized. Safeguarding integrity is vital no one wants to undermine a tainted award. But prima facie must mean immediate, concrete, particularized evidence, not warmed-over allegations that have already been cross-examined to death. Used tightly, it's a filter. Used loosely, it's a sinkhole.

Institutional arbitration is gaining a foothold in India. Emergency relief is no longer an exotic import. But the prestige of an arbitral seat is not earned in the hearing room it's earned in the enforcement court. If the journey from award to payment is slow, uneven, or hostage to procedural gamesmanship, serious parties will keep seeking arbitrations abroad, using

Indian enforcement only when it suits their leverage. Strip away the policy speak and it comes down to trust. Arbitration promises speed and finality. Parties pay for that promise in tribunal fees, in counsel hours, in foregoing the comfort of multiple appeals. When the state allows the losing party to turn enforcement into a second season, it is not simply breaching a commercial deal; it is undermining faith in its own word.

That deceptively bland phrase "enforced as if it were a decree" is the giveaway. The "as if" is the open door through which delay marches in. The task is not to rewrite the phrase; it is to redeem it. Enforcement must feel like execution, not negotiation.

A party should walk into court with funds or security ready, prepared to argue fast and lose fast if that's the outcome. Judges should have both the tools and the appetite to say "no" without ceremony when a challenge is camouflage for stalling. And when a challenge is real, it should be disposed of at speed, with reasons sharp enough to deter copycats.

India has the lawyers, the judges, the commercial volume to be an arbitration hub. What it lacks is rhythm. The habit of saying "tomorrow" must be replaced with the discipline of saying "now." Delay must be made expensive. Compliance must be made dull and speed the most underrated virtue in law must become habit.

Adv. Siddhartha Kumar is Senior Partner, Dua Associates

PERSPECTIVE

THE BATTLE FOR BIHAR

What are the issues that are at play in Bihar? The Congress and the Rashtriya Janata Dal have been raising the issue of the Voter Identification review being carried out by the Election Commission and have recently concluded the Voter Adhikar Yatra. While Rahul Gandhi is spearheading this yatra and has become the face of the Vote Chori campaign against the Modi Government, the RJD has lent its weight behind the Congress on this issue as have other INDIA bloc allies such as the Samajwadi Party, DMK, TMC and even the Aam Admi Party though the last mentioned did not the Bihar yatra. However when it comes specifically to Bihar then Tejashwi Yadav is keen to make joblessness and the lack of employment opportunities in the state his main issue. He feels that this would have a direct connection with the youth. Perhaps keeping the youth vote in mind, the RJD leader also announced that if voted back to power, he would extend the reservations to 85 percent. This has puzzled many for he is reaching out to a vote bank that is already with the RJD. Instead what he has done is to push the upper caste vote that was unhappy with the BJP and was toying with the idea of moving to Prashant Kishor, back towards the BJP in a move to consolidate the anti RJD (and thereby anti Congress vote).

The BJP will kick off its campaign mid September and while its not clear what will be its key issues, they are certain to raise the charge of goonda raj and lawlessness against Lalu Yadav's party. Also don't forget that it was from Bihar that the PM announced Operation Sindoor. So some nationalist fervour will also be part of the BJP-JDU rhetoric. As will the move to undertake a caste based census. This originally was a demand of the opposition but having announced its implementation the BJP wants to take ownership of the entire idea - and the PM does know how to market himself well.

So the question that one is asking at the conclusion of Rahul Gandhi's Voter Adhikar yatra is that can the opposition convert the crowds into votes? And more importantly having concluded the yatra before the PM and the BJP has begun its campaign, has the opposition peaked too soon?

PRIYA SAHGAOL

Next-Gen GST reform: A boon for the Indian economy

OPINION

DR KARNATI KIRAN KUMAR

The Government of India has taken the 'Next-Gen GST reform' under the able leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, which is a path-breaking decision to condense the goods and services tax slabs and reduce and eliminate the tax rates on various products. To establish a uniform tax system and avoid the cascading effect of tax-on-tax, the Indian government began implementing GST from 1st July 2017. The GST Council introduced various tax slabs of 28%, 18%, 12%, and 5%, along with a compensation cess. The primary objectives were to promote transparency, increase state revenue, and stimulate economic growth.

By introducing GST, it formalised and streamlined the tax revenue collection without having tussles. People of the country followed the government's decision. They bore taxes even though it was burdensome since its implementation, where they thought marginal social benefits could replace the marginal income sacrifice. In various forms, some sections have benefited, and some sections of society dissent on the government tax sys-

tem, especially those paying income tax. Income taxpayers had to pay the tax on their income and bear various forms of GST while purchasing Goods and services. Ultimately, this led to a reduction in demand for consumer durables.

The government aims to achieve the Viksit Bharat @2047, and for that, it started fiscal reforms. Firstly, brought the Direct Tax reforms with the new Income Tax Act 2025, and recently withdrew it to further strengthen, as per parliamentary committee recommendations. A path-breaking Indirect Tax reform was announced on 2nd September in the name of Next-Gen GST reforms, which brought commodities and services by condensing tax slabs from 4 to 2 (18% and 5%).

The observed fact is that the previous GST slabs became bottlenecks for strengthening MSMEs and producers of consumer durables. Mainly, the consumers who are ultimately affected by all stages of GST. Presently, a question is still arising among people about how it impacts their lives and the country's overall economy. Some people

think it may be a political strategy for elections.

The basic tax multiplier effect tells the percentage increase in people's income when there is a percentage reduction in taxes. Reducing indirect taxes will increase income levels with high savings and enhance the purchasing power of consumers. Finally, it will improve commodity demand (Demand Side Effect). Moreover, reducing taxes will encourage production in the manufacturing sector (Supply Side effect) as it decreases raw material prices and reduces the cost of production. Overall, it leads to a price reduction in input purchasing and the final product of the commodity. It enhances the Aggregate Demand and Supply in the economy.

In India, recently, people lifted out of lower middle income to upper middle income, and upper middle-income people got the status of high income. At the same time, as per World Bank data, poverty reduced from 27.1 per cent in 2011 to 5.3 per cent (PPP 2021, 3 dollars a day) in 2022. Nearly 269.2 million people have been lifted from poverty and gained the lower middle-income status. When people transform to different income stages, their consumption needs change, and they want to improve their living standards. As per people's demand, there should be sufficient domestic production from the manufacturing sector. Otherwise, the country had to depend on imports.

The basic tax multiplier effect tells the percentage increase in people's income when there is a percentage reduction in taxes. Reducing indirect taxes will increase income levels with high savings and enhance the purchasing power of consumers. Finally, it will improve commodity demand (Demand Side Effect).

The Government of India, since 2014, have been focusing on developing MSMEs. The government started giving more subsidies and investment credit facilities in this row. In the Indian economy, the MSME sector plays a significant role in manufacturing, exports, and employment generation. Reducing tax under Next-Gen GST 2.0 will be a boon for MSMEs because it reduces input costs and boosts production in a global manufacturing hub.

As per the recent Public Information Bureau (PIB) information on Budget 2025-26, in India, registered MSMEs are 5.93 crore and provide employment opportunities to more than 25 crore people. In 2023-24, the MSME Sector products recorded 45.73% of India's total exports. Moreover, this sector contributes significantly to the country's Gross Value Added (GVA). Its contribution to GVA increased from 27.3% in 2020-21 to 30.1% in 2022-23. The Government expenditure for developing MSMEs increased tremendously over

the past few years in the Budget from 7011.29 crores in 2019-20 to 23,168.15 crores in 2025-26.

Now we can observe and analyse the sector-wise reduction in GST and how it will impact those sectors and overall economic performance.

Reduction of GST from various rates to 5% on inputs used in agriculture and the allied sector will bring significant and drastic changes in the agricultural practices. On one end, the usage of more tractors in agriculture will increase demand for tractors from the farmers' side, and on the other end, it will increase the supply of tractors in the industry sector. It benefits two sectors in parallel. Farmers use the tractor for multiple purposes, such as proper land tillage and easy carrying of crop production from the field to the market. It increases the use of biopesticides in the crop field. Overall, the Agriculture sector provides 44% of total employment. Reducing taxes will positively impact people's incomes, enhance crop productivity

and sustainable agriculture practices. This reduction of input prices and decrease in taxes on dairy products (such as panther, ghee, cheese and butter, etc), horticulture products (such as fruits and dates) and prepared and preserved fish, shrimp will become very cheap in the international markets and the country will get a comparative advantage while exporting to other countries. In this regard, it forces the USA to import Indian products cheaply rather than imposing tariffs on them.

Taking care of health is a significant part of everyone's life. Due to the weather changes, the unexpected spread of diseases increases people's out-of-pocket expenditure on health care daily. As per World Bank data, for 2022, out-of-pocket per capita expenditure on Health was USD 36.56. It declined from USD 37.76 in 2014 to USD 31.60 in 2020 and increased to USD 36.56 in 2022. After the COVID-19 pandemic, expenditure on health started growing. Growing out-of-pocket per capita expenditure on health is majorly impacting their savings and ability to procure necessary things. It is a good initiative by the government of India to reduce taxes from various high-level slabs to 5% on all healthcare items. Now, it can save people's income. Health can be accessible and affordable for ordinary people.

High expenditure on the children's education is essentially erasing

household savings. Moreover, it is impacting the procurement of consumer durables. As per PIB 2025, if we observe the average expenditure in rupees per student made by households on school education on various items. The spending on education by households is highest on course fees and afterwards on books and stationery fees, which is Rs. 1,664 in rural areas, Rs. 2,867 in urban areas, and Rs. 2,002 in rural-urban areas. Now, eliminating the GST on stationery and textbooks reduces household expenditure and makes education more affordable for poor and lower-middle-income groups.

After the expenditure on health and education, a significant part of households' income goes toward purchasing daily essentials. Households need to buy daily essentials at any cost; without them, it isn't easy to sustain life. Reducing GST by 5 per cent from various high-level rates saves the households' income. It is not a one-day Diwali gift, and it will be a long-lasting Diwali gift for all sections of households in the country.

Now is the time to boost the domestic manufacturing of consumer durables such as automobiles and electronic appliances. Over the period, we were behind in manufacturing these products. Need to accelerate the production of consumer durables by keeping in view the huge demand for automobiles, electronic appliances, because the savings

arising from the reduction of GST slabs in health, education, and daily essentials and the increase in incomes of farmers, along with the decrease in prices of these consumer durables, will generate huge demand.

At the same time, the automobile and electronic appliances sectors will provide employment opportunities to the youth of this country. As per World Bank data, the unemployment rate in the country has been declining from 7.7% in 2014 to 4.2% in 2024. It will further reduce the unemployment rate in the country to below 2% by the next 5 years due to a massive boost in the enhancement of production in the agricultural, MSME, and manufacturing sectors. Moreover, the inflation rate in the country is presently 5% and will decline to below three per cent due to the reduction of GST slabs on various products.

Achieving stability in macroeconomic indicators such as employment, inflation, and GDP growth rate will boost confidence in business communities, encourage investment and lead to a healthy, sustainable and developed economy. Next-Gen GST reforms will make India self-sufficient in producing automobiles and electronic appliances. It will be a boon for India's exports and reduce import dependence. Any more, it will not be a political election stunt.

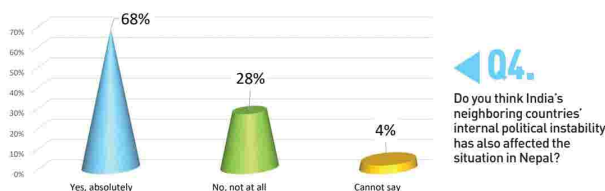
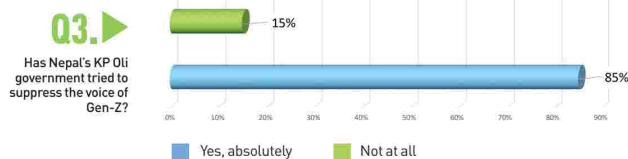
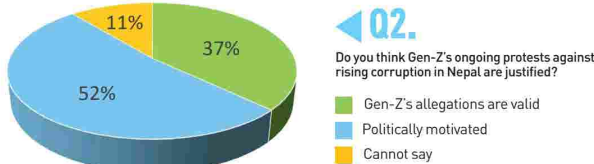
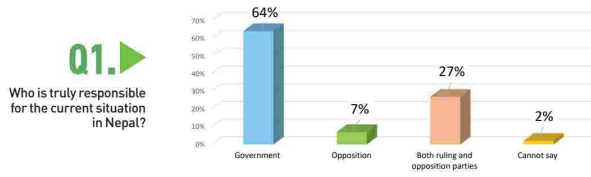
Dr Karnati Kiran Kumar, Assistant Professor, Department of Economic Studies, Central University of Punjab

THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON NEPAL GEN Z PROTEST

85% believe that Nepal's KP Oli government has indeed tried to suppress the voice of Gen-Z.

The survey on Nepal's Gen-Z protest shows that 64% blame the government for the crisis, while 85% believe KP Oli's government suppressed youth voices. Though 52%

see the protests as politically motivated, 64% think the movement is writing a new chapter in Nepal's history amid political instability.



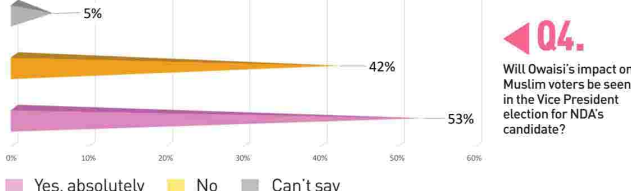
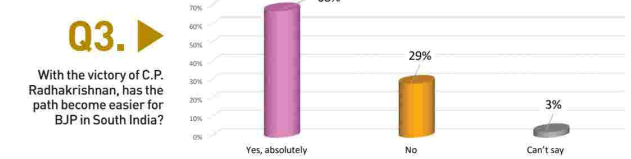
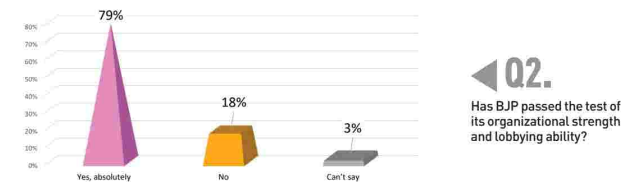
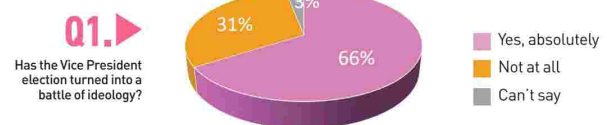
THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON VICE PRESIDENT ELECTION

68% believe C.P. Radhakrishnan's victory has eased BJP's path in South India.

The survey on the Vice President election (sample size 104) shows clear trends. 66% believe the contest

became an ideological battle, while 79% felt BJP proved its organizational strength. 68% think BJP's path in

South India has eased, though opposition unity appears weak, with only 44% seeing coordination.



India elects 15th Vice President

CONTINUED FROM P1

2025, following the resignation of Jagdeep Dhanikhar due to health concerns. Chandrapuram Ponnusamy Radhakrishnan, before his nomination, was serving as the 24th Governor of Maharashtra since July 31, 2024. He had previously held the governorship of Jharkhand from February 2023 to July 2024, and briefly served as Governor of Telangana and Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry in 2024.

Born on October 20, 1957, in Tiruppur, Tamil Nadu, Rad-

hakrishnan is a seasoned BJP leader and former two-time Member of Parliament from Coimbatore, elected in 1998 and 1999. He holds a bachelor's degree in Business Administration and began his political journey in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) before joining the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the predecessor to the BJP. He became BJP Tamil Nadu state secretary in 1996 and went on to hold key roles in Parliament, including Chairmanship of the Parliamentary Standing Committee and membership in

committees related to PSUs and Finance. He also served on the special committee investigating the Stock Exchange Scam. Between 2004 and 2007, Radhakrishnan was the BJP state president in Tamil Nadu and led an ambitious 93-day, 19,000-kilometre 'Rath Yatra' across India. The campaign focused on national issues such as interlinking rivers, eradicating terrorism, implementing a uniform civil code, eliminating untouchability, and advocating for social reform.

Nepal Parliament torched

CONTINUED FROM P1

dence in Balkot, demanding accountability for Monday's fatalities. During the protest, demonstrators set fire to the residence. The central office of the Nepali Congress in Sanepa was vandalized on Tuesday afternoon. The Himalayan Times reported. Protesters have also vandalized the homes of Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba in Budhanilkantha. Protesters have attacked political party office of the CPN-UML in Chyasil, Lalitpur.

Protesters broke windows, threw stones, and set fire to

the building, as part of demonstrations against corruption following the death of 19 protestors on Monday. According to reports, police deployed tear gas to disperse the crowd. Although authorities stated that security forces had been instructed to exercise restraint and that no live ammunition was authorized, there were reports of gunfire and bullet injuries, as per The Himalayan Times. The Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA) has been fully closed following escalating demonstrations. The Nepali Army has been deployed to provide security at the airport.

The Gen Z-led protests in Nepal against the government's alleged corruption, intensified on Tuesday with protestors targeting the residences of political leaders and ministers. The Kathmandu Post reported. As per The Kathmandu Post, protestors set fire to the house of Minister for Communication and Information Technology Prithvi Subba Gurung, pelted stones at the residence of Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Bishnu Paudel, Nepal Rastra Bank Governor Biswo Paudel and attacked the house of former Home Minister Ramesh Lekhak.

PM surveys flood-hit Punjab

CONTINUED FROM P1

officials presented detailed reports on human casualties, livestock deaths, crop losses, and damage to public infrastructure such as roads, schools, and healthcare centres. Many villages, officials reported, had remained completely cut off due to washed-away roads and collapsed bridges. In response, the Prime Minister announced that Rs 1,600 crore would be released immediately to support relief and rehabilitation efforts. He also confirmed that the second instalment of the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF), worth Rs 208 crore, has been approved in advance to ensure uninterrupted funding for urgent works. Additional financial assistance for farmers will be routed through the PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme. PM Modi outlined a multi-dimensional rehabilitation strategy that includes rebuilding homes under the Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana, restoring damaged roads and highways, reconstructing schools through the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, and providing livestock support via mini-kits. Schools affected by the floods will receive additional assistance once the Punjab government submits the required documentation.

Special provisions were also announced for the farming community, which has suffered severe losses. Assistance will be provided to restore borewells damaged by floodwaters, with project-based support under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana. Diesel-operated pumps will be eligible for solar panel support in collaboration with the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, and micro-irrigation will be promoted under the 'Per Drop More Crop' scheme. To improve long-term resilience, the Centre will invest in repairing and building water recharge structures under the Jal Sanchay Jan Bhagidari programme.

For families directly affected by the calamity, the Prime Minister announced Rs 2 lakh as ex-gratia for the next of kin of those who died and Rs 50,000 for the injured. Children orphaned due to the floods will be supported under the PM CARES for Children scheme, which offers financial aid, educational support, and healthcare coverage until adulthood. In Gurdaspur, PM Modi met with affected families and expressed his condolences. He praised the efforts of NDRF, SDRF, and Aapda Mitra volunteers, who have been working round-the-clock to rescue stranded individuals and distribute relief supplies.

While the government highlights the Rs 12,000 crore already available under central schemes, experts clarified that this amount represents cumulative allocations and not necessarily liquid cash on hand. Opposition leaders have criticized the announcement, calling it misleading, while BJP leaders argue it reflects the Centre's substantial ongoing commitment to Punjab.

The scale of the destruction is staggering: over 51 lives have been lost, vast areas of standing paddy submerged, and countless livestock killed. In many areas, families remain stranded, and agricultural losses are expected to cause ripple effects across the rural economy for months. Farmer unions have demanded a special compensation package that goes beyond the existing SDRF norms, arguing that the scale of loss—of crops, seed, fodder, and labour—requires exceptional support.

Rajasthan CM Announces major tourism initiatives

CONTINUED FROM P1

attractions such as 3D projections and light-and-sound shows to recreate the historic battle. Pratap's memorial at Chawand will be expanded, while a Vijay Stambh at Dewair will commemorate his famous victory. The Tribal Circuit will highlight Rajasthan's diverse tribal heritage. It will cover Sitamata Sanctuary, Rishabhdev, Gautameshwar Temple, and Matri Kundia, along with the development of Beneshwar Dham and Mangarh Dham. The Chief Minister also announced memorials for tribal heroes in Dungarpur and Banswara, ensuring that their contributions to Rajasthan's history are honored.

Deputy CM Diya Kumari, Rajasthan Heritage Authority Chairman Onkar Singh Lakhawat, and senior officials were present at the meeting.

In another review, the Chief Minister directed officials to ensure maximum participation of Non-Resident Rajasthanis (NRRs) in Pravasi Rajasthan Divas scheduled for December 10. The event will feature sessions on education, tourism, industry, health, and water, with involvement from distinguished expatriates and experts. To attract meaningful investment, Sharma instructed the appointment of nodal officers and called for structured engagement with Rajasthan-origin officers serving in other states. To foster emotional connections, a short film on Panch Gaurav will be screened during the event, helping participants reconnect with their native soil. Outstanding Non-Resident Rajasthanis contributing in social, economic, and industrial fields will also be honored.

VP polls: NDA secures big win

CONTINUED FROM P1

party line. Reports say about 14 MPs did this. According to sources, these MPs are mainly from Congress, Trinamool Congress (TMC), Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), and some regional parties. For example, there were already news of unhappiness among some TMC members because of internal fights in Mamata Banerjee's party. Similarly, some Congress MPs might have been influenced by Modi government's policies. Biju Janata Dal (BJD), Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS), and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) decided to stay away from the

election, which helped NDA. These parties' total 12-15 MPs did not vote, which hurt the opposition. Cross-voting showed that there are cracks in the opposition alliance, and not everyone is united. There are many reasons behind NDA's success. First, the alliance has strong numbers. NDA has majority in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, which kept them ahead from the start. But getting extra votes through cross-voting was a great strategy by NDA. BJP leaders claimed they contacted opposition MPs and explained that an experienced leader like Radhakrishnan is better for

the country. This worked because opposition candidate B Sudarshan Reddy could not get much support. Reddy is a retired judge, but lack of political experience made him weak. NDA focused on regional issues to get support from South and East states. Was this Modi's magic? Yes, absolutely. Prime Minister Narendra Modi talked to many MPs before the election and stressed on NDA's unity. He was the first to vote, which was a message. Modi's popularity and his government's achievements, like economic reforms and foreign policy, influenced many MPs.

Choksi's extradition looms as decisive hearing on September 19

CONTINUED FROM P1

while the justice ministry begins the process of transferring him to India. Though he could attempt a limited appeal to Belgium's Court of Cassation, such a move would only test points of law rather than revisit the facts, leaving him with little room to delay. Indian officials believe that once the warrants are validated, his extradition could be completed before the end of the year.

It is pertinent to mention that Choksi was arrested in Antwerp on 11 April after India formally sought his extradition under the bi-

lateral treaty ratified in 2020. The Antwerp court subsequently rejected his bail plea on 24 April, citing fears that he might once again abscond given his history of evading authorities. His appeal against the enforceability of the Indian arrest warrants, first heard in late April, is now before the appellate bench. For years, Choksi has used every means available to resist being sent back to India. Now, however, the options before him appear to be narrowing quickly. After fleeing the country in January 2018,

just before the PNB scam became public, he obtained citizenship of Antigua and Barbuda and sought to use multiple jurisdictions to delay proceedings. In December last year, The Sunday Guardian had revealed in an exclusive piece that Choksi was in Belgium, receiving treatment in a hospital in Antwerp and suing the Government of India in UK courts in an effort to complicate extradition attempts. He had also launched a damages case claiming mental and physical trauma caused by Indian agencies' actions, seen widely as a tactic to stall

legal proceedings. Choksi's family has long-standing ties to Belgium, with siblings and relatives residing in Antwerp. His presence there allowed Indian agencies, including the CBI and Enforcement Directorate, to press for action under the India-Belgium extradition treaty, which covers serious financial crimes like fraud, corruption and money laundering. India has also invoked global conventions such as the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the UN Convention against Corruption to strengthen its plea.

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Vice President of India holds the second-highest constitutional office in the nation, a position established under Article 63 of the Constitution. More than a symbolic role, the Vice President is the ex officio Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of Parliament, and is tasked with discharging the functions of the President in a contingency. Since its inception in 1952, the office has been a repository of national experience, wisdom, and statesmanship, held by a distinguished roster of individuals from diverse backgrounds. The historical narrative of the vice presidency is a reflection of India's evolving political landscape, from the academic idealism of the Nehruvian era to the pragmatic politics of the modern day.

PART I: THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION (1952–1969)

The first generation of vice presidents were towering intellectuals and public figures who brought a sense of philosophical gravitas to the nascent republic. They set the precedent for the office as one of profound dignity and erudition.

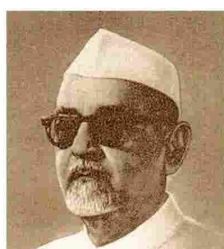
Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1952–1962): The first and longest-serving vice president, Radhakrishnan was a world-renowned philosopher and academic. His election was a testament to India's respect for intellectual prowess. Prior to his tenure, he had held the prestigious Spalding Chair of Eastern Religion and Ethics at the University of Oxford and served as India's Ambassador to the Soviet Union. As Vice President, his two terms were marked by a quiet efficiency. He was instrumental in shaping the early procedures of the Rajya Sabha as its first Chairman. His unopposed election to both terms underscored his cross-political appeal and national stature, culminating in his ascent to the presidency in 1962.

Zakir Husain (1962–1967): A distinguished educationist and freedom fighter, Husain's election continued the tradition of placing a person of high moral and intellectual standing in the office. As a former Vice-Chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University and Governor of Bihar, he was deeply committed to the principles of education and social reform. As Vice President, he also served as acting President for a brief period in 1965 when President Radhakrishnan was away. He was widely respected for his gentle demeanor and deep commitment to secular values. His election as president in 1967 was a landmark moment, as he became the first Muslim to hold the highest constitutional office.

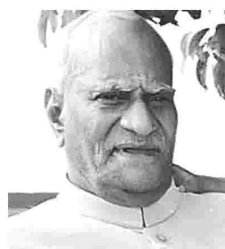
V. V. Giri (1967–1969): A veteran labor leader and a prominent figure in the freedom movement, Giri's tenure was brief but historically significant. He was a former Union Minister of Labour and served as Governor of multiple states. His time in office ended dramatically when he resigned to contest the presidential election in 1969 following the death of President Zakir Husain. This decision precipitated a major political crisis and a split in the Indian National Congress, as Giri ran as an independent candidate against the party's official nominee, Neelam Sanjiva Reddy. His victory, secured on the basis of second-preference



SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN
(1952–1962)



ZAKIR HUSAIN
(1962–1967)



V. V. GIRI
(1967–1969)



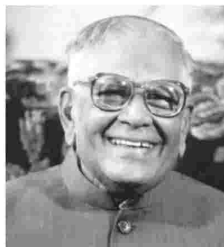
GOPAL SWARUP PATHAK
(1969–1974)



B. D. JATTI
(1974–1979)



MOHAMMAD HIDAYATULLAH
(1979–1984)



RAMASWAMY VENKATARAMAN
(1984–1987)



SHANKAR DAYAL SHARMA
(1987–1992)



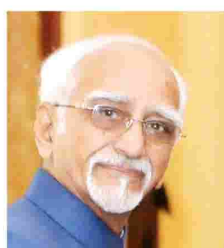
K. R. NARAYANAN
(1992–1997)



KRISHAN KANT
(1997–2002)



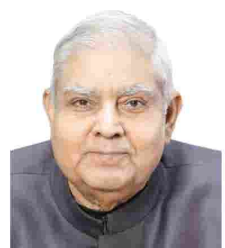
BHAIRON SINGH SHEKHAWAT
(2002–2007)



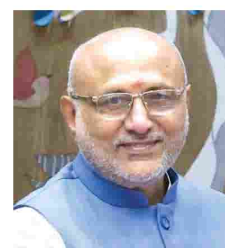
MOHAMMAD HAMID ANSARI
(2007–2017)



MUPPAVARAPU VENKAIHAH NAIDU
(2017–2022)



JAGDEEP DHANKHAR
(2022–2025)



C. P. RADHAKRISHNAN
(2025–INCUMBENT)

THE OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT: A HISTORICAL TAPESTRY

Since 1952, India's Vice Presidents have played key roles in politics and governance. This overview highlights their legacy, ending with the newly elected C. P. Radhakrishnan.



Parliament House

votes, forever linked the office of the vice presidency with the high-stakes drama of national politics.

PART II: THE STABILIZING FORCE (1969–1987)

The political tumult of the late 1960s and 1970s saw the vice presidency filled by seasoned jurists and administrators who acted as a stabilizing force during periods of national crisis.

Gopal Swarup Pathak (1969–1974): A former judge of the Allahabad High Court and a distinguished legal scholar, Pathak's tenure brought a sense of legal and constitutional propriety to the office. He was the first vice president who did not go on to become president, a trend that would become more common in the decades to follow. His calm

and measured approach as Chairman of the Rajya Sabha helped navigate the turbulent political waters of the Indira Gandhi era.

B. D. Jatti (1974–1979): A former Chief Minister of Mysore and Governor of Orissa, Jatti's tenure coincided with one of India's most challenging periods—the Emergency (1975–1977). Following the death of President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed in 1977, he was sworn in as acting President. Jatti's decision to temporarily delay the dissolution of nine state assemblies by the Janata Party government in 1977 created a brief constitutional stir, though he eventually signed the order. He was a man of quiet conviction and deep religious faith.

Mohammad Hidayatullah (1979–1984): A renowned jurist and former

Chief Justice of India, Hidayatullah holds the unique distinction of having served as acting President (in 1969), Vice President, and Chief Justice. His legal acumen was a valuable asset, and he brought immense dignity to the office. As the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, his rulings were widely respected for their constitutional soundness and impartiality. His presence in the upper house was a constant reminder of the rule of law.

Ramaswamy Venkataraman (1984–1987): A seasoned politician and a former Union Minister, Venkataraman was known for his administrative expertise. As Vice President, he played a crucial role as a mediator between Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Minister Zail Singh during a period of growing friction

between the two offices. His diplomatic skills and ability to find common ground were highly valued. He resigned to assume the presidency in 1987.

PART III: THE ERA OF TRANSITIONS (1987–2002)

This period saw the vice presidency firmly established as a stepping stone to the highest office, with several incumbents seamlessly moving from one role to the other.

Shankar Dayal Sharma (1987–1992): A veteran of the freedom movement and a former Chief Minister and Governor, Sharma was a towering figure in Indian politics. He was elected unopposed as Vice President, a reflection of the widespread respect he commanded across the political spectrum. His tenure as Vice President was marked by a quiet statesmanship. He was elected president in 1992, becoming the fourth vice president to make the transition.

K. R. Narayanan (1992–1997): A distinguished diplomat who had served as ambassador to countries like China and the United States, Narayanan's election was a landmark moment. He became the

first vice president from the Dalit community, signaling a new era of social and political inclusion in India's highest offices. As Vice President, his intellect and integrity were widely recognized. He was elected president in 1997, further cementing his place in history.

Krishan Kant (1997–2002): A dedicated socialist and freedom fighter, Krishan Kant was known for his principled politics. He was the first vice president to die in office, a tragic and unexpected event. His tenure was marked by his efforts to bring a sense of fairness and decorum to the Rajya Sabha. The 2001 Parliament attack, where his official car was a target of the terrorists, brought a shocking moment of violence to the otherwise peaceful office. His death in 2002 was a profound loss for the nation.

PART IV: THE MODERN ERA (2002–PRESENT)

The contemporary history of the vice presidency is defined by leaders who are deeply embedded in the national political landscape, often serving as a key link between the government and the opposition.

Bhairon Singh Shekhawat (2002–2007): A veteran of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and a three-time Chief Minister of Rajasthan, Shekhawat was the first vice president from his party. His election marked a significant political shift, reflecting the rise of the BJP on the national stage. Known for his rustic charm and political acumen, he presided over the Rajya Sabha with a steady hand during a period of complex coalition politics.

Mohammad Hamid Ansari (2007–2017): A career diplomat with an illustrious background, Ansari served two consecutive terms as Vice President, a feat previously achieved only by Radhakrishnan. His decade-long tenure was a period of intense parliamentary debates and political friction. He was widely praised for his dignified conduct and strict adherence to parliamentary rules as Chairman of the Rajya Sabha. He is remembered for his unwavering commitment to constitutional values and his attempts to elevate the decorum of the upper house.

Muppavarapu Venkaiah Naidu (2017–2022): A senior BJP leader with a long and active political career,

Naidu was the first vice president to be born after India's independence. As a former Union Minister and a brilliant orator, he brought a dynamic energy to the office. His tenure was defined by his focus on rural development and his efforts to make the Rajya Sabha more productive. He often used witty remarks and powerful rhetoric to encourage members to engage in constructive debate.

Jagdeep Dhankhar (2022–2025): A seasoned lawyer and a former Governor of West Bengal, Jagdeep Dhankhar was the National Democratic Alliance's candidate in the 2022 election. His tenure was marked by a firm approach to maintaining order and decorum during parliamentary proceedings. Citing health reasons, he resigned from the office on July 21, 2025, necessitating a fresh election.

C. P. Radhakrishnan (2025–Incumbent): The newly elected 15th Vice President of India, C. P. Radhakrishnan, is a veteran politician from Tamil Nadu with deep roots in the Rashtriya Swamayevek Sangh (RSS) and the BJP. A two-time Lok Sabha MP from Coimbatore, he has also served as Governor of Jharkhand, and most recently, as Governor of Maharashtra. Known for his soft-spoken and non-confrontational style, his election was a significant victory for the NDA. He is tasked with steering the Rajya Sabha as its Chairman, continuing the rich and varied history of this pivotal office.



Decisive step

Including Aadhaar as 12th document for voter verification is significant

The Supreme Court of India's decisive intervention, ordering the Election Commission of India (ECI) to include the Aadhaar card as one of the 12 valid documents for the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of Bihar's electoral rolls, is a vital course correction. It is a resounding victory for the fundamental right to vote, reaffirming the principle that procedural rigidity must not disenfranchise lakhs of eligible citizens. The ECI adopted questionable reasoning, insisting that Aadhaar was merely proof of residency, not citizenship, and was, therefore, inadmissible. The Court rightly dismantled this argument by pointing out the glaring inconsistency: if nine of the other 11 documents, save for a passport or birth certificate, do not conclusively prove citizenship, why single out Aadhaar for exclusion? The Court also said that Aadhaar could be used subject to verification of its authenticity. This judicial clarity was urgently needed. Empirical evidence demonstrates that excluding Aadhaar, which is held by nearly 90% of Bihar's population, in favour of documents such as passports (held by a mere 2%) and others, would have created insurmountable barriers for a vast number of genuine voters, particularly among the poor and the marginalised. The ECI's rushed SIR exercise had already resulted in the exclusion of over 65 lakh electors from the draft roll. A statistical analysis by *The Hindu* of this exclusion reveals several anomalies – disproportionate numbers of women removed, statistically improbable death rates in certain areas, and questionable "permanent shifts" of residents, especially migrant workers and married women. These patterns suggest a flawed process that prioritised haste over accuracy, risking the removal of legitimate voters.

The inclusion of Aadhaar paves the way for a smoother, more accessible verification process. First, it offered a lifeline to those unfairly struck off the rolls among the 65 lakh electors. It also assists electors already on the rolls who require document verification. It vindicates the persistent appeals from political and civil society activists who had warned that the ECI's stance was creating a problematic situation on the ground where Aadhaar was not accepted as a verification document, contradicting the Court's earlier guidance. Its order, on Monday, forces the ECI to align its procedures with the practical realities of identity verification in India today. This ruling has implications beyond Bihar, setting a precedent for all the other revisions envisaged across the country. For the ECI, the goal of electoral roll revision should be to ensure accuracy and inclusivity, not to rush the process through in a way that could affect citizens' rights. The ECI must now pivot toward a more diligent and humane approach, emphasising thorough house-to-house verification and ensuring that the foundation of India's democracy – the electoral roll – is both accurate and truly representative of all its people.

Next best

The generational shift is complete in men's and women's tennis

Carlos Alcaraz's tennis life came full circle on Sunday. Three years ago, on these very courts in New York, the irresistible Spaniard secured his maiden Grand Slam trophy and became the World No. 1 for the very first time. After four Majors elsewhere, the 22-year-old clinched his sixth with a rousing four-set victory over Jannik Sinner in the US Open final. With that, Alcaraz regained his position at the top of the sport, a spot Sinner had owned – through a three-month doping ban – since June 10, 2024. The success also marked an evolution in Alcaraz's play as he traded some of his spectacular and risky shot-making for a bit of clinical efficiency. The result was that he did not lose a set until the final, faced just 10 breakpoints all through and surrendered his serve only thrice. Prior to Roland-Garros, Sinner was deemed the better player on hard courts and Alcaraz on clay and grass. But with the Italian coming within a point of beating Alcaraz in the French Open final and then eclipsing him at Wimbledon, and Alcaraz turning the tables at Flushing Meadows, the era-defining Alcaraz-Sinner rivalry has been pushed into uncharted territories. The fact that the two have swept the last eight Slams and met in three straight Major finals – an Open Era record for a calendar year – means that the likes of 24-time Slam winner Novak Djokovic now resemble the last vestiges of a once glorious past.

While Alcaraz and Sinner continue to indulge in a cat-and-mouse game, Aryna Sabalenka, by defending her US Open crown and taking home a fourth hard court Major overall, proved that she was the numero uno on the acrylic. Starting 2023, the Belarusian has been in the final of the Australian Open and US Open all six times, and won four of those. During this period, she has also reached two semifinals at Wimbledon, and a final and semifinal each at Roland-Garros, evidence of her remarkable consistency and fast-developing all-court nous. In Amanda Anisimova, the World No. 1 had a tough opponent. The American was on an inspired run of her own, having made it to her second consecutive Slam final. The 24-year-old had beaten No. 2 Iga Swiatek, who had handed her a chastening 6-0, 6-0 defeat at the All England Club in July, and out-gunned four-time Major champion Naomi Osaka in arguably the match of the fortnight. But Sabalenka, who has at times let emotions override her tennis, stayed calm and collected. It was her first triumph in three Major finals as World No. 1. There is now the promise of many more.

The cracks are emerging in political hegemony

For more than a decade, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has not merely dominated Indian politics. It has reshaped it. The party governs 15 States and Union Territories, shares power with allies in six more, and wields the machinery of the Union government even in regions beyond its direct control. Its ascent rested on a potent mix of cultural assertiveness, institutional dominance and muscular nationalism, projecting an aura of invincibility that elevated its rule beyond ordinary electoral success into the realm of political hegemony. But that is beginning to change. The BJP remains electorally formidable and is still the dominant party. Yet, its ability to dominate common sense, dictate the terms of public debate and mute opposition is beginning to show cracks. Recent developments suggest that the once-unassailable dominance of the BJP is facing its most serious challenge in a decade. It has squandered the dominance – even the hegemony – it once enjoyed, a decline now intertwined with the political challenge it confronts as it approaches the Bihar Assembly election later this year.

An eroding narrative supremacy

Its political project built around Hindutva, national pride and majoritarian identity long helped mask economic underperformance, deepening inequality and extreme concentration of wealth in the hands of a few who now exert outsized influence over public policy. The emotional returns of Hindutva were allowed to stand in for material improvements. That trade-off is losing its grip. Youth unemployment remains high, wage growth is stagnant and the informal sector continues to reel from the aftershocks of demonetisation, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Goods and Services Tax (GST). For growing sections of the population, the promise of jobs and upward mobility is beginning to outweigh symbolic victories. And in that widening gap between rhetoric and reality, the party's narrative supremacy is beginning to slip.

The appeal to the urban middle class rested not only on Hindu nationalism but also on the promise of international recognition – an India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as a globally respected power. Diplomatic visibility, high-profile summits and a carefully curated image of global stature were projected as markers of national progress. But that narrative has lost momentum, particularly after tensions with the United States over President Donald Trump's claim of brokering a ceasefire following the India-Pakistan conflict sparked by the Pahalgam terror attack in April 2025. The tariff war with Washington, which has triggered job losses across several sectors, alongside the collapse of trade talks and tighter visa regimes, has further punctured the illusion of a seamless global



Zoya Hasan

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The Bharatiya Janata Party remains electorally strong, but its political hegemony is showing signs of strain as narrative control weakens and the Opposition's confidence grows

ascend. For India's middle class and media, once buoyed by the rhetoric of global rise and the self-proclaimed role of Vishwa Guru, the hard edges of realpolitik have begun to temper enthusiasm and puncture the earlier sense of triumphalism.

One area where the party continues to hold strong appeal, particularly among rural voters and the urban poor, is its system of Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT). Schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi or PM-KISAN, Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana, Mukhya Mantri Ladli Behna Yojana, and other targeted programmes deliver tangible material benefits. In a context of economic insecurity and widespread deprivation, this helps blunt public discontent. It also helps explain the paradox of the BJP's sustained electoral competitiveness, even as its hegemonic architecture shows signs of strain. Yet, welfare delivery alone cannot sustain political dominance. This is why the regime persistently crubs dissent, silences opposition, and incarcerates critics, activists and intellectuals – not merely to neutralise political rivals, but to suppress independent voices that question its legitimacy.

A more coordinated Opposition

Perhaps the most intangible, yet revealing, sign of change is this: people, especially Opposition leaders, are no longer afraid. Fear once defined the ecosystem of control – fear of arrest, harassment, or marginalisation. That atmosphere has begun to thin. The Opposition is now not only more coordinated but also more assertive, carving out space and placing the government under sustained scrutiny. Yet, challenges remain. The INDIA alliance must still navigate complex regional and ideological differences. But to focus only on those hurdles is to miss the larger shift: the Opposition is no longer a passive critic of government policy. It is actively working to redefine the political agenda. As a result, the cracks in the ruling dispensation's dominance have widened, most visibly in Parliament. Both the Budget and Monsoon sessions saw a combative Opposition taking on the government across multiple political and policy fronts, often to the ruling party's visible discomfort. The "Gujarat model" – suspending the entire Opposition and pushing Bills through without debate – is no longer proving effective. A more united Opposition has now cornered the government on key issues such as the caste census, Operation Sindoor, the Special Intensive Revision scheme of the Bihar electoral rolls, and alleged election manipulation.

At the centre of this shift is the Congress, led by Rahul Gandhi. His Bharat Jodo Yatra (2022-23) marked a turning point, both for him and for the party. Since then, the Congress has regained momentum, even as the regime tried to cripple it

by freezing its bank accounts on the eve of the 2024 general election. That move backfired. Rather than weakening the party, it exposed the government's heavy-handedness and chipped away at the BJP's aura of invincibility. Mr. Gandhi and his colleagues have managed to reframe the party's image from a reactive opposition to a more proactive, agenda-setting force. The real test, however, lies ahead: turning that shift into sustained political action and significant electoral gains.

The regime's push to tighten control over the Election Commission of India is a telling sign of its waning hegemony. Recent efforts to weaken judicial oversight and expand executive power – particularly through the CEC and Other Election Commissioners Bill, 2023 – reveal a deeper unease. The BJP is no longer willing to rely on existing rules unless it can reshape them in its favour. A government secure in its authority would have no need to rewrite the rules. The very impulse to do so signals a crisis of control – a fear that its dominance can no longer be taken for granted.

Perhaps the most damaging development for the regime has been the Congress-led campaign accusing it of systematically manipulating voter rolls. What might once have seemed like routine administrative irregularities has been reframed as a deliberate strategy to undermine democratic choice. By exposing patterns of mass deletions, rushed revisions and algorithmic targeting of Opposition-leaning demographics, the campaign has transformed technical disputes into a broader indictment of the regime's integrity. Essentially, these charges go beyond questioning the fairness of individual elections, they challenge the legitimacy of the regime's victories, suggesting that they stem not from genuine majority support but the manipulation of electoral processes.

The two parties, the crucial difference

Crucially, the BJP's dominance is often compared to the post-Independence dominance of the Congress Party but the analogy obscures a fundamental difference. What distinguishes the current moment from earlier eras of single-party dominance is that it has not produced a "BJP system" in the way the Congress once created a "Congress system". The Congress's hegemony rested not just on electoral victories but also on its ability to absorb and reflect India's diverse social, regional and ideological currents. Its dominance was underpinned by a broad consensus even when contested. In contrast, the BJP's dominance is rooted in polarisation and exclusion, rather than accommodation and inclusion. Its power rests primarily on electoral success reinforced by state machinery, rather than on a deep reservoir of social legitimacy. And as soon as that machinery falters, the cracks begin to show.

The long march ahead to technological independence

India celebrated its hard-won political freedom on the 79th Independence Day, on August 15, 2025. But we must recognise that true independence today requires more than political autonomy. It also demands technological sovereignty, as technology aids every walk of life today.

Geopolitics has taken a darker turn recently. Modern wars are fought with software and drones, not bullets and bombs. The most damaging war is in cyberspace. Our banks, trains and power grids run on information and communication technology. A small number of companies, primarily from a single country, build and control these systems.

This dependence is a serious vulnerability. What happens if these companies turn off their cloud or Artificial Intelligence services under national duress or out of malice? The capacity to inflict serious harm on the country is very real. We saw this when cloud services were stopped to a company recently. This is not a hypothetical threat, but a reality that we must confront.

Building the foundation

Technological autonomy is the solution. India has no operating system, database, or other foundational software that it builds and can trust completely. This leaves the country dependent on external sources that it cannot control or trust. However, the path to independence is not as difficult as it might seem.

The open-source model offers a path to a solution. India can create its own versions of Linux and Android that are safe and free of backdoors. It is possible for a dedicated group of professionals to do this. The real challenge lies in long-term support and maintenance. A large, supportive user base is necessary for a home-grown operating system (OS) to be viable. If we are to adopt an OS that is a little behind, we can make them competitive and viable. This is a



P.J. Narayanan

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True independence today demands that India pursues technological sovereignty, as dependence is now a vulnerability

mission for India's sizeable technology community. The problem affects everyone, but the solution lies with IT professionals who build the digital world. They must join hands to remove this debilitating dependence. This is too big a task for any single institution, but is achievable if many unite behind this goal.

The path to hardware sovereignty

Achieving hardware sovereignty is a greater challenge than software sovereignty. Building sophisticated semi-conductor fabs requires massive, long-term national investment in chip design, manufacturing and supply chain management. Do we have the resources and, more importantly, the patience to build them? A crucial first step is to focus on specific hardware components and invest in partnerships to build expertise in chip design and assembly, even if fabrication is outsourced.

India's journey to political independence was defined by non-violence. Its quest for technology independence should be through open-source software, which is a gift of society to itself. This is about supporting ourselves and not opposing others.

The global open-source movement is no longer the powerful socio-political force that it was. Much of the software today is open-source, including Android, Linux, and Hadoop. However, key control is with centralised cloud and data managed externally by powerful companies. A social movement for autonomy in software and hardware is needed today. India has the necessary talent and the capability. The way exists.

What India needs is the collective will. Let it start an urgent mission of planning, development, and execution before a crisis forces its hand.

Assembling a crack team to create India's own versions of essential software from the open

source resources is the first step. India must build client-side components (such as database, email client, calendar) and server-side components such as web server, email server, and cloud server. Open source versions are available for all of them. India needs to set up teams to continually update and maintain these components, which is the harder task. These teams should work like product teams in companies. This is possible only when there is a sound business model behind it, outside of government or private funds. The mission has to be self-supporting or better.

While this may have been a difficult idea to sell in the past, the current climate is different. Previously, only the strategic sectors were concerned with having trusted and secure software. Now, private companies and individuals are concerned about being dependent on outside forces for critical needs. People are already paying, either directly or indirectly, for the free and open-source software that they use. The shift to a model where these costs are explicit and support trusted software would be a small one.

A mission as the core

The immediate step is to establish a mission to plan the necessary actions. This will be an implementation mission and not a research and development mission aimed at academic/research communities. It will primarily involve strong development and support teams of engineers and a capable project management team to coordinate activities.

There is ample expertise in both industry and academia to make it happen, provided a viable model is established. The government will need to play an enabling role, but should focus on establishing a self-sustaining model as early as possible.

Let us embark on the long march toward technological independence.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Vice-Presidential election

The results of the Vice-Presidential election are in. However, the decision of some political parties such as the Biju Janata Dal, the Bharat Rashtra Samithi and Akali Dal to abstain from voting in the election is unfortunate and a sign of political expediency (Inside pages, September 9). This is an election held by secret

ballot and there is no question of any party being issued. In this case, it is inexplicable why parties should abstain from voting and renege on their constitutional function to vote. What is the difference then between the common voter, who stays away from voting in the general election for various reasons and these Parliament members who abstain from

voting in the Vice-presidential election? When Parliament members, who are supposed to be responsible, themselves abstain from voting in an important election such as the Vice-Presidential election, why blame the common man when he does not exercise his voting right in general or Assembly elections? These parties should have allowed their

members to participate in the election and vote as per the member's individual conscience and choice. That would have been more democratic, protected the rights of the Parliament members and upheld democratic values. **Kosaraju Chandramouli, Hyderabad**

Given the numerical superiority of the NDA in the electoral college, the win of C.P. Radhakrishnan has come as no surprise. As Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, he must be impartial. To put it plainly, he must stay away from demonstrating his gratitude to the NDA for his election. He must be guided by the fact that the Opposition is no less important than the government and has its own role to play in a

parliamentary democracy. He will be closely watched on how he manages to the conduct of his duties in true faith and allegiance to the Constitution. He must steer clear of the political battles fought within and outside Parliament. **G. David Milton, Marthandapuram, Tamil Nadu**

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

Indian academia in times of genocide

In August, as part of a group of 500 scientists and academics, we petitioned the International Olympiad on Astronomy and Astrophysics (IOAA) regarding Israel's participation. The IOAA, held in Mumbai from 1-21 August with 63 countries participating, is one of the major science Olympiads designed to identify talented high-school students. The Olympiads are a matter of national prestige in Israel and the government showcases the performance of its teams as evidence of scientific progress.

Our petition proposed that Israel be as a national team, which would require students and team leaders to participate as individuals and without an official Israeli flag. Our goal was to convey disapproval of Israeli policies and reduce the Olympiad's propaganda value for the Israeli government. Similar sanctions were applied to Israel in the Informatics Olympiad and to Russia and Belarus in several Olympiads and the Olympic games.

The IOAA is governed by an autonomous international board with 120 members and representatives from every participating country. The board considered our petition, along with other evidence including testimony from the Palestinian delegation. After extensive debate, it approved the proposal with an overwhelming majority. Since Israel did not send a team this year, the board's decision will be effective from next year should Israel choose to participate.

Rift among Indian academics
The Israeli embassy reacted furiously. Consul General Kobbi Shoshani suggested that the Olympiad "change Albert Einstein's relativity theory" to "Hamas' political theories". 300 Indian academics – among them directors of two IITs and vice chancellors of several universities – asked the Prime Minister's Office to take "strict and appropriate



Suvarat Raju
is a theoretical physicist with the International Centre for Theoretical Sciences Bengaluru



Alok Laddha
is a theoretical physicist with the Chennai Mathematical Institute

It is our duty, as academics and scientists, to do everything in our power to put pressure on the Israeli govt. to change its policy.

action" against seven signatories, including the two of us, and the President of IOAA.

This complaint is puzzling since the decision was taken by the IOAA's board and not by the signatories, none of whom are members of the board. The IOAA's President had no involvement with the petition, beyond relaying it to the board. Moreover, the PMO has no role to play and the IOAA has clarified that "deliberations in its meetings are independent of the host country". Nevertheless, this controversy should prompt us to think about the responsibility of Indian academics in the face of the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

10% of population erased
Israel has killed more than 63,000 people in Gaza since 2023. Leaked data indicates that the Israeli military itself estimates that 83% of its victims were civilians. Israel has destroyed or damaged more than 90% of schools in Gaza and the World Health Organization estimates that it has damaged 94% of Gaza's hospitals. In July 2024, experts writing for The Lancet estimated that the breakdown of civic systems and food shortages could lead to more than three additional deaths for every direct victim. This implies that Israel's campaign might have caused the deaths of more than 10% of Gaza's population of 2 million people.

The UN has officially declared a famine in Gaza, with the UN Secretary General calling it a "man-made disaster".

Israel's supporters sometimes argue that its continued campaign is necessary to ensure its security in the aftermath of the attack of 7 October 2023. But former Israeli security chiefs undercut this justification in August 2025 by calling on their government to end the war. This echoes calls made by families of the remaining hostages in Gaza, who have been frustrated by Israel's refusal to strike a deal to secure their release.

Israeli minister, Amichay Eliyahu, provided a frank explanation for Israel's policy in

July, explaining that the government was "rushing toward Gaza being wiped out." This continues a tradition of dehumanisation of Palestinians and a refusal to recognise their right to their own lands that has been a central element of Israeli policy since 1948, when 750,000 Palestinians were expelled to make way for the founding of Israel, in what Palestinians called the 'Nakba'.

Einstein and other Jewish leaders described a particularly gruesome event from the Nakba in a letter to the New York Times: "terrorist bands attacked [the] peaceful village" of Deir Yassin, "killed most of its inhabitants ... and kept a few of them alive to parade as captives." This letter was written to denounce Menachem Begin who was one of the leaders of these violent groups and went on to become the Prime Minister of Israel in 1977. Begin founded the Likud party that continues to rule Israel today. It makes no sense to pretend that science and cultural events can go on as usual, in the face of the historic crimes unfolding in Gaza. It is our duty, as academics and scientists, to do everything in our power to put pressure on the Israeli government to change its policy.

It is distressing that some of our colleagues have instead chosen to disregard or defend Israel's actions. The responses we find on social media are even more troubling since some people in India refuse to recognise the rights of Palestinians to live with dignity and freedom, merely because of their religion.

Therefore, the debate over the scientists' petition to the IOAA should be viewed as part of a broader struggle for communal harmony and academic freedom within India. We are proud that so many Indian academics signed this petition. It shows that many of us still stand for democratic rights and with India's anti-colonial traditions.

The views expressed are personal

Hubbub around Habba

BJP's tantrum over Banu Mushtaq's invite to Mysuru Dasara defies tradition

STATE OF PLAY

S. Bageshree

The Siddaramaiah-led Congress government's decision to invite International Booker Prize winner Banu Mushtaq to inaugurate the Mysuru Dasara – Karnataka's Naada Habba (State festival) – on September 22 has sparked a controversy in Karnataka.

Inviting a Muslim woman to inaugurate the event has, not surprisingly, raised the hackles of the BJP and its affiliates, whose leaders are keen to see the festival as a singularly religious event and not what it has evolved into over the years – a festival that is undoubtedly rooted in the Hindu tradition, but has acquired a multi-dimensional character. It has, since the latter period of the Mysuru Wadiyar dynasty's rule to the emergence of Karnataka as a democratic state, metamorphosed into a symbol of the State's identity, a colourful pageantry attracting thousands of tourists from around the world, a business opportunity, a forum for performing arts and much more.

The BJP leaders have asked Ms. Mushtaq to "prove" herself to be deserving of the honour of inaugurating Dasara by throwing multiple challenges, going so far as to ask if she would turn up sporting vermilion and turmeric. Adding another twist, they asked why Deepa Bhashti, the translator of the collection *Heart Lamp* that won the Booker, was not invited to inaugurate Dasara. Even as protests continue, reacting with restraint, the writer has said that she is honoured by the invitation and respects the spirit of the festival, which is an integral part of Karnataka's shared culture.



What has given added ammunition to the BJP arsenal is an old speech by Ms. Mushtaq on how the depiction of the Kannada language as "godless Bhuvaneswari" is exclusionary. Though the question of using religious iconography to define national or linguistic identity has been debated for decades, edited clips of her speech made at the Jana Sahitya Sammelana in 2023, held to protest against that year's Kannada Sahitya Sammelana excluding Muslim writers from its panels, have come in handy now.

Ms. Mushtaq is not the first Muslim to be invited to inaugurate the Dasara festival. Back in 2017, the late writer K.S. Nisar Ahmed had inaugurated the event. Though that choice too had faced opposition, the virulent attack on Ms. Mushtaq seems to be not just against her religious identity, but also her activism. She has consistently identified herself with the progressive stream in Kannada literature and has been a feminist and a critic of communal politics. Importantly, her criticism has been against patriarchy of all hues. Many stories in *Heart Lamp* depict the debilitating impact of Muslim orthodoxy on the women of the community.

Attempts to infuse Dasara with a secular character, while not doing away with the religious component, had begun during the late 19th and early

20th century. Navadi Krishnaraja Wadiyar – the modernist king whose regime was marked by several progressive reforms – is credited with using the Dasara event as an opportunity to showcase his kingdom's entrepreneurial spirit. Interestingly, there was opposition when the king took his trusted and long-serving diwan, Mirza Ismail, to accompany him in Jambo Savari, the elephant procession on Vijayadashami, the finale of the celebrations and its centrepiece.

Reacting to the controversy, Pramoda Devi Wadiyar of the erstwhile royal family, who is the custodian of the palace traditions, has sought to draw the distinction between the "secular" and "religious" aspects of the festival. She has differentiated between the State government's Dasara, a cultural celebration, and the one observed by her family, adhering to laid down religious traditions.

The BJP in Karnataka seems keen to portray the ruling dispensation as "anti-Hindu". In the coastal region, it is painting the ongoing Special Investigation Team (SIT) probe into the alleged killings and burials in the pilgrim centre of Dharmasthala as a deliberate attack on the religion and religious place itself. In southern Karnataka, the party wants to portray a Muslim woman inaugurating Dasara as part of "appeasement politics" of the Congress. A communal disturbance during a Ganesh procession in Maddur town, in Old Mysore region, has added yet another dimension. While the ruling Congress seems to be on the back foot on the Dharmasthala issue, it has stood its ground on the choice for Dasara inauguration.

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China digs in on 'rare earth' commands global market

China is world's largest producer of rare earths, contributing over 60% of global production

DATA POINT

Sambavi Parthasarathy

Last month, China's Ministry of Industry and Technology introduced interim measures to tighten controls on 'rare earth' mining and processing. The rules are the latest in Beijing's efforts to centralise oversight of extraction, exports, and refining.

While China's trading partners such as India and the U.S. are seeking alternative sources to reduce dependency, data shows that China's dominance in rare earths stems not only from resource availability but more so from its long-standing strength in mining and research capacity.

Rare earth elements (REEs), despite the name, are not particularly scarce. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), they comprise 17 metals, typically grouped into light rare earths (LREEs) – including lanthanum, cerium, praseodymium, neodymium, samarium and europium – and heavy rare earths (HREEs) such as gadolinium, terbium, dysprosium, holmium, erbium, thulium, ytterbium, lutetium, scandium and yttrium. Promethium is not included in the list as it is radioactive and does not occur in mineable quantities.

They are critical components in clean energy technologies such as electric vehicles and wind turbines, as well as in defence applications. Rare earths are also essential for high-tech devices including smartphones and hard drives.

Although rare earth deposits exist in countries such as Brazil, Australia, and India, China holds nearly half of global reserves (Chart 1). It is also the world's largest producer, contributing over 60% of global production in the last five years (Chart 2). Beyond extraction, China dominates the value chain with around 92% of global refining capacity, according to the

IEA. Moreover, in the last five years, China has been the largest exporter, supplying close to 30% of global demand (Chart 3).

Charts 1, 2 and 3 establish China's dominance across reserves, production, and exports. In April, amid escalating U.S.-China trade tensions, Beijing imposed export restrictions on seven rare earth elements. The move targeted elements used in neodymium-iron-boron (NdFeB) magnets – essential for clean energy technologies – as well as those critical to ceramics, phosphors, steel, optical glass, fibres, and aerospace applications (Chart 4).

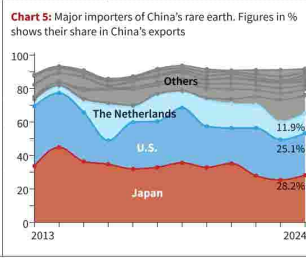
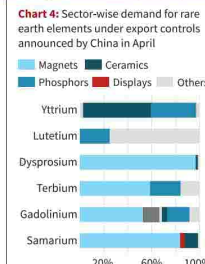
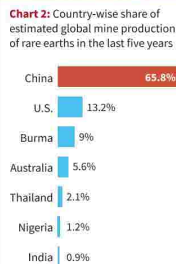
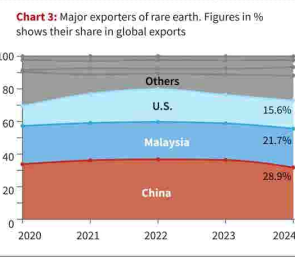
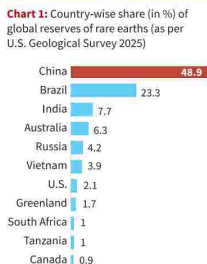
China's decision to curb rare earth exports, amid tit-for-tat tariffs, dealt a significant blow to the U.S., which remains heavily dependent on Chinese supply. The U.S. is the second-largest importer of Chinese rare earths, after Japan (Chart 5). India, too, is heavily dependent on China for its rare earth imports. Since 2021, more than 75% have come from China. Under China's interim measures announced last month, Chinese companies must now operate within government-set quotas for various minerals and obtain approval to trade in rare earths. This is not the first time China has tightened its rare earth trade. It has already prohibited export of tools and methods used to extract and separate rare earths, and in December 2023, it banned the export of processing technology.

China's monopoly over rare earths is also reinforced by its strong research base. A study found that China leads the field of rare-earth research, contributing nearly 30% of all published papers. The U.S. and Japan followed with shares of 10% or less, while India accounted for about 6%.

In parallel, China has increased funding for mineral exploration, allocating about \$14 billion annually since 2022, according to the IEA. The agency notes that this marks the highest three-year stretch of investment in the past decade.

Tightening its grip

The data for the charts were sourced from the U.S. Geological Survey, UN COMTRADE, the International Energy Agency, AP and Reuters



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The *Hindu*.

FIFTY YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 9, 1975
(THERE WAS NO ISSUE DATED SEPTEMBER 10)

Role of Telugu Institute in Facing New Tasks

From Our Correspondent
Hyderabad, Sept. 8.

Inaugurating the International Telugu Institute here at Jubilee Hall to-day, the President, Mr. Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, expressed the hope that the Institute would establish meaningful links with sister organisations outside the State like the International Institute of Tamil Studies in Madras, the International Institute of Hindi Studies in Wardha and the Central Institute of Indian Languages in Mysore.

"This new cultural complex can play a vital role in preparing Indian languages for the new tasks devolving on them in the national context in different spheres like education, administration and public life," he said.

FIRST OFFSPRING

The International Telugu Institute, established by the Andhra Pradesh Government in Hyderabad, is the first offspring of the World Telugu Conference. The principal aim of the institute is to promote research in all aspects of Telugu language and literature and allied fields. To mark the inauguration, the President unveiled the emblem of the institute. Mr. Ahmed said the World Telugu Conference had many solid achievements to its credit. The most important was the re-establishment of a cultural identity – a sub-national identity within the wider framework of Indian nationalism. He said that Telugus numbering over 50 millions now, were the largest linguistic group in this country.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 10, 1925

Australia's New Capital

(Reuter's Special Service.)
Sydney, Sept. 8.

The new capital at Canberra, where the Federal Parliament, is due to meet next year, was thoroughly inspected by the delegates to the Imperial Press Conference, who were guests of the Federal Capital Commission. The ex-Premier Hughes, at a luncheon, said that the people abroad believed that Australia was the land of strikes and drought. The visitors would see that much of what they had read and heard about the country was untrue. The Delegates visited the Royal Military College at Duntroon.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of people evacuated as floods hit central Pakistan

1.2 In lakh. Floods in Pakistan's Punjab province have forced the evacuation of people from Jalalpur Pirwala. Weeks of heavy monsoon rains, dam releases, and cloudbursts have submerged 3,900 villages and displaced 2.2 million people. At least 61 deaths have been reported since last month. AP

The job shortfall in government posts in Meghalaya

67,500 Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma told the State Assembly on Tuesday that Meghalaya faces a deficit of government jobs. While 70,000 youth join the workforce annually, only 2,000-2,500 can be absorbed in State jobs. PTI

Magnitude of the earthquake that struck Greece's Evia island

5.4 On the richter scale. A moderate earthquake struck off the Greek island of Evia and was felt in Athens. The epicentre was located four kilometres from Nea Styra, about 45 km northeast of the capital at around half past midnight local time. No casualties or damage were reported. AFP

Number of people killed during the protests in Nepal

19 Nepal's Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli resigned, a day after protests against a social media ban, including Facebook, YouTube, and X, turned deadly. Demonstrators, mostly youth, demanded action against corruption and attacked politicians' properties despite a curfew. AFP

Civilians killed in the Russian airstrike in the Donetsk region

20 A Russian airstrike on the settlement of Yarova in Ukraine's Donetsk region struck as pensions were being distributed, leaving bodies with personal belongings scattered around. Kyiv says Moscow has massed 1,00,000 troops in the area. AFP

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Why was Indonesia rocked by protests?

How did the protests start and what led to its escalation across the country? How many people have been arrested or detained by the police? What did Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto say about the looting and rioting by protestors on the streets? What fuelled such anger against the elites?

EXPLAINER

Joan Sony Cheriau

The story so far:

What started as a peaceful protest against Parliament members of Indonesia on August 25 in Jakarta, quickly snowballed into violent riots between civilians and the police/military when, on August 28, footage emerged of an armoured vehicle of the paramilitary police running over and killing a 21-year-old delivery worker. Since then, thousands have been arrested and at least seven have died in one of the most violent protests Indonesia has seen recently.

What happened?

The initial protests, which were mainly composed of students and labour unions, were conducted outside the Indonesian Parliament, against the housing allowance accorded to legislative members which is almost 50 million rupiah (\$3,000) – 10 times the national average monthly minimum wage.

However, after 21-year-old Affan Kurniawan, a delivery worker, was run over and killed by a police vehicle, protests escalated and spilled out of the capital across the country against the 'corrupt elite' and Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto's government. The delivery driver's killing became the flame which ignited the long-repressed anger of the people at the various austerity measures of the President in the past year. Protestors attacked public buildings, burned down and looted houses of public officials, including the house of then Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati, and violent clashes were reported between protestors and the police.

How has the government responded?

President Prabowo announced that the Parliament had come to a consensus to reduce housing allowance and foreign visits for Parliament representatives. He also assured that an investigation will be



In rage: Demonstrators set alight banners during a protest in Bandung, West Java on September 1. AFP

conducted into the killing of Mr. Affan, and that those responsible will be brought to book. However, he warned that while his government respected the right to peaceful assembly, looting and rioting would be punished and that the same bordered on "terrorism and treason". "I order the police and military to take the strongest possible action against destruction of public facilities and looting of homes and economic centres," Mr. Prabowo said.

At least 3,000 people have been arrested or detained by the police across the country, and hundreds have been injured, some of whom include police personnel. Rights groups have said that at least 20 people are missing since the protests began.

What about income inequality?

The protests in Indonesia have generally been seen as an incitement of anger against the elites by a shrinking middle

class. While the Gini co-efficient of Indonesia has been declining, the country still registers one of the highest levels of inequality in the Southeast Asian region.

As per an Oxfam report, Indonesia ranks sixth among countries with the greatest wealth inequality. The four richest people in Indonesia have a combined income of more than 100 of the poorest citizens in the country. Additional issues which plague the poor include low wages and job insecurity. Education also remains underfunded, with various barriers restricting higher education.

Is this the first time protests have emerged against the ruling party?

Mr. Prabowo and his government came to power last year in October. And since then, his government has embarked on a cost-cutting drive to increase 'efficiency'.

In the beginning of this year, the Prabowo government announced a fiscal cut of 306 trillion rupiah (\$18.8 billion)

from the country's budget. These cuts were justified by the government as being redirected to fund the 'free meal' programme in schools, which was one of the key election campaign promises of the ruling government. The programme was aimed at not only providing nutritious food to school students but also as a tool to build back the dilapidated schools of the country.

However, this reallocation has come at a great cost. The budgets of several government departments have been reduced significantly; for example, there has been a 70% reduction for public works, a 52% cut for economic affairs and a 40% reduction in investment. To cope with such budget cuts, regional governments increased local taxes, the most infamous of them being a 250% increase in property tax in Pati, a town in central Java. The higher education ministry's budget was also cut by 25%.

These cuts caused massive outrage among college students who stated that these reductions will make education expensive as well as cut scholarships. On February 17, thousands of students came out in protest of these budget cuts. The movement was dubbed 'Dark Indonesia' as opposed to the President's vision of bringing in a 'Golden Indonesia'. The movement reached its zenith on February 20 with hundreds of thousands of students taking to the streets in Jakarta and other cities. However, Mr. Prabowo slammed the protests and said that these cuts were necessary to fuel the economic future of the country.

What next?

In a bid to quell some of the public anger, one of the police officers behind the killing of Mr. Affan has been "dishonourably" fired. The Cabinet has also been reshuffled with five Ministers losing their job, including Ms. Indrawati. Parliamentary officials also met with at least 10 student unions whose demands included the release of demonstrators and detainees. Fitch Ratings has said that the unrest could harm Indonesia's sovereign credit profile.

THE GIST

▼ The initial protests, which were mainly composed of students and labour unions, were conducted outside the Indonesian Parliament, against the housing allowance accorded to legislative members.

▼ However, after 21-year-old Affan Kurniawan, a delivery worker, was run over and killed by a police vehicle, protests escalated.

▼ These protests in Indonesia have generally been seen as an incitement of anger against the elites by a shrinking middle class.

Can the T.N. government break the caste-job nexus?

How have the lives of civic workers in Bengaluru changed after the government regularised their jobs?

Venkatanarayanan Sethuraman
Vijayalaya Srinivas
Viji Bathirasamy

The story so far:

In contemporary times, every sector is moving towards privatisation and contractualisation of the workforce. The recent struggle by conservancy workers in Chennai against privatisation, demanding regularisation, and the way in which they were arrested created a political storm in Chennai.

What happened in Chennai?

Contractual work under the government was providing conservancy workers with minimum wage, which will be further reduced when working under a private contract system. Since a majority of conservancy workers belong to the Dalit community, there were voices against regularisation, as it might perpetuate the

caste-based profession within the community for generations. But working under a private contractor is not going to break this nexus.

Has Bengaluru also faced the same?

A recent study by the authors on civic workers (*pourakarmikas*) in Bengaluru has shown progressive changes in their life after the Karnataka government announced the regularisation of around 12,000 civic workers this year. The 1976 report of the Committee on Improvement of Living and Working Conditions of Sweepers and Scavengers under the chairmanship of IPD Salappa was one of the important interventions which suggested changes in conditions of *pourakarmikas* in Karnataka. The extensive report discussed various aspects related to their housing, health, work safety, job security, etc., and suggested sweeping measures for rehabilitation and

providing healthy living and working conditions for them. Even though, regularisation was not a major issue back then, the privatisation and contractualisation of labour after the 1990's has worsened the status and situation of civic workers so much that it has become impossible to break the caste-profession nexus. But, the recent regularisation has given them hope to break this chain. After sustained struggle under the AICTTU, the government of Karnataka implemented two important measures in 2017 and 2018. In 2017, they implemented minimum wage and in 2018, they removed contractors and brought *pourakarmikas* under the direct payment system of the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike with an assurance that they will be made permanent.

How to break the caste-job nexus?

Most of the *pourakarmikas* feel that

regularisation and job security play a significant role in breaking the caste-profession nexus. It provides a safety net and protection to fight against exploitation and discrimination. It can also strengthen bargaining power which is much needed in the fight for equality. The *pourakarmikas*, under the earlier private contract system, did not get minimum wages, safety equipments, leave entitlements, compensation for injury/death and other legally mandated benefits. Such uncertainty had been a major hurdle in focussing on their health, children's education and other aspects to bring the next generation out of the caste-profession nexus.

What should the DMK do?

The government of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), which is ideologically rooted in social justice and caste annihilation, has to seriously rethink its approach towards the regularisation demand of conservancy workers. Even though, the government has announced various welfare measures, these will not be able to break the caste-profession nexus, while working under private contractors as job insecurity will be a major hurdle for them to challenge exploitation and discrimination.

Venkatanarayanan Sethuraman, Vijayalaya Srinivas and Viji Bathirasamy teach at Christ University, Bengaluru.

THE GIST

▼ Contractual work under the government was providing conservancy workers with minimum wage, which will be further reduced when working under a private contract system.

▼ Most of the *pourakarmikas* feel that regularisation and job security play a significant role in breaking the caste-profession nexus.

▼ The government of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) has to seriously rethink its approach towards the regularisation demand of conservancy workers.

EXPLAINER



Rejuvenating cities: A fisherman casting his net into the backwaters, in Kochi. KUTIBU

Lessons for India: how Kerala is tackling rapid urbanisation

As the first State-level urban commission in the country, the Kerala Urban Policy Commission's report promises nothing less than a data revolution, governance recalibration, identity revival, and finance empowerment

Tikender Singh Panwar

The story so far:

Kerala is a tapestry of villages rippling into towns, of backwaters, and midlands and highlands woven together in a living continuum. Capital cities and hamlets blend into each other, forming a unique "rurban" landscape. Yet beneath this tapestry lies a race against time — urbanisation accelerating faster than infrastructure and governance can keep up, while climate stress lurks in floods, landslides, coastal erosion, and unpredictable weather. In response, Kerala decided to tackle the problem head-on with the Kerala Urban Policy Commission.

What is the KUPC?

The Kerala Urban Policy Commission, (KUPC) set in motion in December 2023, was charged with designing a 25-year urban roadmap that sees cities not as concrete problems, but as organic, climate-aware ecosystems. When the KUPC handed its report to the State in March 2025, the result was not a mild adjustment — it was a structural reset. The blueprint promised nothing less than a data revolution, governance recalibration, identity revival, and finance empowerment — all tied together in one bold vision.

Why was it needed?

By late 2023, Kerala was urbanising at a pace well ahead of the national average. Estimates projected an urban population of over 80% by 2050 — a seismic shift in a region where villages and towns intermesh in a delicate mosaic. Meanwhile, climate threats were intensifying. Floods devastated Ernakulam; landslides shattered hillsides; and coastal zones reeled from sea-level pressures. The gap between crisis and planning was growing wide.

The cabinet's December 2023 resolution to form the KUPC was a calculated break from India's centralised, project-based urban model. It was a

political acknowledgement that Kerala needed its own compass — tailored to its place, history, and climate context. No other State had taken such a leap. Therefore, the KUPC became India's first State-level urban commission, signalling a paradigm shift — from reactive fixes to systemic thinking.

What were the recommendations of the commission?

The commission conducted 33 deep-dive studies, covering everything from land-use patterns and water systems to finance flows and civic health. It held 53 district-level stakeholder dialogues, involving mayors, NGOs, unions, resident associations, gig workers, and panchayat members.

A 2,359-page final report, structured around 10 thematic pillars, ranging from climate readiness and finance to well-being and identity, was submitted to the State. The commission drew on Census numbers, satellite imagery, socio-economic realities, ecological hazards, and Kerala's lived "rurban" character to deliver actionable insights grounded in evidence and local narrative.

Some of the most important recommendations of the KUPC report submitted to the Chief Minister on March 30, 2025 include:

Climate and risk-aware zoning: Any kind of urban planning must reflect hazard mapping of landslides, coastal inundation, flood zones etc. Thus, planning becomes proactive, instead of being reactive.

A digital data observatory: At the Kerala Institute of Local Administration, a real-time data nerve centre could collate high-resolution Light Detection and Ranging, and ground penetrating radar, tide/water gauge, satellite and real-time weather data. Thus, every municipality gains a living intelligence feed.

Green fees and climate insurance: Projects in eco-sensitive zones could come with environmental levies (green fees) which would fund urban resilience. A parametric insurance model ensures pre-approved payouts for disaster-prone

areas.

Municipal and pooled bonds: While Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi, and Kozhikode, being bigger cities, could issue municipal bonds, smaller towns would use pooled instruments. Bond subscriptions were even plugged into the 2024 Interim Budget.

Governance overhaul: City cabinets, led by mayors, could replace bureaucratic inertia. Specialist cells (climate, waste, mobility, law) with dedicated municipal cadres should be formed. A "Jnanashree" program would recruit and deploy youth tech talent.

Place-based economic revival: Thrissur-Kochi is known as a FinTech hub; Thiruvananthapuram-Kollam a knowledge corridor; Kozhikode is known as the city of literature; and Palakkad and Kasaragod have been elevated to smart-industrial zones.

Commons, culture, and care: The report stressed the need to revive wetlands, reactivate waterways and preserve heritage zones. It also recommended city health councils to cater to migrants, students, gig workers.

Why is the report unique?

The KUPC highlighted a deeper innovation: the fusion of local narratives and data systems.

Commission members described how fishermen's ordeals with coastal recession, youth-crafted water conservation drives, or mobility woes voiced by bazaar vendors — all became structured into the urban data apparatus. LIDAR maps now register tidal health near fishing zones; municipal dashboards carry community-generated indicators; and city briefing templates reflect lived stories. Rather than imposing "top-down solutions," policies were co-produced with citizens, giving Kerala an urban intelligence engine — a living, breathing system where city systems absorb, interpret and act on the emotional, lived intelligence of local communities.

What distinguishes the KUPC isn't one big idea — it's the collision of several game-changing ones.

The KUPC is the first State-level commission built for sub-national realities and not recycled from national frameworks. In its report, climate resilience is embedded and not appended — every pillar integrates disaster awareness. The report also calls for the emancipation of public finance through municipal bonds and green levies which give local bodies fiscal agency.

It also re-defines governance from passive bureaucracies to dynamic election-led city cabinets, guided by youth technocrats. Rich stories fuel data, and data fuels policy, closing the feedback loop between lived reality and institutional action. Together, these features dismantle silos — in planning, finance, governance — and re-assemble them into a 360° urban system.

Does it offer lessons for other States?

Kerala's Urban Commission offers a template with tangible takeaways for other States — mandate a time-bound commission; combine technical data with lived experience and create dialogic systems where citizen inputs are mapped into data observatories; empower local bodies with green levies, bonds, and risk premiums; and insert youth and specialists in governance.

What next?

The KUPC changed more than planning — it rewired the DNA of how a State conceives its cities and towns. It entwined climate awareness, community narrative, financial empowerment, digital governance, and identity economy into a living document-functional plan.

As the first such State-level commission in the country, KUPC isn't an end — it's a beginning. For Kerala, it's a chance to grow not just richer, but wiser; not just bigger, but better; not just more urban, but more human.

For others, it's a call to action: urban transformation isn't a problem to solve. It's a story to be authored — together.

Tikender Singh Panwar is a Member of the KUPC and a former deputy mayor, Shimla.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know Your English

K. Subrahmanian
S. Upendran

"I tell you that Sujatha is crazy!"
"What has she done now?"
"Well, yesterday we were all drinking punch and she was trying to convince us that the word 'punch' comes from an Indian language. When we asked her which Indian language, she said she didn't know. We knew then she was lying."
"She wasn't."
"What? You mean the word 'punch'..."
"...many people believe that the word 'punch' comes from the Hindi word 'paanch'."
"Paanch! You mean the word for number five?"
"That's right. Don't 'paanch' and 'punch' sound similar?"
"They do. But what's the connection between the drink and the number five?"
"The connection lies in the number of ingredients that went into making the drink. Punch has five main ingredients — water, spice, sugar, spirit, and fruit juice."
"And since it comprises of five main ingredients, it was called 'paanch'. And from 'paanch', we get 'punch'."
"Exactly! By the way, we do not usually say 'comprise of'. The word 'comprise' is not generally followed by 'of'. For example, The class comprises 20 students."
"The United States comprises 50 states."
"Tendulkar's century comprised 20 boundaries."
"But the word 'consist' can be followed by 'of', right?"
"You're right. The word 'consist' can be followed by 'of'. For example, The class consists of 20 students."
"America consists of 50 states."
"Good. Now you can tell Sujatha that she was right about 'punch' after all. I am sure she'll be as pleased as punch."
"As pleased as punch! What does it mean? Happy?"
"That's right. When you say that someone is as pleased as punch it means he/she is extremely happy. For example, when Azhar was appointed captain, he was as pleased as punch."
"When my father came to know that he was getting a promotion, he was as pleased as punch."
"When my boss came to know that the Board meeting had been put off, he was as pleased as punch."
"That reminds me, you'll be happy to know that the cultural programme that we had planned for tomorrow has been postponed."
"I am as pleased as punch. You were planning to sing some old Hindi song, weren't you?"
"Yes, we were planning to sing that hit song from the movie Tezaab, 'Ek, dho, theen...'. I guess now we can say, 'Ek, dho, theen, chaar, PUNCH, che, saath...'"
"Ha! Ha! Ha!"
Published in The Hindu on January 13, 1998.

THE DAILY QUIZ

By winning the U.S. Open on this day in 1988, Steffi Graf completed her Grand Slam; she was the first woman to accomplish the feat since 1970. A quiz on many firsts in tennis

Sindhu Nagaraj

QUESTION 1

What is the term when a player wins the four majors in all three disciplines a player is eligible for — singles, doubles and mixed doubles?

QUESTION 2

In the history of men's tennis, only two players have won the calendar Grand Slam — a player who wins all four majors, in singles or as part of a doubles team, in the same calendar year. Who are they?

QUESTION 3

Only two players have achieved the new term, a "Surface Slam", winning three

consecutive majors on three distinct surfaces. Who are they?

QUESTION 4

Who is the only player who has won a non-calendar year grand slam — all four major titles consecutively (not in a calendar year)?

QUESTION 5

Which female tennis player equals Novak Djokovic at 24 grand slam singles wins?

QUESTION 6

This player went almost six years without a loss on clay, winning 125 straight clay-court matches between September 1973 and May 1979. Name the player.



Visual question:

Identify this player. Hint: In 1953, she became the first woman to win a Grand Slam. She is known for another achievement. What is it?

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

1. This Vice President also served as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India. **Ans: Mohammad Hidayatullah**
2. This Vice President was the only person to have become the President of India after having served as the Chief Minister of this State. **Ans: Shankar Dayal Sharma; erstwhile Bhopal State**

3. Apart from the first Vice President, this VP was re-elected and served a total of 10 years in the post. **Ans: Hamid Ansari**

4. The first person from a Dalit community to serve as Vice President, and later as President of India. **Ans: K.R.Narayanan**

5. This Vice President was the first to not be elected as President of India. **Ans: Gopal Swarup Pathak**

Visual: Name this former Vice President. **Ans: Zakir Husain**
Early Birds: Tom Alan Faithi| Sukdev Shet| Dodo Jayaditya| Sadhan Kumar Panda| M. Suresh Kumar

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

Word of the day

Inconmode:
to cause inconvenience or discomfort

Synonyms: bother, disoblige, inconvenience, trouble

Usage: The cramped seating *inconmode* the passengers.

Pronunciation: newsth./live/ inconmodepro

International Phonetic Alphabet: [ɪnka'moʊd]

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

The Statesman

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

Jobs on Edge

The August labour market figures from the United States confirm what has been building for months: the world's largest economy is slowing in ways that can no longer be brushed aside as statistical noise. Employers added a mere 22,000 jobs last month, while the unemployment rate inched upward to 4.3 per cent.

More alarming was the revelation that June actually saw a net job loss, the first since the pandemic. For a country that has prided itself on its post-Covid recovery, this is a warning bell that should not be ignored.

The fragility of the labour market is not an accident of business cycles alone. It reflects the deliberate policy choices made in Washington.

Sweeping tariffs, a sharp turn on immigration, and significant cuts in government payrolls have converged to squeeze both supply and demand. Manufacturing has endured four consecutive months of losses, construction has faltered, and even the once-reliable cushion of public sector jobs has thinned after thousands of federal workers were let go. Health care remains a bright spot, but its gains are not enough to offset the declines elsewhere.

For ordinary Americans, these trends are deeply unsettling. Secure, well-paying jobs in factories and construction sites have long underpinned the middle class. Their erosion, accelerated by trade uncertainty and shrinking government support, threatens to widen inequality and weaken social cohesion.

At the same time, a crackdown on immigration has slowed the inflow of new workers, altering the balance of the labour force. While the economy may now need fewer jobs each month to absorb population growth, that statistical cushion cannot disguise the reality of a system producing less opportunity.

Investors, meanwhile, are reading the numbers differently. Financial markets greeted the weak report with relief, seeing it as a guarantee that the Federal Reserve will cut interest rates. Bond yields fell and equities edged higher, proof of the perverse logic that "bad news is good news" when central banks are expected to step in.

Yet rate cuts, however welcome to traders, are not a panacea. Cheap money cannot resolve the structural weaknesses created by trade barriers, policy uncertainty, and shrinking fiscal support.

The larger concern is that Washington seems unwilling to acknowledge the depth of the problem. Blaming statistical agencies or insisting that revisions will paint a better picture avoids the central issue: the job machine that powered America's growth is faltering under the weight of political choices. The damage cannot be reversed simply by monetary policy tweaks or optimistic rhetoric.

The lesson from August is sobering. Employment data may fluctuate month to month, but four straight months of manufacturing decline and a first net loss since 2020 are not coincidences.

Are signals of a slowing economy shaped by policy as much as by markets, if the United States fails to adapt, the weakness in its job market may mark not just a pause, but a turning point.

Food over Time

Intermittent fasting has been hailed as the ultimate shortcut to better health. By narrowing the hours of eating rather than obsessing over calories or food groups, it advocates promised a pathway to weight loss, metabolic balance, and even longevity.

The appeal was obvious: skip breakfast, eat in a compressed window, and let biology do the heavy lifting. It fit neatly into the rhythm of modern life, where simplicity often trumps sustainability.

But new evidence has thrown a spanner into this narrative. For the first time, large-scale, long-term data tracking of thousands of adults suggests that restricting eating to less than eight hours a day may not be as benign as once thought. In fact, the findings indicate a significantly higher risk of cardiovascular mortality among those who stuck to such narrow eating windows, even after accounting for diet quality, lifestyle factors, and existing health conditions.

The revelation is jarring. If fasting is truly protective, why would deaths linked to heart disease rise so sharply in those who adopt it most rigorously?

The answer may lie in the limits of earlier studies. Most fasting research to date has been short-term - weeks or months - sufficient to capture quick changes in weight or blood sugar, but not long enough to reveal the toll on organs and systems over years. What looks like progress in the near term may mask vulnerabilities that emerge slowly.

There are, of course, nuances. The increased risk was strongest among smokers, diabetics, and people already battling cardiovascular disease.

That suggests fasting may interact differently with underlying vulnerabilities. For someone relatively young and healthy, a time-restricted routine might remain useful for weight management. But for others, especially those with fragile metabolic balance, prolonged fasting could aggravate existing risks.

This raises an uncomfortable but necessary point: nutrition cannot be reduced to a universal hack. Context matters - age, medical history, cultural patterns, and even psychological resilience influence how the body responds.

Skipping meals might help some manage blood sugar, while for others it may trigger nutrient deficiencies, muscle loss, or dangerous dips in energy. What is liberating for one person can be hazardous for another.

The broader lesson here is humility. Science evolves, and dietary wisdom shifts with new evidence. Instead of clinging to a single formula, individuals should view fasting as a tool - one option among many - not as a guaranteed road to health. Medical guidance, especially for those with chronic conditions, becomes indispensable.

Perhaps the more enduring truth is this: it is not the clock but the plate that deserves greater attention. Flexibility, diversity, and moderation still shape long-term outcomes more reliably than fashionable regimens. Until science settles the debate, moderation and balance remain safer bets than extreme adherence to dietary trends.

Politics of Payback ~ I

The script is well-known. A critical comment, a challenging primary campaign, a vote against a key policy - any of these can trigger a chain reaction. The politician can expect an investigation, perhaps by a federal agency, perhaps by a congressional committee. The allegations may be baseless, the timing suspicious, but the damage is done. The spectre of impropriety hangs over the politician's career, a constant, nagging drain on their time, their resources, and their public standing. The message is clear: challenge Trump, and you will find your life, your finances, and your family under a microscope.

The political landscape, it is often said, is a battlefield of ideas, a contest of policies debated in the hallowed halls of democracy. Yet, in the age of Donald Trump, this battlefield has taken on a more primal, more punitive dimension. The rules of engagement have been rewritten. The art of political disagreement has been replaced by the science of personal retaliation.

To thwart Mr. Trump is not merely to lose a debate; it is to court punishment, as India has recently discovered with 50 per cent tariff for buying Russian oil.

Recently, The Economist wrote: "To thwart Donald Trump is to court punishment. A rival politician can expect an investigation, an aggravating network may face a lawsuit, a left-leaning university can bid farewell to its public grants, a scrupulous civil servant can count on a pink slip and an independent-minded foreign government, however determined an adversary or stalwart ally, invites tariffs. Perceived antagonists should also brace for a hail of insults, a lesson in public humiliation to potential transgressors."

This is a stark message, and it is a pattern that has defined Trump's political career, both as a candidate and as president. It is a modus operandi built on the simple, unyielding principle that perceived disloyalty must be met with a swift and decisive response.

This is not the political rough-and-tumble we are accustomed to; it is a system of public humiliation and professional endangerment, a lesson in what happens when one crosses the man at the centre of the political universe.



Let us begin with the rival politician. The script is well-known. A critical comment, a challenging primary campaign, a vote against a key policy - any of these can trigger a chain reaction. The politician can expect an investigation, perhaps by a federal agency, perhaps by a congressional committee.

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This isn't the first time Bolton has been in

the crosshairs. He was a fierce critic of the president after he left his administration and wrote a tell-all book, *The Room Where It Happened*, which the Justice Department under the previous administration tried to block. The lawsuit was dropped, but it seems the matter wasn't settled after all. The raid feels like a stunningly personal, political act. Next, consider the aggravating network, the news outlet that dares to question the narrative, to report on inconvenient truths, or to provide a platform for dissenting voices.

Such a network may face a lawsuit, often a SLAPP suit - a Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation - designed not to win in court but to drain the network's resources, to intimidate them into silence.

The legal bills mount. The editorial decisions become more cautious, and the chilling effect permeates the newsroom. The aim is not to prove that the reporting is false; it is to make the act of reporting on Trump financially ruinous endeavour.

For instance, Trump has sued numerous media outlets, including CNN, CBS, and The Wall Street Journal, for critical coverage. In one high-profile case, CBS's parent company, Paramount, settled a lawsuit with Mr. Trump, reportedly agreeing to pay him millions of dollars and to implement what critics have dubbed "the Trump Rule," requiring the network to release full, unedited transcripts of future presidential candidate interviews.

Then there is the left-leaning university, a perceived bastion of liberal thought, a place where critical inquiry is not just encouraged but celebrated. Such an institution can bid farewell to its public grants. The

dismissal may be framed as a matter of "performance" or "reorganization," but the true reason is known to all. The civil service, the bedrock of any functioning government, is transformed from a meritocracy into a loyalty test.

The cost is not just to the individual; it is to the very fabric of government, to the principle that public servants serve the public, not a particular political leader.

The Campaign Legal Center reported that Trump's administration revived the Schedule F executive order, which could allow for the firing of thousands of career civil servants and their replacement with loyalists.

Recently, Trump removed the Bureau of Labor Statistics commissioner, a political appointee, after the agency released a jobs report that was seen as disappointing.

(To Be Concluded)

INQUIRER

Paving the road to reckoning

It took almost 10 years, but finally a regional trial court (RTC) has found a police colonel guilty of extrajudicial killing, the fourth conviction handed out so far to law enforcers involved in the former administration's brutal war on drugs. In a 39-page decision, the Baguio City RTC Branch 60 found Police Col. Dante Lubos guilty of homicide over the death of Ryan Dave Almora on July 28, 2016, barely a month after former president Rodrigo Duterte launched his bloody anti-illegal drugs campaign.

Presiding Judge Rufus Gave Malecand Jr. sentenced Lubos, then the head of the city police's Central Intelligence Unit, to up to 14 years in prison and ordered him to pay Almora's family some P1.45 million in damages, lawyer's fees, and civil indemnity.

Lubos had categorically admitted to shooting Almora dead during a police anti-drug operation, saying it was "necessary" as the victim had fought back and started shooting them and their civilian informant.

But the judge dismissed the "manlaban"

narrative, citing "overwhelming" documentary evidence and expert testimony on the absence of gunpowder burns on Almora, the downward trajectory of the bullets, and the three shots to his abdomen and chest that rendered him "defenseless and [in] a compromised position when he was killed."

By the accused, "Lubos' conviction brings to 10 the number of police officers found guilty in the extrajudicial killings of Kian de Santos, Carl Arnaza, and Reynaldo "Kulot" de Guzman in 2017, and Luis Bonifacio and his son Gabriel in 2016. Government data has put at 6,000 the number of suspects killed in police anti-drug operations, though rights groups say the number is closer to 20,000. Most of those killed had allegedly fought back, a narrative that Duterte said he supported during a Senate inquiry on the drug war in October last year. Under oath, Duterte admitted that during his time as president and as mayor of Davao, he had ordered police to

"encourage" suspects of crimes to fight back and "draw their guns" so that the officers can justify the killings as "self-defense."

In February 2021, Duterte's Justice secretary Menardo Guevarra told the United Nations Human Rights Council that more than half of thousands of anti-drug operations launched by the police had failed to comply with rules of engagement and protocol.

The Duterte official noted that there was "no full examination of the weapon recovered, no verification of its ownership, and no request for ballistic examination or paraffin test."

The initial findings of a government panel tasked to review controversial police operations also showed that in more than half of the cases, the agents involved had failed to coordinate with other agencies in the processing of the crime scene, Guevarra added.

While inordinately delayed, the latest court ruling is a welcome correction of the skewed justice system that saw the law weaponized to favor Duterte's political

allies - as in the exoneration of police involved in the death of suspects under government custody - and to silence critics, as in the case of former senator, now Mamamayang Liberal party list Rep. Leila de Lima, who spent almost seven years in prison before being acquitted of trumped-up drug charges. With justice still elusive to thousands of other EJK victims, the National Police Commission should push its demand that the police open its sealed records on Duterte-era drug operations so that more scalawags can be identified, investigated, and charged.

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ASIA NEWS NETWORK

PERSONAL

ANNUAL General Meeting of Calcutta Y.M.C.A. will be held on Wednesday, 24th September, 2025 at 4:30 p.m. at the Y.M.C.A. Chowringhee Branch, 25, Jawahar Lal Nehru Road, Kolkata-700087. Mr. John Mazumdar, President of the Association will be in the Chair.

Letters To The Editor | editor@thestatesman.com

Day of pride

Sir, This refers to the article written by PM Narendra Modi. A tribute to Bhupen Da (September 8). September 8 is a day of immense pride for all admirers of Indian art and culture, particularly for the people of Assam. It marks the birth anniversary of the legendary Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, whose centenary year has just begun. He was not merely a gifted singer but a cultural icon whose creations carried messages of humanity, compassion, and unity.

From his childhood in Assam, nurtured by his folk traditions and oral heritage, Bhupen Da developed a voice that reached far beyond the state. His music drew inspiration from folk figures like Paul Robeson, yet it never lost touch with his native soil. While he excelled abroad, he chose to return home, dedicating himself to giving voice to workers, farmers, women and ordinary citizens

through songs, theatre, cinema, and documentaries.

Yours, etc., Sanjoy Chopra, Mohali, 8 September.

Transparency

Sir, Of late, our courts have witnessed a spate of judicial recusals. While recusal is an established safeguard to ensure impartiality, the manner in which it is invoked and communicated has raised troubling questions. The episode at the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) where a member disclosed that he was recusing himself from a case as he had been "approached" by a higher judicial figure to favour a party has shaken confidence in the process. Recently, Supreme Court Justice M.M. Sundresh recused himself from hearing Dalit rights lawyer Surendra Gadling's bail plea, without citing any reason. Even Chief Justices - Sanjay Khanna in the Election Commissioners'

appointments case and B.R. Gavai in an in-house judicial probe - have recently stepped aside. Such inconsistency sends mixed signals on transparency.

The law offers little clarity. There is no codified framework for recusals. But a minimal path is possible. Courts could adopt minimal disclosure standards - a one-line "reason category" on the order sheet and a central recusal register. Such light-touch reforms would safeguard independence.

Silence, especially in sensitive matters, is no longer neutral.

Yours, etc., Khokan Das, Kolkata, 8 September.

No special cells

Sir, This refers to the visit of the officials of Crown Prosecution Service of UK to assess the conditions of Thar Jail following the flagging of the same by fugitives who are

soon to be extradited to India. While it speaks well of the Indian government to have facilitated such a visit of officials of another country, it does, however, raise the question as to why the conditions of our jails need to be inspected and ticked off by officials of other countries. Jails are not five-star hotels and even if they host high profile personalities, they are wrong doers and hence cannot seek any special facilities.

It appears that Indian authorities have assured the visiting team that a separate place can be created to accommodate high-profile fugitives and that their special needs will be taken care of. While the authorities are duty bound to ensure safety and security of all inmates, why should there be a separate place and consideration for high-profile ones? At the most, jails can have separate cells for hard-core criminals.

Yours, etc., V.S. Jayaraman, Chennai, 7 September.

Tariffs appeal could divide US top court unpredictably

PRABHU DAYAL

The United States has historically championed free trade, particularly after World War II. It played a key role in establishing the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and later the World Trade Organization (WTO), both promoting reduced trade barriers. While the US has negotiated numerous Free Trade Agreements, its commitment to free trade has recently been a topic of debate, especially with the rise of protectionist sentiment. President Trump has made tariffs on imports from other countries the central plank of his administration's trade policy. Trump's tariffs, while intended to boost domestic production and jobs, are having a complex set of global and domestic economic effects. While the tariffs are designed to protect specific domestic industries and raise revenue, the overall economic impact on the US and the global economy is turning out to be negative, resulting in reduced trade, higher costs, and decreased growth.

The tariffs are sparking intense uncertainty in the US and it is unclear how it will all end. The full impact of these tariffs is still unfolding, and economic projections may vary depending on how consumers, businesses, and governments respond. The implementation of Trump's tariffs could significantly impact economic growth within the US.

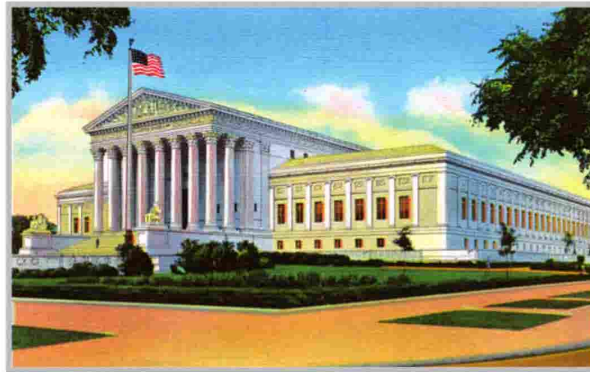
There's also on-going uncertainty about the legal basis of these tariffs, particularly regarding the administration's reliance on the

International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), which could be challenged in court. Against this background, it is not surprising that multiple cases have been filed in the US Federal Courts against the Trump Administration's tariffs.

The main legal challenge centres on whether the IEEPA gives the President authority to impose tariffs without specific congressional approval. While the IEEPA grants the President broad economic action powers during national emergencies, it does not explicitly mention tariffs. Challengers argue that tariffs are a matter for Congress to decide, while the administration contends IEEPA's powers include imposing tariffs. Other arguments concern whether the reasons for the tariffs qualify as an 'unusual and extraordinary threat' under IEEPA and broader constitutional limits on executive power.

Some days ago, the Federal Circuit ruled by a 7-4 decision that the tariffs which Trump brought in through emergency economic powers act did not fall within the president's mandate and that setting levies was 'a core Congressional power'. The Court of Appeals ruled that Trump overstepped his presidential authority when he implemented the steep levies.

In a petition filed in the US Supreme Court, the Trump administration has asked the justices to quickly intervene to overturn the judgement of the Appeals Court and to rule that the President does have the power to impose such import tariffs on foreign nations. The president has warned that 'our country is going to suffer greatly' if the Supreme Court upholds the lower



court's decision on the tariffs. The outcome in the case is not guaranteed, and various factors could influence the Supreme Court's decision. Some US analysts suggest the 6-3 conservative majority in the Supreme Court could lean in Trump's favour. However, others point out that the legal challenge is based on fundamental constitutional principles and could divide the court in unpredictable ways. Economists say that the tariffs are slowing down US economic growth, while inflation has also ticked upwards. In his piece 'Trump's Tariff Tantrums Are Hobbling the US Economy', Jeffrey A. Sonnenfeld, Professor in the School of Management at Yale University has stated that tariffs

have fundamentally disrupted markets, leaving businesses vulnerable to the double threat of uncertainty and cost inflation.

John Mearsheimer, a leading American international relations expert and Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago, has said that the 'Trump administration's India policy is a "colossal blunder" and asserted that secondary tariffs on India for buying Russian oil "won't work." Trump's former National Security Adviser (NSA) John Bolton has said that he (Trump) "has shredded decades of efforts" made by the West to strengthen diplomatic and strategic ties with India with his "disastrous" tariffs. Meanwhile, global trade continues to be destabilized by the on-going tariff battles. According

to the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the rules-based global trading system has been weakened, and countries are increasingly resorting to tariffs to pursue domestic policy goals. As a result, many countries are engaging in bilateral negotiations to navigate and mitigate the effects of the US tariffs.

India is also actively pursuing and expanding its bilateral trade network as a key part of its economic strategy. This strategy of diversification is to some extent a response to trade uncertainty with the US, and is intended to provide India with greater negotiating leverage.

(The writer, a retired IAS officer, served as India's Ambassador to Kuwait and Morocco and as Consul-General in New York.)

100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 10 September 1925

OCCASIONAL NOTE

Slowly but surely the League of Nations is consolidating its position. Fifty-four nations are represented at the present session in Geneva, and with the admittance of Germany, which is foreshadowed in M. Poincaré's Presidential address, the total will increase to fifty-five, and the population represented by an aggregate of seventy millions. At the proper time the United States, to whose President the conception of the League is due, will doubtless shed its attitude of aloofness, and join hands with Europe in the promotion and preservation of world peace. Not the least significant fact about the sixth session is the widespread interest which is being taken in it. This indicates that the League has ceased to be a negligible factor in world affairs if ever was such — and that as time goes on it will bring the weight of an ever-increasing pressure to bear upon every individual nation which recognizes its authority.

News Items

GERMAN TRADE

RESUMING NEGOTIATIONS WITH FRANCE

(Times' Special Service)

London, Sept.

The Franco-German trade negotiations which are being resumed on September 15, are likely to be protracted. It is considered, says The Times Berlin correspondent, that since their suspension the position has become more difficult and it may be necessary to conclude a new temporary agreement. There is also talk of resuming negotiations with Russia and Italy. The Soviet treaty has so far not progressed, and is not regarded as very hopeful.

LANDING CONFIRMED

LITTLE RESISTANCE TO SPANISH TROOPS

Madrid, Sept.

General Primo di Rivera has sent a wireless message to the King of Spain from the battleship Alfonso, stating that the 13th Corps, commanded by General Sarrá, landed on the peninsula of Morro Nuevo on the western side of the Bay of Alhucemas at noon, and established their position at Salsouf later, after a short bombardment, without great resistance. — Reuter.

CAIRO RESIGNATIONS

LIBERALS & THE CABINET EXECUTIVE

Cairo, Sept.

The Ministers of Agriculture and Pious Foundations have resigned their executive appointments. The Liberal Constitutional party has passed a unanimous vote of confidence in Abdel Aziz Fahmy, and decided that the two remaining Liberal Ministers mentioned above must resign, and that the Liberals must no longer co-operate with the Cabinet Executive. The resolution also deprecated the manner in which the religious campaign was being stirred up and warned the Cabinet of the dangers resulting therefrom. It also stated that the Liberals stood for the country's religion as strongly as other parties of the Executive and communicated its decision to Sidky Pasha who, although not a Liberal, is regarded as being completely sympathetic towards his Liberal colleagues in the Cabinet. — Reuter.

PRESS DELEGATES

VISIT TO NEW CAPITAL AT CANBERRA

Sydney, Sept.

The new capital at Canberra, where the Federal Parliament is due to meet next year, was thoroughly inspected by the delegates to the Imperial Press Conference who were guests of the Federal Capital Commission. The Ex-Premier, Mr. Hughes, at a luncheon said that the people abroad believed that Australia was a land of strikes and drought. The visitors would see that much of what they had read and heard about the country was untrue. The delegates visited the Royal Military College at Duntroon, the Cotter River Dam and the Mount Stromlo Observatory. — Reuter.

Lee's diplomacy, Trump's ambition converged

ROBERT J. FOUSER

On September 4, South Korean President Lee Jae Myung finished his first three months, or one quarter, in office. He took office after six months of political turmoil that began with former President Yoon Suk Yeol's declaration of martial law, subsequent impeachment, and an early presidential election. President Lee has moved quickly to bring stability to the nation amid economic challenges and shifting geopolitical dynamics. The public has rewarded him with positive approval ratings.

One of Lee's biggest early challenges has been managing the relationship with the United States and its president, Donald Trump. This past April, shortly after beginning his second term, Trump began slapping tariffs on nations around the world, including a 25 per cent tariff on imports from South Korea. This caused the US stock market to drop sharply, causing Trump to retreat to give nations time to negotiate trade deals with the US. On July 30, South Korea and the US reached an agreement that lowered US tariffs on Korean imports from 25 to 15 per cent. In return, South Korea pledged \$350 billion in US

investments, including \$150 billion in shipbuilding and \$100 billion in liquefied natural gas.

On August 25, Lee and Trump held their first summit at the White House. The summit was designed to highlight economic cooperation, reaffirm the alliance and find common ground on relations with North Korea. Hours before the meeting, Trump posted on social media, "WHAT IS GOING ON IN SOUTH KOREA? Seems like a Purge or Revolution. We can't have that and do business there." This rocked social media for a few hours, but Trump greeted Lee warmly and the two leaders got on well.

The Oval Office photo-op turned press conference that many foreign leaders have come to dread went particularly well as Lee charmed Trump and affirmed support for his dream of playing a 'peacemaker' on the Korean peninsula. Lee had clearly prepared for the meeting and used diplomatic finesse to establish a good rapport with the mercurial Trump. The summit ended on a positive note and was heralded as a success in South Korea.

President Lee's approach is easy to understand, but President Trump's sudden shift in mood remains a mystery. Trump's burning desire for a Nobel Peace Prize is

most likely behind the change. His overtures to Russian President Vladimir Putin have fallen flat despite the high-profile summit in Alaska. Rumbles of impending peace talks between Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy faded in the week after the Alaska summit.

By the time Trump met Lee, his attention was turning to another venue that offers him a chance to play peacemaker: the Korean Peninsula. Lee had previously reached out to North Korea to establish dialogue, but Kim Yo-jong, leader Kim Jong-un's sister, poured cold water on that effort. In Trump's eyes, Lee's outreach turns him into an ally in any effort to negotiate a flashy peace deal with North Korea. This explains why his comments in the Oval Office kept returning to North Korea.

As long as Trump remains interested in the Nobel Prize, he will continue to support overtures to North Korea unless he wins the prize from efforts in another venue. President Lee wants to revive the efforts to reach out to North Korea that have been the hallmark of every centre-left president since Kim Dae-jung. And as long as the two men's approaches to North Korea are aligned, the positive rapport will most likely continue, which should help stabilize the relationship between the two countries.

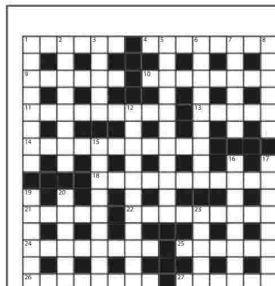


Neither Lee nor Trump can run for re-election. Trump's term ends in January 2029, while Lee's ends in June 2030. This means that Lee will have a year and a half of his term with a post-Trump US president. Nobody knows who that will be, but one thing is for certain: generational change. The most talked about candidates are a mix of Gen X and millennials, both of which have a different worldview from baby boomers who, except Joe Biden, have held the office since Bill Clinton in 1993.

For South Korea, this means that the next US president will come from a generation with less interest in projecting US influence. Millennials, in particular, are impatient for change in a wide range of domestic policies and wary of US unilateralism. Though difficult to imagine now, the next US president will most likely seek to deepen cooperation with South Korea while leaving North Korean outreach to President Lee and his successor, as it should be.

The Korea Herald/ANN.

Crossword | No. 293236



Yesterday's Solution

SUBMERGES
COLLABORING
AMIGO
LIMB
SOUTH
TOSSERS
STIFFENER
AUDIOD
SNAKE
MAGNUS

ACROSS

- 1 A Sikh on vacation engaged by, for instance, leisurely walk (6)
- 4 A belief in reform around Sweden is likely (8)
- 9 A second seabird on the back of a liner, say (6)
- 10 What initiates disquiet about fellow in computing etc for certain (8)
- 11 Bodies not disposed to make a useful contribution (2,4,3)
- 15 Bottle stocked by finer vendors (5)

- 14 Captain altered course in fit of severe anxiety (5,6)
- 18 Fine writing graphically represented (11)
- 21 Where one might see polar bears waiting in readiness? (2,3)
- 22 Father messed up a pinner when grabbing good item in the kitchen (6,3)
- 24 Caught a place for surgery in the US lacking a medical tube (8)
- 25 Disruption where one might play volleyball? About right (6)

DOWN

- 1 Fall to keep appointment with last of mandarins in Whitehall etc (5,3)
- 2 Essential matter overlooked by group as key
- 3 See eye to eye with a native of Corfu largely (5)
- 5 A tune played with levity as a possible result (11)
- 6 Wild prunk in sea, not a feature of yachting? (9)
- 7 British comedian dropping very old sitcom actor (6)
- 8 Former partner leads number wanting hotel in English city (6)
- 12 Traditional site for an engagement? (11)
- 15 Inventor discussed

- 26 Rule out contralto appearing in opening passage (8)
- 27 South American dictators, not a model of industry, are lecherous types (6)
- 30 moment in a court? (5,5)
- 31 See eye to eye with a native of Corfu largely (5)
- 32 Only just how one measures rainfall? (2,6)
- 33 Reportedly, pull top thing for protecting a boot (6)
- 34 Man in Rome regularly toured showing patience, perhaps (6)
- 35 Film critic on TV once snubbed opera (5)

- French symbol (9)
- 16 Hype in a rogue when seizing power produces moment of revelation (6)
- 17 Only just how one measures rainfall? (2,6)
- 19 Reportedly, pull top thing for protecting a boot (6)
- 20 Man in Rome regularly toured showing patience, perhaps (6)
- 23 Film critic on TV once snubbed opera (5)

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



Editor's TAKE

'Swadeshi' in the Age of Tariffs

Prime Minister Narendra Modi asks NDA MPs to push the *Swadeshi* agenda to tackle the Trump tariffs. How can this be a game changer?

US President Donald Trump's reciprocal tariffs have significantly affected India. They have adversely impacted the Indian economy, making recalibration of both external and internal policies imperative. *Swadeshi* has long been a cornerstone of Prime Minister Modi's philosophy. He has made a fervent pitch for *swadeshi* through 'Make in India' and 'Vocal for Local' slogans.

Today, the *Swadeshi* plank is rooted in practical pragmatism. PM Modi has once again invoked the spirit of *Swadeshi* in his recent call to National Democratic Alliance MPs, asking them to turn 'swadeshi' into a mass movement. Modi's push to celebrate the upcoming festive season with 'Swadeshi Melas' is cultural as well as economic. The question, however, is whether such a revival of *swadeshi* can counterbalance the Trump tariffs. Modi seeks to draw upon national sentiment. His call to choose Indian-made goods at a time when global currents appear hostile may or may not resonate as before.

Whether we like it or not, today the world is a small place, and consumer choices are not confined to a region or country; they are epicurean, not ideological. The twenty-first-century economy is not easily swayed by patriotic purchasing. Even if it works, it would play only a marginal role in offsetting the tariffs. Indian exporters will still face tough competition, and the pressure will show on jobs and incomes. *Swadeshi* fairs in constituencies may boost visibility for local artisans, but they cannot substitute for a national export strategy. The Prime Minister's emphasis on manufacturing and self-reliance is well placed, but along with this, much more needs to be done.

For India to withstand trade shocks, it must improve productivity, cut red tape, and invest in supply chain resilience. The recently announced GST reforms are a step in the right direction. If implemented in earnest, they can indeed ease business operations. *Swadeshi* cannot be an excuse for protectionism or a nostalgic fallback. It must be reinterpreted as competitiveness. India's best bet against tariffs is two-fold. First, to diversify trade partners and negotiate from a position of strength. Second, to foster genuine domestic capability so that Indian goods are not chosen merely out of patriotic duty but because they are of good quality.

The long-term goal must be to make 'Made in India' synonymous with quality, reliability, and innovation. The politics of *swadeshi* may rally sentiment in the festive season, but the economics of *swadeshi* must be grounded in competitiveness. Modi is right to remind India that self-reliance is no longer a slogan but a necessity. The challenge is to ensure that it does not remain an emotional appeal but evolves into structural transformation. Only then can India meet tariffs abroad with resilience at home.

KCR's Family: Dynasty in Disarray

The Bharat Rashtira Samithi, once the torchbearer of Telangana's statehood movement, is now caught in a bitter family feud that threatens its very survival. A succession battle has erupted as K Kavitha takes on her brother, KT Rama Rao



KALYANI SHANKAR

Why do political families believe they can hold on to power indefinitely? This is common in many one-man or one-woman parties, where leaders often engage in nepotism by appointing relatives to positions of authority. For example, the late Mulyam Singh Yadav, leader of the Samajwadi Party, had over 20 family members active in politics at one time. However, these families frequently face power struggles as the leader's influence declines.

This is precisely what is unfolding in Telangana, where the Bharat Rashtira Samithi chief and former Telangana Chief Minister, K Chandrababoo Naidu, has suspended his daughter, K Kavitha, for engaging in anti-party activities, though he had encouraged her earlier. Kavitha was also ambitious.

A power tussle is looming large between KCR's daughter and son, KT Rama Rao. By directly naming her cousins Harish Rao and Santosh Kumar, she has even challenged the party's contention that the indictments against KCR and Harish Rao by the Commission were politically motivated. Kavitha's allegations could help BRS's opponents and open the door for political shifts.

Soon after her suspension, Kavitha quit the party and her membership in the Legislative Assembly. She is considering launching her own political organisation. This move could significantly alter the state's political landscape, but only if she succeeds.

This story reflects key themes in the regional politics of South and North India. Succession issues have long troubled regional parties, with a traditional preference for sons over daughters as political heirs. Political rivalries abound, including VN Janaki versus J Jayalalithaa, N Chandrababu Naidu versus Lakshmi Parvathi, MK Stalin versus MK Alagiri, Uddhav versus Raj Thackeray, and now Kavitha versus KT Rama Rao. The family feud within the BRS has intensified into a political drama as KCR's health and influence decline. His charisma failed to sway voters in the 2023 elections, resulting in a loss of power for his party. In the 2004 Lok Sabha polls, BRS got zero.

Kavitha, recently released on bail after being jailed for a multi-crore loan case, is now targeted by her father's confidantes. She has been struggling to remain relevant politically. KCR had a grand dream of becoming the Prime Minister, making his daughter Kavitha a Central Minister, and his son KT Rama Rao the Chief Minister of Telangana. But these remained dreams because KCR was a minor player in



The Pioneer SINCE 1865

MORE THAN A DECADE AFTER THE FORMATION OF TELANGANA, THE BHARAT RASHTRA SAMITHI (BRS), WHICH SPEARHEADED THE TELANGANA MOVEMENT, IS ON THE ROADS

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overall national politics. The blow to BRS came when it lost power in 2023. As it happens to many regional parties, the BRS, which finished third in the 2023 polls, became demoralised. Following a significant defeat in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, KCR has withdrawn from public life, making occasional public appearances. Most of his time is now spent at his farm-house. Thus came a gap which needs to be filled by a capable political heir.

KCR himself had depended on his son KTR as his political heir. Kavitha has been openly critical of her party, writing a six-page letter to her father about KCR's recent lack of energy. She condemned his silver jubilee speech for neglecting important issues and lacking speaking skills.

Kavitha alleged that her cousins have a "tacit understanding" with Congress to harm her father's image and warned they might face similar consequences. Interestingly, Kavitha, KTR, and Harish Rao are all seeking the party presidency. Kavitha's revolt occurred at a critical moment since the Central Bureau of Investigation is set to investigate alleged issues with the Kaleshwaram lift irrigation project, which the BRS has hailed as the jewel of Telangana. Kavitha claimed, "The CBI inquiry against KCR is due solely to the corruption of Harish Rao and Santosh Kumar." The family feud intensified after Chief Minister Revanth Reddy decided to hand over the Kaleshwaram project irregularities to the Central Bureau of Investigation. Reddy

accused the then Chief Minister, KCR, and his Irrigation Minister, Harish Rao, of corruption. Kavitha has decided to confront her cousins, Harish Rao and Santosh Kumar, regarding the irregularities in Kaleshwaram. The power struggle has intensified following KCR's deterioration in health. Kavitha criticised senior party members as the Telangana High Court granted KCR interim protection.

Meanwhile, KCR's nephew, Harish Rao, received interim relief from actions related to the Ghose Commission report, which alleged KCR's involvement in the KLS barrage planning and execution. The ugly drama ended with Part One, concluding with Kavitha's expulsion and her exit. What does the future hold for the BRS? The party is already in decline, and Kavitha's actions could further damage its standing. KTR has collaborated with his father, but it's uncertain whether he can keep the party united. Its future remains uncertain, raising serious concerns about its stability.

More than a decade after the formation of Telangana, the Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS), which spearheaded the Telangana movement, is on the roads. The absence of significant achievements to rally the public has led to the lack of the same level of regional sentiment that once earned it a strong electoral mandate. The BRS faces potential existential challenges. The possibility of BRS members joining either the Congress or the BJP could significantly impact the political landscape.

PIC TALK



The mysterious and seldom-seen Pallas's cat, captured in the high-altitude wilderness of Arunachal Pradesh. PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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SUICIDE PREVENTION DEMANDS EMPATHY, AWARENESS AND ACTION

Approximately seventy per cent of those who commit suicide provide some clues about their intention. Also referred to as *suicidal ideation*, such indications can range from a passing mention to an open admission.

Family history, long-standing illness, repeated stress, or bereavement in the family are important risk factors that can drive a person into despair and hopelessness. Easy access to lethal means – guns or poisons – also heightens the risk, alongside substance abuse disorder (SAD).

On September 10, the World Suicide Prevention Day. It is vital to remember that prevention is possible, and suicide is not an exception. Awareness, compassion, and timely intervention save lives. It is always best to start a direct

conversation with those who may be contemplating suicide, showing genuine care and empathy. One must listen patiently, avoiding judgement or argument, as insensitive responses can push vulnerable individuals further to the brink. The guiding principle remains clear: "Talk with them; do not argue with them."

The mountains of problems that men and women carry are meant to be climbed, not abandoned. Support, counselling, and community awareness can provide the strength needed to endure. Suicide prevention begins with each of us. With timely care and compassion, no life needs to be lost to despair. Suicide prevention is a collective responsibility we must uphold.

GANAPATHI BHAT | AKOLA

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

The Mantra for Peace, Progress, and Prosperity



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

2ND OPINION

From the very moment of birth, an individual enters a specific cultural, social, and national framework. He is nurtured within a community, religion, and tradition that shape his personality and outlook. As he grows, he absorbs the values, customs, and attitudes of these groups, and in turn, he influences them. No human being can live in isolation; life necessarily involves constant interaction with different circles of people. These connections enrich life and give meaning to one's existence.

However, such participation in group life also carries a subtle risk. Gradually, a person begins to develop deep loyalties to his cultural and social units. He identifies strongly with those who belong to his group and, consciously or unconsciously, begins to view others as out-

siders. Humanity, for him, is no longer a universal brotherhood but a limited fraternity. In this mindset, his obligations rarely extend beyond the frontiers of his group or state. This narrow loyalty often breeds prejudice. At first, it may appear as simple misunderstanding or ego-centred behaviour toward others.

But, over time, it can escalate into hostility, bickering, and eventually open conflict. Such tendencies pose a grave threat to peace and stability, both within nations and across the world.

True stability requires the willingness of people to rise above self-interest and make sacrifices for the larger good, recognising that their own well-being is bound with that of others. The ancient Indian wisdom captures this spirit in the Sanskrit verse: "Sarve bhavantu sukhinah, sarve santu niramaya."

This philosophy must become the guiding principle of politics, economics, and social life. Without such a foundation, society will continue to grapple with tension and unrest. The practical question, then, is how to cultivate this attitude. The second timeless mantra offers the answer: "Vasudhaiva kutumbakam" – "The world is one family. When we begin to see the entire human race as members of one household, narrow divisions lose their power. This shift requires more than intellectual agreement; it calls for a transformation in

consciousness. Such transformation is possible when individuals move from body-consciousness to soul-consciousness. At the level of the soul, one recognises a universal kinship that transcends race, religion, and nationality. Spirituality allows a person to remain part of a cultural or ethnic group while simultaneously rising above parochial boundaries to embrace a global vision.

Spirituality, then, is not an escape from life but the cornerstone of true peace. It enables human beings to connect with their higher self and with the universe in a way that transcends religious differences. Practices such as meditation, mindfulness, and gratitude nurture compassion, empathy, and a sense of interconnectedness.

This inner awakening creates a ripple effect, fostering mutual respect and reducing ethnocentrism. Societies built on such values naturally move toward sustainable prosperity and lasting stability. What the world needs most urgently today is spiritual education that awakens the awareness of a global family under the fatherhood of God. Only then can humanity overcome division, and only then can progress bring genuine happiness.

The writer is a spiritual teacher and a popular columnist

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sankarshan Thakur: Voice of truth

This is in response to the report titled "The Telegraph editor Sankarshan Thakur dies" (September 9). In these dark days, Sankarshan Thakur had established himself as that rare journalist and human being with a spine, who never hesitated to call a spade a spade when confronted with injustice or values that contradicted his democratic and liberal convictions. By swimming against the "mainstream", Thakur's pen and voice always confronted the mightiest wreaking havoc in society. He continued to highlight the plight of innumerable citizens during demonetisation, the unilateral abrogation of Article 370 with the fragmentation of Jammu and Kashmir, stringent clampdowns, the callous handling of the Covid-19 pandemic with its fatal lockdown, economic stagnation, joblessness, and the assault on freedom of speech, making a mockery of "Good Days".

The secular Thakur will remain in our hearts for speaking the unspeakable and for daring to criticise the Indian electorate, rightly blaming them for the present state of affairs. Very rightly, he exposed Indians as "compliant and complicit" to horror shows continuing for more than a decade. Stars like Sankarshan Thakur never fade – they shine in Indian journalism's firmament.

KAJAL CHATTERJEE | KOLKATA

Sin tax on casinos justified

The GST Council's decision to bring casinos under the 40 per cent "sin tax" slab deserves appreciation. Gambling, like tobacco and alcohol, may appear a matter of personal choice, but its consequences spill into society through addiction, indebtedness, crime, and family breakdowns. By placing casinos in the same category as sin goods, the Government has acknowledged the wider social costs of such activities.

The purpose of a sin tax is not only revenue collection but deterrence. When harmful habits become costlier, people reconsider indulging. The revenue generated can fund healthcare, awareness campaigns, and welfare programmes. If utilised transparently, this money can offset public burdens caused by lifestyle diseases and social harms linked to gambling. The casino industry's claim that such taxation will destroy business is overstated. Goa's experience shows casinos flourish despite multiple tax notices and legal disputes. The Government must not succumb to industry pressure but stand firm. Ultimately, a sin tax is not merely economic but a moral responsibility. It ensures those indulging in harmful activities also contribute towards covering society's costs. Strengthening this policy is a step towards a healthier, more responsible nation.

AYUSHMAN PANDEY | LUCKNOW

Hundred years of Periyar's rebellion

The year 2025 marks the centenary of the Self-Respect Movement, founded by EV Ramaswami Periyar. The movement altered Tamil Nadu's political discourse and emerged as a response to the hierarchical nature of Indian society, marked by caste oppression and gender inequality. It advocated rationalism, rejecting superstitions that sustained caste hierarchies and social injustice. Periyar was influenced by anti-caste reformers like Jyotirao Phule and BR Ambedkar, whose ideas reinforced the need for social transformation and equality.

The Self-Respect Movement sought not only to dismantle caste discrimination but also to empower women, promote scientific thinking, and encourage self-dignity among oppressed communities. Its relevance is strikingly evident today. Despite India's progress, caste-based discrimination, gender inequality, and socio-economic disparities remain.

The Self-Respect Movement's legacy is one of enduring influence. Its call for social justice, rationalism, and equality is as urgent today as it was in 1925. Commemorating its centenary should not be symbolic. It must inspire renewed efforts to build an inclusive society, free from caste oppression and gender bias, where rationalism and equality guide public life.

RANGANATHAN SIVAKUMAR | CHENNAI



Curbing unaccounted cash in property transactions

Unaccounted cash, particularly in property transactions, has long posed a challenge to India's fiscal transparency and economic governance. Despite various provisions, successive governments have struggled to contain undervaluation of property, stamp duty evasion, and the circulation of black money

FIRST Column



SUBHASH CHANDRA AGRAWAL

Once, there used to be a provision under Section 269U of the Income Tax Act, 1961 that gave the government the option to purchase property at 10 per cent above the sale consideration declared in the income tax return by the buyer. However, this provision was deleted from the Act with effect from 01.07.2002 because of practical difficulties faced by the government. First, the government required excessive funds to purchase properties that the Income Tax Department considered undervalued in the returns. Second, the provision often resulted in deliberate acquisitions of properties that ultimately caused losses, as the government could not even recover the purchase price during subsequent auctions.

At present, the only provision available to the Income Tax Department is to treat the difference between the purchase price and the circle rate as "Income from Undisclosed Sources." However, this provision is itself problematic. In certain areas, such as New Friends Colony in New Delhi, the circle rate is higher than the actual market rate. This creates peculiar situations in property transactions, as stamp duty must be paid on a value greater than the actual purchase price. Conversely, in most cases, property transactions prominently involve unaccounted cash. The involvement of unaccounted cash in property transactions can and should be curtailed through a series of reforms. First, the rate of stamp duty on property transactions should be uniformly reduced to 5 per cent across the country, inclusive of municipal charges.

A 1 per cent concession should be provided if the property is purchased exclusively in the name of a woman, and the concession should be proportionately reduced if the property is purchased jointly by men and women. Second, a permanent Voluntary Disclosure Scheme should be introduced, under which individuals may declare unaccounted income, including cash, in their income tax returns voluntarily under the maximum tax slab.

This slab should be restored to 30 per cent, as originally recommended by the Raja Chellai Commission, instead of the current effective rate of about 43 per cent (due to surcharges and cesses). If a property seller



declares unaccounted cash in a particular year, the Income Tax Department would simultaneously obtain valuable information about the purchaser who may have provided such unaccounted cash.

Such a scheme should also include a provision for compulsory long-term investment of 20 per cent of the disclosed funds in bonds of public sector companies, with floating annual interest equivalent to that of RBI bonds (currently about 8 per cent per annum). For instance, the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) could be entrusted with managing such funds, with its operations expanding to establish production units in every district. These units could produce baked products for use in the Mid-Day Meal

Scheme and railway catering, thereby generating both economic and social benefits. Additionally, the dual provisions for calculating long-term capital gains on property—either 12.5 per cent on the total gain or 20 per cent on the reinvested balance up to ten crore rupees—should be replaced by a uniform 10 per cent long-term capital gains tax, similar to that applied to gains from shares. This change would incentivise taxpayers to conduct property transactions transparently, reducing the reliance on unaccounted cash. Furthermore, a special website should be developed by the Income Tax Department on which property sellers would be required to list complete details of properties intended for sale.

The required or negotiated sale price must be declared. Any prospective buyer willing to purchase the property above the declared price within a stipulated period (for example, 30 days) should have the right to do so by depositing 10 per cent as earnest money. If multiple bidders come forward, the highest bidder would gain the right to purchase, provided the balance payment is made within ten working days of finalisation. If the highest bidder fails to make the payment, the earnest money should be forfeited, and the next highest bidder should be given the opportunity. If no higher bidder emerges, the seller may proceed with the originally negotiated deal. This proposed website should be structured hierarchically—state-wise,

district-wise, and area-wise—with wide publicity among property brokers. If implemented carefully, this provision would substantially reduce the role of unaccounted money in property transactions. It would also benefit genuine sellers by enabling them to obtain fair market value for their properties, instead of losing out to intermediaries and brokers who often capture a disproportionate share of profits.

The same portal should also include a section for properties auctioned by banks to recover loans, thus serving as a consolidated, transparent marketplace beneficial for both financial institutions and investors. Collectively, these measures would induce transparency in property transactions, significantly reduce the role of unaccounted cash, and simultaneously boost the housing sector. The result would be greater revenue generation for the government through property-related taxation. Finally, India must also study and adopt best practices from countries such as Sweden, which is known for its cashless economy and widespread use of credit cards. In India, credit card use remains limited, largely because traders often charge an additional 2 per cent fee when payments are made by card, particularly in businesses with low margins. This surcharge exists because banks currently levy about 2 per cent on card transactions. To resolve this, the government should cap bank charges on credit card payments at 0.5 per cent, with the Union government bearing this cost.

Such a measure would increase credit card usage significantly, benefiting banks through higher transaction volumes, while the government would gain increased revenue due to improved tax compliance. Another major source of unaccounted cash is the misuse of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) structure. Unused GST invoices are sometimes "sold" in exchange for cash, with buyers and sellers sharing the benefits of false input tax credit claims. Such practices have contributed substantially to cash circulation even after demonetisation on November 8, 2016. To address this, input tax credit (ITC) should be allowed only for tradable commodities and not for goods used as expenses or for which depreciation is claimed. Other corrective steps should also be taken to ensure that India can progress towards a cashless economy, as envisaged by the Prime Minister at the time of demonetisation on November 8, 2016.

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How the geopolitical landscape is India's lever for Aatmanirbhar Bharat



GURLEEN NAGPAL

In 2017, walking past Trafalgar Square, I remember watching a group of kirtanias joyfully singing and dancing to devotional bhajans. The sight amused some passers-by and made others frown. To me, it captured how India was largely perceived at the time—an exotic land of "spirituality" and Bollywood glamour, where yoga mats and Hindi film songs were the most consistent ambassadors of its global image. Beyond that, India was seen as just another developing Commonwealth nation: its economy doing "alright" but not formidable, its political leadership visible but not yet commanding recognition, and its policymaking still recovering from the paralysis of the previous regime, with the new government only three years into its tenure.

Fast forward to 2025, and the conversations I now have with a close associate in the UK tell an entirely different story. Interestingly, the starting point remains the same, a group of devotees swaying down Oxford Street to Marble Arch during Jannashami. But soon, the conversation shifts from bhajans to geopolitics: India's decisive stance on tariffs, its refusal to be cajoled into binary choices between Asia and the West, and its pragmatic neutrality in continuing energy imports from "traditional partners" despite global criticism.

This shift in perception, from being shrugged off as a chaotic developing state, to now commanding attention as an assertive, self-confident player on the global stage, made me reflect on what has changed. How did India, amidst global volatility and the fractious politics of our times, build the resilience to stand tall? The answer lies in the idea of Aatmanirbhar Bharat, a call that began as a campaign but has since become the real underpinning of India's rise.

The groundwork for self-reliance has been systematically laid over the last decade. This transformation is neither accidental nor cosmetic, but structural and strategic. Consider how. Banking on its demographic dividend and vast market, and with a strong push through Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes, India has drawn global giants into its fold while energising domestic champions. Electronics, pharmaceuticals and textiles are no longer import-heavy vulnerabilities but fast emerging as indigenous strengths.

Nowhere is this shift more visible than in defence. India's defence production reached an all-time high of ₹1.27 lakh crore in FY 2023-24, a



The Pioneer
SINCE 1869

staggering 174 per cent rise since 2014, powered by the Make in India initiative. Even more telling is the export story: from being the world's largest arms importer, India is now exporting defence equipment to more than 85 countries. Defence exports touched a record ₹23,622 crore in FY 2024-25. Safe to say, we are no longer just consumers of the global security order but contributors shaping it.

On semiconductors, what eluded us in the 1980s is now taking shape, backed by billions in investment. The Semiconductor Mission is positioning India as a credible hub in the most strategic industry of the 21st century. Likewise, India has quietly emerged as the world's third-largest bio-economy. The vaccine triumph during the pandemic was not a stroke of luck, but the fruit of years of investment in R&D, biotech, pharma and digital health infrastructure. That foundation is now propelling a new wave of bio-innovation.

India also hosts the world's third-largest startup ecosystem, where entrepreneurs are building solutions not just for India but for the globe. From AI to clean energy, innovation is powering the spirit of Aatmanirbhar Bharat. And self-reliance extends to the backbone of Bharat, its farmers. With digital marketplaces, precision farming and direct benefit transfers, they are less dependent on middlemen than ever before. Farmers today are producing not just for sustenance, but for global markets.

The timing could not be more fortuitous. The global geopolitical landscape, volatile as it is, provides India with a unique lever to prove its self-reliance and take the threats and challenges head-on. While Europe scrambles for alternatives, India has managed to secure affordable energy by balancing relations with multiple partners. This pragmatism has shielded our economy from shocks while reinforcing our sovereign decision-making.

As power dynamics shift, India has refused to be drawn into a zero-sum game. We speak to Washington and Moscow, to Beijing and Tokyo, to Riyadh and Tel Aviv. This multipolar diplomacy is not fence-sitting; it is the confidence of a nation that charts its own course.

With a digital economy contributing nearly 12 per cent of GDP and projected to touch 20 per cent by the end of the decade, India is no longer the weak link in global value chains. Instead, companies are de-risking from China by investing in India, a shift in strategy that aligns with our Aatmanirbhar ambitions. The Indo-Pacific tensions, cybersecurity threats and space competition have shown the importance of being technologically sovereign. India is not just buying platforms; it is designing, developing and exporting them.

The biggest transformation has been in governance. A nation once accused of policy paralysis has become a nation of policy power. Today, the effectiveness and scale of policies from Jan Dhan to UPI, from Aadhaar to GST are felt by millions but by over a billion people. This credibility at home strengthens credibility abroad.

Diplomacy, too, has mirrored this change. Where India once hesitated, today it speaks with unapologetic clarity. From cautious participation to unapologetic assertion, India now shapes rather than shadows global debates. On global platforms, in climate negotiations, trade and tariff talks, or conflict mediation, India's voice carries both conviction and consequence, making it no longer a nation that can be nudged to the periphery or arm-twisted into conformity.

A decade ago, devotional singers on a London high street could have been dismissed as quaint symbols of India's soft power but today, the same sight sets off conversations on geopolitics, strategy, self-reliance and the rise of an economy that has surged past the UK and Japan. From symbolism to substance, from policy paralysis to policy power, from dependence to Aatmanirbhar, India's journey has been a head-turner.

Yet, truth be told, there are still miles to go before we can genuinely claim the mantle of 'Vishwaguru', rather than invoking it as a convenient narrative. The geopolitical landscape may be volatile, but for India it is the perfect lever to assert its rise. For the first time in decades, the world sees India as a nation with economic might, technological ambition, and political will. Aatmanirbhar Bharat is no longer a campaign or a hashtag. It is the lived reality of a nation that has found its voice and is ready to use it. The task now is to stay the course—resilient, inclusive and confident—as we build not just a self-reliant India, but a stronger, fairer world.

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Rural literacy: How grassroots volunteers can enhance literacy



CHANDRAKANT KUMBHANI

In rural India, literacy is more than just the ability to read and write, providing the foundation for lifelong learning and livelihood. Yet, despite decades of progress, a large number of children in underserved communities continue to struggle with foundational reading skills. The inability to read fluently at the right age not only hampers academic performance but also closes doors to opportunities later in life, from higher education to dignified employment.

Schools alone cannot bridge this gap. Frequently under-resourced in rural areas, a single teacher may be tasked with handling multiple grades or classes of 30-40 children, each at different reading levels. The pressure to complete the syllabus leaves little room for personalised attention. As a result, many children are promoted year after year without mastering basic literacy, creating a learning deficit that only widens over time.

What is needed is a collective effort that mobilises communities, strengthens access to books, and nurtures a culture of reading from the ground up.

Here, grassroots volunteers can play an invaluable role. Local youth, women, or retired teachers can step forward as reading champions within their communities.

They not only lead reading sessions and inspire children to explore stories but also provide the personalised support that classrooms often cannot. Volunteers bridge the gap by grouping children according to their reading level, giving focused inputs, monitoring progress, and fostering peer learning. This tailored approach ensures that no child is left behind and that every student can strengthen reading skills at their own pace.

The urgency of this work is highlighted in the Annual State of Education Report (ASER) 2024 by Pratham, which shows that despite progress, persistent gaps remain in rural learning. For instance, the share of Class III government school children able to read a Class II-level text rose from 16.3 per cent in 2022 to 23.4 per cent in 2024, the highest level since ASER began.

Among Class V students, reading fluency improved from 38.5 per cent to 44.8 per cent over the same period. These figures highlight that while foundational literacy is improving, large sections of children still lack grade-level

skills-underscoring the urgent need for community-driven, volunteer-led reading interventions. Access to books is another crucial enabler. Small, school or community-based libraries stocked with age-appropriate and engaging material help cultivate a reading habit outside the classroom.

When children are exposed to stories that reflect their realities or spark their imagination, the joy of reading becomes self-sustaining. Evidence from villages surrounding Chandrapur, Maharashtra, provides a glimpse of what is possible. A Rural Reading Promotion Programme, launched in 2019 and evaluated between 2022-2024, revealed consistent upward trends in reading across all grades, thanks to community volunteers called 'Pustak Fairies'.

Two factors emerged as most strongly linked to improvement: the number of reading sessions attended and the number of books read. Students who stayed in the programme for more than a year

not only improved faster but also began subsequent academic years at higher reading levels than their peers—demonstrating the fact that community-supported literacy programmes create a compounding effect. Once a child builds confidence in reading, their ability to engage with other subjects also improves.

Such models prove that transformation need not be expensive. With sustained volunteer participation, steady access to books, and regular encouragement, literacy outcomes can be dramatically improved at a low cost. NGOs and civil society organisations have a key role to play in scaling this model, supporting volunteers with training and resources, and ensuring accountability through monitoring.

Rural literacy is not just a teachers' challenge; it is a development imperative. Children who can read are more likely to stay in school, pursue higher studies, access skill training opportunities, and secure meaningful livelihoods. For communities, literacy fuels empowerment, strengthens voice and agency, and helps break the cycle of poverty.

The path forward is clear: India must invest not only in classrooms and teachers but also in the power of communities themselves. By harnessing local volunteers as reading champions and embedding reading habits with access to books, we can lay a stronger foundation for Bharat's rural children.

With the right support, every child can be given the tools to read, learn, and thrive.

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It is swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves. It is, therefore, in the palm of our hands. But such swaraj has to be experienced, by each one for himself

Mahatma Gandhi

INDIAN EXPRESS IS NOT AN INDUSTRY. IT IS A MISSION.

—Rannath Goenka

GOVT MUST ENSURE GST, CRUDE OIL SAVINGS REACH CONSUMERS

AT the initiative of the Union government, the GST Council has agreed to lower the GST rates on most essential and common-use goods. These far-reaching changes, effective September 22, have been scripted to ease the burden on the common man and slow inflation. They are expected to trigger higher consumption and drive economic growth. Therefore, it is imperative that the savings be passed on entirely to consumers and not skimmed off by manufacturers or traders. Any 'leakage' in transition would defeat the very purpose of these measures. The government is conscious of the issue—Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has confirmed that various ministries and MPs are working to ensure the tax benefits are passed on.

Some other measures have been put in motion, too. Car showrooms have been told to display boards indicating the old and new prices; it must be appreciated that several manufacturers have preemptively announced price cuts ranging from ₹50,000 to ₹5 lakh on various models. So have some public insurers. However, while it is easy to monitor prices of goods like cars and air-conditioners, it will hurt if the benefit is denied for smaller, essential items. The FM has estimated that as many as 375 essential and common-use goods will benefit from the rate changes, while only 13 items in the 'sin' category will be more expensive.

To guarantee the interests of the common man, it is necessary that a well-oiled, multi-ministerial taskforce be set up to monitor retail prices. The monitoring machinery will have to keep a sharp eye on sectors like private health insurance, which works with layers of hidden costs, as well as unscrupulous traders who try and pass off old sticker prices. Setting up an efficient citizens' reporting mechanism could work wonders, too.

Towards the same end, the government must also pass on savings on imported crude oil. With demand softening due to geopolitical turbulence and the OPEC+ bloc intent on increasing production, it is expected that crude prices will stay below or around the current levels of \$65 a barrel in the near term. Earlier, the savings from lower crude prices had been diverted by the government to cover for its fiscal deficit. Hopefully, the new savings will be passed on to consumers if spurring demand and keeping a lid on prices are serious goals.

'12TH DOCUMENT' RAISES ELEMENTARY QUESTIONS

THE Supreme Court has had the last word on a vexing matter: Aadhaar verifies identity, but does not confer citizenship. On Monday, the court referred to Aadhaar as the "12th document" in the Election Commission's list for revising Bihar's voter rolls, emphasising that while Aadhaar may show who you are, it cannot establish that you belong as a citizen. This tension between Aadhaar's reach and its limits is at the heart of India's complicated relationship with the system as the Election Commission undertakes a Special Intensive Revision of the Bihar voter list.

When it was introduced in 2010, few anticipated how swiftly Aadhaar would become entwined in daily life. Today, it's used to obtain a gas cylinder, open a bank account, collect pension, get a new phone line, file taxes, or apply for passport. For the poor, it has become the gateway to survival, granting access to food rations and benefit transfers.

However, Aadhaar is not accepted as proof of citizenship for voting rights. The Election Commission and the court both assert that citizenship can only be proven by documents such as passports, birth certificates, or naturalisation papers, though many people do not have them. This would be comic if it were not so tragic: India has created the world's largest identity project, linking it to every conceivable service from banking to welfare, but when the question of citizenship arises, Aadhaar provides no answer. In Bihar's revision of electoral rolls, this irony deepens, with the opposition claiming selective disenfranchisement. All this leaves citizens asking: if Aadhaar is essential for everything, why not for voting?

The answer is, of course, constitutional. Citizenship is a legal status; identity is an administrative requirement. Mixing the two leads to the prospect of people being removed from the rolls because their paperwork does not align with their actual existence. And yet, leaving the distinction so hazy risks excluding the very people who rely most heavily on Aadhaar for daily life. India must choose—create a true universal card that merges identity and citizenship, or stop assigning Aadhaar roles it cannot fulfil. Until then, Aadhaar will remain crucial everywhere except when it comes to being counted as an Indian.

QUICK TAKE

SCORING OWN GOALS

THE Trump administration's attempt to rebrand the US department of defence as one of war is telling in more ways than one. First, while signing the executive order, Trump said, "We won the First World War. We won the Second World War. We won everything before that and in between." By leaving out everything after 1945, Trump seemed to suggest the glory days of American military were long over. Second, when he posted a meme of himself as a character from *Apocalypse Now*, threatening "war" on Chicago, he strayed into *'Hollow Men'*, the T S Eliot poem whose memorable ending the filmmaker used: "This is the way the world ends, not with a bang but a whimper." *Sic transit gloria.*

THIS essay is an attempt to explore the relation between the word and the world in the domain of policy. One must confess the domain of policy has become an esoteric world—full of arcane interpretations of ordinary language.

The recent exchange of words between Donald Trump and Narendra Modi escalated a lot in the news. It has been seen as a battle between two nations on tariffs and trade. It is also a struggle for dignity. Modi has raised the word 'swadeshi' in this context. One hopes to explore the word in this word.

Modi's use of the word is strictly economic; but one has to locate this sense of swadeshi within a wider historical and philosophical context. The most fruitful way of doing this is to contrast Modi's construct of swadeshi with a Gandhian imagination.

One has to, first of all, emphasise that while Modi evoked the official, Mahatma Gandhi's is a playful performance. Gandhi displayed a cultural confidence against the British. One can see the power of his attitude in two small anecdotes. Once an American journalist asked Gandhi what he thought of Western civilisation. He replied, "It would be a good idea." Gandhi went further. He said the task of the Indian national movement was not just to overthrow the British, but to rescue them from the travails of modernity.

To the cultural confidence that underlay swadeshi and swaraj to its playfulness, one must add a polysemic power. For Gandhi, these two words conveyed a spectrum of meanings. Swadeshi implied the indigenous, the local, and the vernacular. Each summoned a different domain of meaning. Each mapped a different angle to life. The word that immediately comes to mind is 'local'. It implied a geography, a sense of neighbourhood. Swadeshi implied that the local was primary.

But Gandhi used the word local in a slightly different sense. The local was also indigenous. It implied not only geography, but also a sense of cultural time. The local was an attempt to sustain diversity and plurality, not just uniformity. The local implied not just economics, but a sense of linguistics and materials. The local implied local materials, local seeds, a local imagination. Each microcosm added to the richness of the macrocosm we call swaraj.

Swaraj, in that sense, is a more holistic term. Yet the two words are connected. Each connects a word and a world.

Gandhi's concept of swadeshi and swaraj were hospitable and caring. To reinvigorate the ideas in today's age, Indians must question policy at the linguistic, ethical and aesthetic levels

RETHINKING SWADESHI IN TRUMPIAN ERA

SHIV VISVANATHAN

Social scientist associated with the Compost Heap, a group researching alternative imaginations



MANOJ PATIL

Modi's sense of swadeshi is too short-sighted to capture this cultural imagination. Swadeshi in the sense implies trusteeship, a sense of caring, not just a parochial sense of security. The relation between language, culture, technology, and economics is just manifold.

Swadeshi and swaraj are not just questions of scale; they imply a relation of parts to a whole—microcosm to macrocosm. The Gandhian activist Ela Bhatt put it brilliantly. She said swadeshi and swaraj are 'home science' words. You use the metaphor of the home not just to create a local space, but a home in the world. Domesticity and international relations weave together, so in a sense a concern for a dweller is a sense of the ocean.

Gandhi's sense of swaraj was playful and holistic. Modi's sense of swaraj is a

purely official, narrow, arid idea of the nation's state. It suffers from a *rigor mortis* of the imagination. If Modi had a sense of swaraj today, he would have challenged Israeli's actions on the Gaza Strip. Instead of letting Palestinians starve, Modi would have flooded the area with *langars*, turning food into a gift of peace. His silence, his international relations, has no sense of swaraj.

Modi also lacks a genuine sense of swadeshi. Swadeshi as an idea doesn't try to exclude, it seeks to encompass. The local always signals the hospitable. Gandhi's sense of swadeshi and swaraj in that sense was hospitable, deeply caring, sensitive to culture—it embodied a trusteeship of diversity on every front.

Modi is all for modernity. He is seeking to change the Andamans through development projects; Gandhi would

KARNATAKA'S RETURN TO BALLOT

WITH the Karnataka government deciding to go for paper ballots for the upcoming local body elections, forgoing electronic voting machines or EVMs, the State Election Commission (SEC) faces challenges in conducting a free and fair exercise.

The Congress-ruled state's decision is not only aligned with the party's national campaign to return to paper ballots, but also follows the allegations of the party's central leadership made against the Election Commission of India (ECI) for 'manipulation' of the poll process. It is now incumbent on the SEC, an independent body, to show that it can prepare a voters' list free of manipulation and conduct paper polling free of discrepancy.

Ever since the Lok Sabha polls last year—and more stridently after the Haryana and Maharashtra assembly elections that followed—the Congress has intensified its campaign charging the ECI of helping the BJP 'steal' elections through manipulation of electoral rolls and EVMs.

Now, given the Karnataka government's decision, among the first responsibilities of the SEC would be to prepare the rolls of the state's 5.52 crore electors, as per a 2025 revision. A clean roll is vital for any democracy; it should ensure that no genuine voter is left out of the system. In this regard, while announcing the state cabinet decision to go for paper ballots, law minister H K Patil pointed out: "The cabinet has decided to authorise the SEC to prepare, revise, and, if required, redo the electoral rolls for these polls."

So far, the SEC was using the electoral roll available with the ECI to conduct the local polls. "Now, to conduct all local body elections, the state cabinet will recommend amendments for revision, correction and reconstitution of the voters' list, so that the SEC can prepare a high-quality electoral roll," Patil added.

The voters' list is indeed a matter of greater concern than the EVM. The allegation of roll manipulation is levelled in almost every state and hardly any party is left unscathed by such charges. It is the ECI's duty to prepare the final, error-free list because the buck stops with the constitutional body in a general election. However, the political parties need to share the blame too, because they need to carry out their

duty of verifying the list properly. The ECI sends the electoral roll twice a year to the political parties to check and recommend deletions or additions. As per the current procedure and calendar of events, the parties are asked to verify the rolls once when the draft rolls are out in October, and again in January when the final list is published. The parties must question themselves whether they have carried out this task rigorously.

Why does the roll become so important? Consider the two recent allegations related to Karnataka made by Congress leaders. In a highly publicised press meet, Rahul Gandhi highlighted what he called a manipulation of the voters' list.

These examples highlight the importance of the voters' list. And need for the Karnataka government and SEC to take all available measures to ensure that the local body polls are fool-proof.

As regards EVMs, over the past couple of decades, high courts and the Supreme Court have dealt with petitions that questioned the use of EVMs and requested a return to paper ballots. Every time, the courts upheld the use of EVMs, saying they cannot be hacked, and ruled out use of paper ballots.

Former Chief Election Commissioners such as Navin Chawla, S Y Qureshi (both appointed by Congress-led governments) and O P Rawat (appointed by a BJP-led government) have strongly refuted claims that EVMs can be hacked. The ECI gave more than one opportunity to political parties to come to the Election Commission headquarters to examine EVMs with their own technicians, but the parties did not accept the gauntlet. Only Janata Party president Subramanian Swamy visited and demanded the installation of VVPATs (voter-verifiable paper audit trails) to the EVMs. The latest legal challenge on EVMs was decided in November 2024, when the Supreme Court again junked a petition seeking a return to paper ballots.

Thus, there is more than one reason the Karnataka local body polls will be watched with keen interest. From a pilot run in a few Kerala polling booths in 1982 to nationwide use in 2004, EVMs have come a long way. It remains to be seen whether they turn another corner in Karnataka this time.

(Views are personal)

MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Kerala exemplar

Ref: Rest of India can learn from Kerala in facing population challenge (Sep 9). Kerala has shown the way through its proposed state policy for older persons. This model of handling the aged could be inducted throughout the nation to tackle the problem, yet rural India stands as a hurdle since illiteracy prevails proportionately. **Rajakumar Anandaraman, Tirunelveli**

Hockey haul

Ref: Men's hockey in good shape before a big year (Sep 9). Harmanpreet can be termed as the 'modern-era Dhyan Chand'. This Asia Cup solid victory brought back the memories of India's record eighth Olympic gold win in 1980, the most successful hockey haul in Olympic history. **PVP Madhu Nirviti, Secunderabad**

Balancing life

Ref: The loneliness bug biting India's working young (Sep 9). Settling in life does not only mean getting educated, being employed and financial security. It also includes a balanced personal life with the family. For better mental health, the corporates should ensure organisational counselling. **PPrerna, Thanjavur**

Education gaps

Ref: The difference a gap year makes (Sep 9). If activity-based learning in Tamil Nadu is a success, why are government schools closing because of less enrolment? Recent surveys have highlighted that middle-school students are unable to explain two-digit numbers and some can't read their textbooks. Education is not what to learn, but how to learn. **SKanthimathinathan, Kovilpatti**

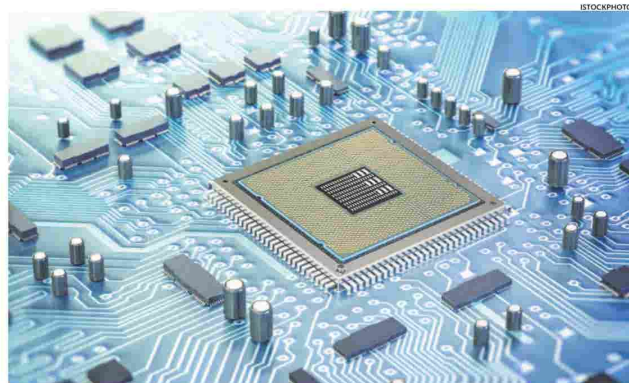
Chittoor memories

Ref: Threads of Aaral legacy (Sep 8). Your column stirred a lot of emotional memories of the old lanes and stairwells of the era. I, too, am a product of Chittoor's Board High School, as were my father and grandfather, with a family history dating back to the 1930s. The town is now a shadow of its former self. **Prasad Gnana, email**

Nepal unrest

Ref: Street war shocker for right to social media (Sep 9). It is shocking to learn that at least 19 people were killed and four hundred were injured in the ongoing protests against the Nepalese government. The mounting anger against corruption and nepotism at the corridors of power has fuelled public anger that may not subside easily. **DV Sankara Rao, Vizianagaram**

OUR VIEW



Our chip mission should keep trade-offs in view

Developing this sector with public funds must be weighed against global semiconductor dynamics and not be driven solely by self-sufficiency. Make or buy? Keep such decisions open

India's government is ready to embark on the second phase of its National Semiconductor Mission (NSM) with a potential outlay of \$20 billion, as reported by *Mint*.

While it aims to catalyse the setting up of ancillary units for our fledgling chip-making industry, policy incentives need to be designed prudently to deliver outcomes that balance two key challenges. The first is supply security for these little chips that power modern machines, from household gadgets to cars. The second is the costs that will be borne—not just by consumers, but also by taxpayers. Given the envisaged scale of fresh state support, in the order of ₹1.76 trillion, we should be reasonably confident of what we gain. After covid disrupted chip factories and supply chains, resulting in a global supply crunch, locally made chips rose from a latent to an acutely felt need. Since then, demand has been shifting beyond just 'legacy' chips to high-end ones, fuelled by an AI boom, even as supply risks have gotten aggravated by geopolitical fissures. The world's facilities to make, pack and test chips are concentrated in South Korea, China and Taiwan.

However, unlike the oil business, say, where crude supplies are fungible, top refining technology is available off the shelf and ancillary industries are hardly needed, the chip sector is intricate. Critical tech is held closely by a few firms, largely American, Chinese and Korean, with one in the Netherlands. Hence, we have seen a global race to build chip factories, with governments pouring in billions of dollars to subsidize prohibitively expensive units. It was in this context that the NSM's first phase, launched in 2021, attracted investments across diverse parts of the value chain, from foundries

to churn out chips and facilities to test them, to the materials needed to pack these delicate products. No doubt, this is a good start. Yet, from here on, we must move with care to foster an ecosystem that stands up to the scrutiny of a 'make or buy' test. Three aspects must not be overlooked. First, chips made in India are likely to be more expensive than their Asian rivals and this must be viewed against the vast expansion plans set out by them. Second, domestic output does not necessarily mitigate supply risks; sanctions on India would hurt, since critical tech is both proprietary and imported. Recall that when Enron filed for bankruptcy two-and-a-half decades ago, one promoter of its Indian power plant that held its crucial turbine tech dragged its feet on turning over the codes to operate it, using these as a bargaining chip. Therefore, tech transfers must play a role in our state-funded endeavours. And finally, our export ambitions must stay in sync with global dynamics. Joining global value chains in the testing, packaging and contract manufacture of legacy chips is within our reach, but attaining true self-sufficiency or export dominance would require us to make critical equipment (and its inputs) at home. China, even as it eyes Taiwan, has taken this path in good measure.

In India, we need public policy to act in concert with a keen private appetite for risk. On R&D, especially, Indian investors would have to invest deeply. Going up the value curve in this fast-evolving sector calls for big capital and steady nerves. If the Centre is ready to place an outsized fiscal bet, private players must do their utmost to tilt the odds in favour of the NSM's success. This business is not for the faint of heart. For a cautionary tale, look no further than the foundry woes of Intel, a former innovator.

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Merchandise exports are crucial for India's economic trajectory. Yet, in 2024-25, these stood at just \$437.42 billion, a mere 0.08% rise from the previous year, even as global trade expanded 3.7%. At a time when India is aspiring for a \$5 trillion economy, such sluggish growth is a red flag. Policy reforms aimed at increasing India's share in global e-commerce exports is a key area for the government to focus on.

E-commerce is an underleveraged export opportunity. But Indian policies stifle this potential. Since 2018, India has prohibited foreign direct investment (FDI)-backed e-commerce platforms from holding inventory. The restriction was designed to shield domestic traders from intense competition in local markets by limiting platforms to act only as intermediaries.

While this logic holds domestically, it shouldn't be applied to exports. When Indian arms of globally interlinked e-commerce entities export goods, they compete with exporters in China, Türkiye or Viet-

nam. By not allowing them to hold inventory for exports, India is effectively strengthening foreign competitors instead of its own sellers and producers. This is at a time when global e-commerce enterprises are seeking to reduce reliance on China.

The consequences are visible. India's e-commerce exports in 2024 stood at just \$5 billion, while China's reached \$374 billion (85% of India's overall merchandise exports). Domestic and international e-commerce platforms operating in China seamlessly aggregate local producers, hold inventory and serve consumers across the US and Europe. In contrast, Indian artisans, manufacturers and farmers are left to navigate fragmented logistics and limitations of scale, leading to limited viability.

Consider Jaipur's textiles or Moradabad's brassware, both of which are in demand globally. Without large platforms aggregating and exporting these goods, small producers face prohibitive costs and market opacity. What could have been an engine of empowerment has become a bottleneck.

Politically connected trader lobbies have been opposing e-commerce export reforms. They argue that inventory-holding platforms might exploit information asymmetries to buy cheaply in India, resell abroad at

a premium and monopolize margins. They further argue that excess export inventory would flood domestic markets. While these concerns are not baseless, outright prohibition is a counter-productive overcorrection. Risks of exploitation can be addressed through smart safeguards rather than throttling export growth opportunities. A pragmatic reform could open global markets while ensuring fairness.

Export-only inventory: Permit FDI-backed platforms to hold inventory for exports, with strict separation from domestic operations.

Inclusive sourcing: Mandate sourcing only from sellers listed on domestic marketplaces to ensure small producers and artisans are the primary beneficiaries.

Transparent pricing: Require platforms to disclose export markups, giving sellers a view of international demand and prices.

Order-linked purchases: Allow platforms to purchase domestically only against confirmed international orders, minimizing the

risk of speculative merchandise stocking.

Such a framework would empower a Varanasi weaver or Kutch artisan to plug into global supply chains without the fear of being displaced in India's local markets. Estimates suggest that local e-commerce exporters account for less than 10% of the country's e-commerce sellers.

E-commerce exports could prove transformative. The projections of a McKinsey study show that such shipments could rise from \$250-300 billion by 2030 with the right policies. This would not only boost overall merchandise exports, but also generate \$10-15 billion annually in tax revenues (source: PwC India), helping fund infrastructure and social pro-

grammes. Beyond economics, there is a geopolitical urgency. Global supply chains are being redrawn amid US-China tensions. Nations like Vietnam, Mexico and Bangladesh are stepping into spaces vacated by Chinese exporters. If India does not act decisively, it

risks missing this window to embed itself in these shifting supply networks.

India's Foreign Trade Policy of 2023 identified e-commerce exports as a priority. But recognition should be backed by reforms. Today's policy framework benefits a narrow set of politically influential domestic lobbies, while millions of potential exporters—artisans, farmers and small businesses—are left out of the global market.

Every additional year of hesitation further entrenches China's dominance. Chinese exporters are expanding to the Global South and no longer reliant just on rich-country markets. So the question is not whether India should allow the holding inventory for exports, but how quickly it can do so.

E-commerce is no longer an optional channel, it is a major component of global trade. India must decide whether to cling to outdated measures that serve vested interest groups or embrace bold reforms that expand export opportunities. Allowing FDI-backed platforms to hold inventory for exports under a clear regulatory framework would democratize access to global markets and drive economic growth.

The country's choice is stark: reform now, or remain a spectator while others shape the future of a global trade.

GERALDINE FERRARO

10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

It was not so very long ago that people thought that semiconductors were part-time orchestra leaders and microchips were very small snack foods.

A live-wire market for electricity can be this sector's UPI moment

Digital tools can plug home solar panels into networks that balance demand and supply efficiently



SAURABH KUMAR & BALAJI CHANDRAMOULI are, respectively, vice-president, GEAPP India, and consulting editor, *Mint*.

With a milder summer than expected and early rains, electricity supplies this season have turned out to be more than adequate to meet demand surges due to the extensive use of air-conditioners. The generation margins reflect efficient policy planning and actions by the Union government, a challenging task, especially since 93% of the electricity produced in India is purchased and distributed by state-owned utilities that are weighed down by populist imperatives. On average, they end up charging less than what it costs to serve the consumer, thereby imperilling investments across all limbs of electricity supply, from generation to distribution.

A key lynchpin of the government's reform efforts that has steered capacity addition in states to make utilities viable has been its digital push. Installation of prepaid electricity meters at the consumer end and remote monitoring of bulk distribution supply assets like transformers has cut technical losses and improved utilities' revenues.

However, the digital experience at the consumer end is limited to paying bills, transactions that can now be done effortlessly thanks to the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), an alternate payment system to traditional bank transfers that now accounts for 85% of all digital transactions in the country.

This takes us to the larger question of

a UPI embrace in the power sector, with electricity being transacted by consumers on a mobile phone keypad.

Domestic roof-top solar panels have emerged as the cheapest source of electricity for consumers, though limited of course to times when the sun shines. In the absence of a free market, after meeting their captive needs, consumers can sell the excess solar panel electricity only to distribution utilities.

Utilities, however, aren't equipped to efficiently match demand with these supplies. A pilot experiment in Jaipur and a few neighbouring cities by the Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet showed that roof-top solar supplies jumped 20% with a service provider implementing a 'digital twin'—physical tagging of every distribution supply device in the area, like transformers and feeders. Mapping these has addressed supply disruption and demand spurt issues by maximizing local area roof-top solar supplies. This entailed the digital tagging of as many as 2 million assets and real-time analysis of the data. As a result, not only have consumers saved on electricity bills, but also the government, since, on average, it subsidizes domestic consumers, who account for a third of the electricity consumed in the country.

This approach sits well with the government's promotion of roof-top solar and decentralized ground-mounted solar, since in the case of large domestic consumers, utilities lose money as they transact on a 'net metering' basis, as volume and not price defines the engagement. This is because they 'buy' from consumers during the day when the market is awash with inexpensive solar supplies and 'return' it to them in the evening by purchasing or generating expensive fossil-fuel electricity.

Digitization at low-voltage levels by giving a unique digital identity to millions of assets that take electricity to consumers under each utility will thus help improve penetration of roof-top solar, which is at an anemic 16%.

This will also lay the foundation for power trading that is currently practised at the inter-state level, where traffic managers or state-owned electricity system operators manage the demand-supply dynamics. By introducing distribution operators in appropriately defined regulatory frameworks, consumers can turn traders and nudge a 'UPI moment' for electricity.

The volume of transactions that could be stimulated are significant, since it allows for innovation at scale, both in terms of technical models of trade, such as peer-to-peer trade, and commercial models involving shared charging infrastructure or vehicle-to-grid exchange. The key to success lies in moving away from net metering and introducing real-time pricing of electricity at the consumer end to create value opportunities. For example, domestic consumers could raise household battery storage capacity for daytime charging, via captive solar panels, to be sold to the utility after sunset or when there is a sudden rise in demand.

Regulatory interventions alone are unlikely to suffice. Utilities should be nudged to either build the capacity needed to turn operators or outsource this function to service providers for a fee, even as they are asked to charge consumers real-time prices.

For this, the Centre's reform programme could be tweaked to include fiscal incentives and disincentives for utilities to usher in a producer-consumer—or 'prosumer's'—market with 'live-wire' prices. Aggressive interventions in the past have been effective. In 2022, inter-state transmission access was blocked for states that defaulted on dues to generators. This resulted in a sharp drop in outstanding bills.

Creating a prosumer's market would be a win-win situation for the utility, with lower spends on generation, better reliability in supply, potentially lower subsidy bills and an inclusive commercial opportunity for citizens.

These are the authors' personal views.



| MY VIEW | STAT-CRAFT

MINT CURATOR

GST reset: A tax reform that can reignite our consumption story

India's GST revision restores confidence in its economic promise and provides just the spark we needed at a delicate moment



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India's GST Council has finally done what many had hoped for since 2017—simplified the regime and made it more pro-consumption. From 22 September, the goods and services tax (GST) will collapse into two main rates of 5% and 18%, plus a stiff 40% for a narrow set of luxury and 'demerit' goods. What looks like a technical rearrangement of slabs is in fact a powerful reset that could change how households spend, companies set prices and the economy grows.

The headline is price relief where it matters most. Everyday goods—like soaps, shampoos, packaged foods, bicycles—shift to the 5% bracket. Cement, long burdened at 28%, moves to 18%, cutting construction costs. Farm equipment and irrigation tools also drop to 5%, giving a boost to rural capex. Life-saving drugs go down to 0–5%, while health and life insurance premiums are exempt altogether. In one stroke, the reform touches both mass consumption and social welfare. For the bottom 40% of households struggling with inflation, the tax cut translates into immediate breathing room.

Urban discretionary demand, which has wavered since the pandemic, should strengthen. Large appliances—ACs, dishwashers, TVs above 32-inch screens—shift from the punitive 28% slab to 18%. Two-wheelers and small commercial vehicles also benefit. Lower sticker prices and loan repayment instalments could nudge lower middle-class households earning about ₹5–10 lakh annually to upgrade rather than defer. That psychological shift is crucial. India's urban consumer has been cautious, squeezed by high financing costs and food inflation. A GST-led price reset, coinciding with the festive quarter, offers exactly the kind of trigger that can unlock pent-up demand.

Cheaper cement deserves special attention. Few products have such a wide economic footprint. At 28%, cement was a textbook case of tax distortion—hurting both housing affordability and builder margins. A cut to 18% changes project viability, especially in affordable housing where every rupee counts. It lowers costs for buyers, improves returns for developers and sets off ripples across sectors like steel, paints, tiles and logistics. If the benefit is passed on faithfully, India could see a mini-cycle in construction and home improvement, with the attendant job creation and credit flows.

The healthcare and insurance changes, though less flashy, may prove equally consequential. By reducing GST on essential medicines and exempting individual insurance, the council has aligned taxation with social need. Cheaper coverage will encourage adoption of health and life insurance, long a policy priority. Wider penetration improves household resilience to shocks and reduces reliance on government schemes. This is one reform where economic and social logic converge.



Of course, not everyone gains. The 40% slab, aimed at casinos, high-ticket-price sporting events, gaming and luxury vehicles, will squeeze margins and reduce demand in some of those niches by design. The council is signalling a clear philosophy: encourage mass consumption but disincentivise sin and luxury. For the wider economy, the negative spillovers are minimal. For the affected industries, however, it is a sharp adjustment that may force business model changes.

Equally significant are the compliance reforms bundled with GST rate cuts. Risk-based provisional refunds, including for inverted duty structures, promise faster cash-flow relief for exporters and small businesses. Registration rules have been simplified for small, multi-state sellers. And a change in 'place of supply' rules makes India's services exports more competitive. These steps may not grab headlines, but they address irritants that have hampered GST's credibility since launch.

The macro implications are positive on several counts. First, inflation: if companies pass on the cuts, headline retail inflation could fall by up to a percentage point over the next year. That makes more policy space for the Reserve Bank of India, with its repo rate at 5.5%, currently and growth risks tilted downward. Another rate cut in 2025–26 is now more plausible. Second, growth: the reform tilts India's GDP mix toward domestic consumption, housing and small-business activity—sectors with high multipliers. Early estimates suggest an incremental GDP lift of a few tenths of a percentage point. That may sound modest, but in a \$4-trillion economy, it is meaningful.

There will be a revenue hit in the short run, but collections are already buoyant at around ₹2 tril-

lion a month. Higher volumes and better compliance should cushion the blow. The political economy risk lies with states, some of which remain dependent on compensation revenues. Managing their fiscal adjustment will be critical to sustaining the reform's credibility.

The larger question is execution. The council can cut rates, but it cannot ensure companies pass them on. If businesses pocket the gain, the consumption story weakens and regulators may have to intervene. Refund and registration reforms must be implemented quickly to ease stress among small businesses. And state finances need careful handling to avoid backsliding into rate tinkering. In short, the spirit of the reform must survive the grind of implementation.

Still, it is hard to overstate the importance of this reset. For years, GST has been criticized as complex, distortionary and poorly administered. By slashing rates on mass-market goods, simplifying slabs and fixing compliance pain-points, the council has repositioned GST as a growth instrument rather than just a revenue tool. The timing is fortuitous: India's consumption story has been uneven, rural demand fragile and urban spending cautious. This reset could be the catalyst that shifts sentiment, strengthens real incomes and ignites a new cycle of demand.

Eight years on, GST finally feels like it is maturing into what it was meant to be—a simple, broad-based tax that fuels rather than hinders growth. If implemented well, the new structure could do more than lower prices. It could restore confidence in the tax regime, deepen formalization and provide India's economy with precisely the spark it needs at a delicate moment.

China is using a Pacific Islands huddle to squeeze out Taiwan

Beijing has been upping the diplomatic ante on its 'rebel province'



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The air at this year's Pacific Islands Forum was heavy with tension. ISTOCKPHOTO

China might not be attending a key Pacific Islands gathering this week, but that is not stopping it from wielding influence to isolate Taiwan diplomatically. The annual Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), which kicked off this week in the Solomon Islands capital of Honiara, is typically a chance for the global community to engage on urgent issues the region faces, such as climate change, transnational crime, multiple health crises and tribal violence. Being dragged into a power play is a distraction.

Solomon Islands Prime Minister Jeremiah Manele, Beijing's closest security ally in the region, announced that all partners, including the US, China and Taiwan, would be excluded. He claimed the decision was made in the forum's best interests. In reality, even though China won't attend officially, Beijing can continue its campaign to diminish Taiwan's status.

China has rejected allegations that it has had a role to play in who attends. This isn't the first time partners have been excluded. But the decision highlights how the Taiwan issue is slowly splintering the group.

Over the last few years, Beijing has made significant progress in getting Pacific Island nations to switch loyalties. From six diplomatic alliances in the region back in 2019, Taiwan now only has three left: The Marshall Islands, the Republic of Palau and Tuvalu.

The Pacific Islands are strategically vital to US security. They straddle key maritime trade routes and are situated in the significant second island chain. Rich in natural resources, these island nations make up more than 6% of the UN, providing a meaningful bloc in multilateral decisions.

Since 1989, countries from outside the region have attended the forum to help with development goals. In 1992, Taiwan was granted permission to present. Only 11 nations and the Holy See recognize its status, so it's a rare opportunity for the democratic island of 23 million people to be represented on the international stage. The PIF has provided a platform for those who support it—to however quietly—challenge Beijing's claim to the territory.

China is working overtime to exclude the island from international organizations. It has also been successful in preventing it from joining the World Health Assembly, the decision-making body of the World Health Organization, even though Taiwan was lauded for its pandemic response.

Beijing's use of economic leverage to convince nations to switch sides has been

successful. Nearly three-quarters of countries now support the position that Taiwan is part of China, a study conducted by the Sydney-based think tank Lowy Institute notes. And 62% of UN member states have endorsed Beijing's one-China principle, which asserts that Taiwan is an inalienable part of the People's Republic of China.

Getting caught in the middle of this geopolitical minefield is costly. The Solomon Islands' decision means the forum won't have the opportunity to discuss the region's most urgent needs with the international community. The Leaders' Summit allows the 18 member states and territories, including New Zealand and Australia, to thrash out issues from the climate crisis to tuna treaty negotiations with the US. The exclusion of partners is a blow to one of the world's most aid-dependent areas, where development assistance serves as a lifeline.

The division over Taiwan and China also risks fracturing Pacific unity. Tuvalu's Prime Minister Feleti Teo openly threatened to withdraw from the summit in protest at the exclusions, calling them a distraction from tackling the urgent concerns unique to these islands, among them worrying levels of debt, malnutrition and high poverty rates.

Pacific leaders have been clear: they want trade, investment, and economic development. China is listening: Beijing has committed billions in infrastructure investments.

This generosity is hard to ignore. As China moves to expand its trade and investment footprint, the US and its allies will have to up their game to counter-balance that influence. Many smaller states hesitate to oppose Beijing, worried about the economic repercussions.

Australia, Washington's key ally in the region, is stepping up. It's the largest donor in the region, followed by China, which has surpassed the US in recent years. More investment would help, but also reassurance that Pacific states will be supported in development and climate vulnerability goals with more than just elegant rhetoric.

The hard work must come from Pacific nations themselves. Their unity in the face of intensifying geopolitical rivalry is essential. Allowing it to be hijacked by other interests only risks delaying responses to urgent priorities. ©BLOOMBERG

| MY VIEW | EX MACHINA

Apply India's IT playbook to help AI businesses take off

RAHUL MATTHAN



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When I first heard of DeepSeek, my immediate reaction was one of disappointment. Everyone else was raving about the capabilities of the model and the frugality with which it had been trained, but I couldn't get past the fact that China demonstrated the 'Jugaad' I was expecting India to show. DeepSeek proves that it is possible for cutting-edge AI to emerge even under constraints, thanks to workarounds. For India, this should be as much a warning as an inspiration.

I am somewhat surprised to find ourselves in this position. After all, we have a reputation of being an IT powerhouse. In 1992, India's software exports were just ₹7 crore. By 2022, that figure had exploded to ₹8.48 lakh crores—a 16,000-fold increase. Those of us who have been a part of this journey know that none of this was pure chance. India's emergence as a global IT powerhouse is as much the result of deliberate policy choices.

Among these was the Software Technology Parks of India (STPI) scheme, a pro-

gramme that offered IT businesses a suite of incentives. STPI units were eligible for a complete income tax exemption for ten consecutive years and could import hardware and software into the country completely duty-free. At a time when foreign ownership was severely restricted, 100% foreign direct investment was permitted in these companies through the automatic route. Most states set up single-window clearance facilities that radically simplified the process for availing these benefits.

Partly as a result of these measures, the IT industry's share of total Indian exports grew from less than 1% in 1997–98 to around 25% in just 15 years. This cemented India's position as the world's IT services capital, so much so that when covid forced global lockdowns, had it not been for the robust IT back-end that local outsourcing operations provided, much of the world's critical IT infrastructure would have ground to a halt.

All this should have translated into a significant advantage when digital technology made its next orbital shift. Unfortunately, success in one era is no guarantee of leadership in the next. Unlike China, India has not been able to contribute significantly to the AI ecosystem, either with benchmark AI models or frontier solutions, despite the best

efforts of the IndiaAI mission in procuring GPUs, funding the development of indigenous large language models (LLMs) and setting up a platform for data sets and models.

We would do well to learn from the lessons of our past. The Indian IT revolution did not take place because the government procured the hardware that IT companies needed or made other resources available to them. All it did was to create appropriate market conditions that encouraged entrepreneurship so that businesses had the confidence to make the long-term investments needed to develop a successful tech industry.

This is exactly what we should be doing to promote AI. Rather than procuring GPUs, the government should create incentives for private investments in the AI space. This could take the form of long-term tax holidays that will provide direct benefits to those investing in AI, as well as tax breaks for the procurement of all that it takes to build a successful AI business. Reliable power and high-quality band-

width should be made available at scale, through dedicated AI parks that are strategically located near cable landing stations and adjacent to reliable power facilities.

But above all, the government needs to send a clear signal that it is ready and willing to take extraordinary measures to encourage AI innovation in India. One way in which it could do this would be to put in place a liability regime designed specifically for AI. Recognizing the probabilistic and non-deterministic nature of AI, the government should announce that it will prefer remediation over punishment. Recognizing that AI models are prone to errors, it should reassure AI companies that they will not be punished so long as they take steps to quickly fix what went wrong.

Equally important is the need to put in place an AI-friendly intellectual property and data protection regime—one that gives entrepreneurs the confidence to train models in India using Indian data sets without the fear of being sued for copyright infringement.

India must seize this moment to provide AI developers with all they need to leap ahead in this vital space

ment or data protection violations. It should be possible to design appropriate frameworks that can protect the interests of creators and data principals that, at the same time, give AI companies adequate comfort.

Once the Centre puts in place these key strategic incentives, state governments will compete among themselves to attract investments. During the IT boom of the 1990s, states like Karnataka and Telangana competed with each other for investments by offering subsidized land, power guarantees and data centre facilities, while offering single-window clearance regimes managed by dedicated commissioners. We should be able to re-create that sort of positive energy around AI.

The IT boom of the 1990s came about not because the government got into the business of IT services, but because it had the courage to carve out a favourable regulatory environment—one that gave entrepreneurs the assurance that their investments would be protected and treated them as partners in national development.

We need to do the same for AI and do it soon. If India does not seize this moment, we risk forever being users, not builders.

We already have the playbook. All we need to do is apply it.

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

Gen Z moment
in Kathmandu

Youth anger against political elite topples the KP Sharma Oli government in Nepal

After Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, it is the turn of Nepal. Just 36 hours after mass mobilisations choked Kathmandu and an alarmed State responded with violence, leading to the death of at least 19 persons, Prime Minister (PM) KP Sharma Oli resigned. On Tuesday, the homes of politicians were attacked and the parliament building was set on fire. Though a government ban on multiple social media apps provided a trigger for "Gen Z" to hit the streets, the widespread support it received suggests a deeper anger against the system that cuts across age and class divides. Nepal seems to be experiencing a moment that Bangladesh saw last July when protests forced the then PM Sheikh Hasina to flee Dhaka, or going back to 2022 when the Aragalaya movement pulled down the Rajapaksa government in Colombo. A restive public, utterly disillusioned with the political class deemed corrupt, venal, and self-serving, forced regime change in all three countries.

Anti-graft sentiment has always headlined street protests in South Asia. But the Nepal situation is peculiar in its own way. One, no government has ever completed its term in the country since 1990, when it abandoned monarchy for democracy. Even after the country moved to a path of reconciliation in 2006 after a decade of civil war spearheaded by the Maoists, government-making in Kathmandu has been about permutations and combinations involving the Nepali Congress, the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN)-UML, various factions of the CPN-Maoist, and the many smaller outfits. Ideological contradictions are subsumed by coalitions of convenience, which have given a new life to even the monarchists. A handful of leaders have taken turns to lead these governments that failed to address the economic aspirations of the people. Two, the Gen Z of Nepal accesses the world through social media — according to DataReportal, Nepal has 14.3 million social media user identities in January 2025, which is about 48.1% of the total population; in comparison, only 33.7% of the Indian population are active social media users. Not surprisingly, Nepal's Gen Z seems to have perceived the crackdown on social media as censorship by an ineffective government.

India has understandably been cautious in its response: Sections in Kathmandu are known to spin conspiracies and spot a foreign hand whenever the public turns against the ruling elite. Instability in Nepal is also a cause of worry for India, particularly when it is trying to rebuild relations with China. Chaos in Nepal offers an opening for Beijing to influence public affairs in that country. The coming days will be crucial, and hopefully, Nepal will follow Sri Lanka's trajectory rather than Bangladesh's decline into sectarianism.

Challenges ahead for
new vice-president

CP Radhakrishnan became India's 15th vice-president (VP) on Tuesday after comprehensively defeating the Opposition's candidate, former Supreme Court Judge B Sudershan Reddy, in an election that comprised members of both Houses of Parliament. The victory caps a distinguished career for the long-time RSS loyalist, who has served as a MP and governor of Jharkhand and Maharashtra. It serves as a vindication of the ruling NDA after the controversial resignation of former VP Jagdeep Dhankhar in July. And it presents an opportunity for some temperance in the now volatile dynamics of Parliament that has marred lawmaking and discussions.

One of Radhakrishnan's most important tasks as VP will be to manage the Rajya Sabha as its chairman and restore the dignity and gravitas that was associated with the House of Elders. Regrettably, in recent years, the deterioration of the relationship between the government and the Opposition, and sharply polarised politics have hollowed out the bedrock of the cooperative relationship that would enable enriching and forward-looking discussions on the future of the country. Whether it be a string of disruptions, Opposition complaints of partisan behaviour from the chair, or mass suspensions, the Upper House has been in the news for unsavoury reasons. Radhakrishnan can help it return to its true purpose — to be a voice for the states, a reasoned check on the more immediate impulses of the directly elected Lok Sabha, and to help create an atmosphere of constructive discussions. He can take inspiration from his namesake, India's first vice-president Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, and other luminaries who graced this chair and made the position far bigger in stature than merely ceremonial.

Why the old regime
in Nepal has to exit

A tech-savvy generation frustrated with the ruling elite has decided to shape their country's future

I started with a hit-and-run. A car that belonged to the Koshi province finance minister, a leader from the deposed Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli's party, knocked down an 11-year-old girl and sped off. The driver was taken into custody later but then released within 24 hours. Oli called it a minor incident and said that compensation would be paid. And that was that.

The incident took place in broad daylight. The visual of the dazed girl, slowly standing up and running to safety, went viral on social media platforms. "Gen Z" protestors would take note. They shared the footage on a social media platform, projecting Oli and his party leaders as an insensitive and self-centred bunch. Only a few days earlier, a similar incident had taken place in Indonesia, where protests over members of parliament awarding themselves a \$3,000-monthly housing allowance boiled over when a government vehicle ran over a delivery man. Though Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto rescinded the decision after nationwide protests, the damage was done. Like it was in Nepal. Nepali youth, tech-savvy and with a worldview of their own, anywhere but a dim view of the three major political parties —

the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN)-UML, Nepali Congress, and CPN (Maoist) — were outraged. They let it be known.

The old-party leaders and the luxurious lifestyle of their children and grandchildren have been under intense public scrutiny for years. Their expensive foreign trips, enrolment in academic institutions outside Nepal, and flaunting of expensive luxury brands were noted. These were leaders who did not inherit any family wealth but became rich after joining politics. The information was shared over social media platforms.

If old-school journalism has a separation line between news producers and readers, that line is blurred on social media platforms. Some pilots provide excellent content on aviation, doctors on medical innovation, and chefs do food podcasts. Nepal has seen a record rise in young content producers in recent years. Not surprisingly, the government announced a ban on social media, it backfired.

The anger over deeply entrenched nepotism and corruption peaked in three days following the hit-and-run incident. On Monday, it spilled over to the streets of Kathmandu, Itahari and Narayanghat, with Gen Z protestors, many of them college students in their uniforms. By the end of the day, at least 19 people, most of them young, were killed in a police crackdown that saw disproportionate use of force against unarmed civilians.

debuta was dragged out of his residence in Budhanilkantha. Oli resigned by late afternoon, but his whereabouts remain unknown. So is the case with another former prime minister, Pushpa Kamal Dahal aka Prachanda.

Within hours, the thousands of protestors who had surrounded Oli's party headquarters in Chaudhary went on a victory rally. But the attacks continued — on the country's Supreme Court, Singha Durbar, the seat of government, and parliament premises. It was a symbolic dismantling of the old state apparatus. In 24 hours, Nepal changed.

So what is next? Kathmandu's young and popular mayor Balen Shah is likely to be the next interim leader. As Oli stepped down and vandalism continued, Shah appealed to the protestors to calm down and help with the transition. He also called on them to stop destroying public property, and



Akhilesh Upadhyay



The old-party leaders and the luxurious lifestyle of their children and grandchildren have been under intense public scrutiny for years. REUTERS

declared that the next leader will be from the young generation.

To all those watching these turn of events in Nepal, some of these pointers would be useful. There seems to be little geopolitical games at play although Indian media may have played the "China hand" and some conspiracy theorists in Nepal see an "American hand". Their argument: China's TikTok remained open under Oli while America's Meta apps were shut down. The pro-China conspiracy theorists hold that Oli is close to China, and hence, India wanted him out of office. The truth is that they give far too much importance to Oli. All these hypotheses are short on evidence.

However, what is evident from the ground, as I saw around CPN-UML headquarters, was that most protestors are very young. Young Nepalis are intelligent, have a belief in themselves, and are far more worried about their future than those we see quoted in newspapers every day. By all evidence, traditional media in

Nepal appears as outdated as old-school party leaders.

Here is a serious lesson on not to underestimate the power of the young generation, who see the future better than older cohorts. They are plain frustrated with the ruling class that failed Nepal after 1990 and later, after the 2006, mass movements.

There are two possible scenarios. One, quick constitutional amendments that push through change. Two, a transition under the current constitution, although it could be far messier than before. Fresh elections will put constitutionalism in place, avoid political anarchy and possible large-scale violence, and offer renewed hope to the citizenry.

Akhilesh Upadhyay, a former editor-in-chief of the Kathmandu Post, is a senior fellow at IIDS, a Kathmandu-based think tank. His book *In the Margins of Empires: A History of the Chicken's Neck*, will be published by Penguin Random House in December. The views expressed are personal

Envisaging a framework
for Sudarshan Chakra

Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi outlined Mission Sudarshan Chakra — to be operationalised by 2035 — on Independence Day. In the context of this vision, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully tested a new integrated air defence system, consisting of a variety of weapons that shot down three targets at different altitudes and ranges, as per the statement of the defence ministry in late August.

The testing of the weapons at different altitudes and ranges signifies the multi-layered characteristic of India's present and futuristic air defence system, which will encompass the weapon systems of the Indian Air Force and army air defence. The necessary capabilities for Sudarshan Chakra exist to an extent, but it is scale that is desired. Future wars are largely going to be non-contact in nature, fought at large stand-off distances. Given the evolutionary nature of warfare, with no clear dividing line between the past, present, and future, it is imperative to prepare for both "old" and "new" kinds of warfare. Herein lies the criticality of blending the best of legacy and contemporary weapon platforms. This is applicable to Mission Sudarshan Chakra too.

The dynamic contexts of the present-day battlefield are marked by diverse campaign settings. It could be, for instance, a conventional conflict such as the Russia-Ukraine one, or irregular warfare that we see in densely populated areas in Gaza, or even combating State proxies, such as terror outfits sponsored by Pakistan. The distances involved in terms of the range of combat also vary. It could be short-range, as it is in Ukraine, or long-range, as with Israel's campaign against Iran and Ukraine's campaign against strategic targets inside Russia. Or, it could be a mix of short- and long-range conflict.

However, amid the many variables, the common thread that is evolving is the deployment of unmanned aerial systems rather than manned ones. The texture of future force is going to shift from a small number of large platforms that are expensive, and increasingly vulnerable, to one that will see a massive number of unmanned systems — either remotely piloted or automated — that are less vulnerable, much smaller, less costly, but still very effective. Clearly, deployment of drones in combination with long- and medium-range missiles and rockets is the threat that the Sudarshan Chakra shall guard against. An air defence umbrella to ensure the safety of India's citizens and assets is an inescapable imperative. In consonance, India's armed forces must learn and adapt to future threats. The prerequisite for success is achieving a suitable blend of the new and the old.

Here, we need to take note of a few critical

aspects. First, countering low-technology aerial threats such as drones will need low-technology and cheap solutions.

Second, air defence of assets will continue to be relevant and, as such, large-range weapon systems will have to be supplemented by smaller range systems that include shoulder-fired air defence weapons.

Third, the upgraded legacy systems will continue to form the backbone of integrated air defence. And finally, upgradation and acquisition will have to be carried out in a graduated manner so as to continue the optimal utilisation of legacies, without, of course, compromising on operational effectiveness. Operation Sindoor marked a significant turning point in India's air defence capabilities, demonstrating the effective integration of legacy air defence systems with modern platforms. India executed a series of strategic strikes against Pakistani military assets, showcasing the successful employment of multi-layered air defence capabilities, which included both modern and legacy systems.

In essence, Operation Sindoor was about the integration of legacy systems, such as the Pechora, OSA-AK, L70, and the indigenous Akashteer, with modern capabilities such as the S-400, SPYDER, etc. The framework of the proposed integrated Sudarshan Chakra shield should be an effective integration of the variety of air defence weapon platforms that India has in its inventory.

Against the general trend of relying exclusively on modern systems, Michael C Horowitz, Lauren A Kahn and others write in *Foreign Affairs* that "investing exclusively in precise mass systems like drones limits the targets a military is capable of destroying". For example, Iran's military exemplified the pitfalls of an over-reliance on low-cost weapons systems. Tehran has one of the most extensive drone programmes in the world, but because it lacked a modern force, it couldn't successfully strike well-protected Israeli military and civilian targets. The larger point is about the importance of combining legacy and modern equipment after due deliberation.

By simply chasing the newest technologies in the hope that they represent a magic bullet, the armed forces should not lose sight of the platforms and weapons that have hitherto been the cornerstones of the nation's military power. In a multi-layered air defence system, which Sudarshan Chakra is meant to be, even man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS), such as the good old Igla, will have a role of engaging the low-flying drones at short range.

Preparing for future warfare has never meant abandoning the past. India's capability development is broadly aligned with achieving a suitable blend of the old and the new — except when it comes to the pace of acquisition and the scale of adoption that will be desired for Sudarshan Chakra. The blending of legacy and modern platforms is likely to be cost-effective, wherein the utility of older systems continues to be replaced, provided operational efficiency is upheld.

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Shashank Ranjan

{ PETER NAVARRO } SENIOR COUNSELLOR TO DONALD TRUMP

None of these countries can survive if they don't sell to the U.S...they're like vampires sucking our blood dry with their unfair trade practices

On the virtual Brics summit planning to discuss measures to counter U.S tariffs

Onus on China to take
SCO beyond symbolism

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Tianjin, China, pressed the platform to take an unambiguous stance against terrorism. The Tianjin joint declaration explicitly condemned the Pahalgaon terror attack. For New Delhi, this outcome not only reassured the SCO Charter's central mission of combating terrorism but also turned global attention toward Pakistan's sponsorship of terrorism against member-countries and Eurasia.

The SCO, however, remains riddled with internal contradictions. Several members exploit the forum for narrow security and geopolitical gains, creating trust issues and disagreements within the forum. As a result, the forum has remained largely ineffective in responding to major regional crises, including terrorism, connectivity gaps, and the situation in Afghanistan.

China's role has been particularly problematic. Beijing continues to shield Pakistan for its use of terrorism as a strategic tool against India — supporting the country at global and regional forums, supplying it with over 80% of its defence equipment between 2020 and 2024, and backing Islamabad during Operation Sindoor. Beijing's parochial strategic interests have thus made the Af-Pak region a cradle of terrorism, weakening the SCO.

Since joining the SCO as a full member in 2017, India has sought to inject its own genuine connectivity and cooperative endeavours that respect sovereignty. New Delhi's priorities are centred on a shared culture and a common future for the region, emphasising reliable, resilient, and diversified supply chains that require better connectivity while respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of member States. New Delhi leveraged the SCO forum to advance its geopolitical and strategic goals in Central Asia and to counterbalance China's assertive influence. Central Asian countries also admitted India into the Ashgabat Agreement in 2018 and have demonstrated heightened interest in the Chabahat Port and Eastern Route to the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). The first India-Central Asia virtual summit in 2022 established a Joint Working Group (JWG) to enhance regional connectivity and trade via the Chabahat port. In June this year, India and Central Asia jointly explored rare earths and critical minerals during the fourth India-Central Asia dialogue in New

Delhi. This followed Beijing's restrictions on rare earth exports for clean energy and defence. Notably, Central Asia is increasingly seen as a potential rival to Beijing's dominance, given its rich reserves of rare earth elements.

The SCO forum has continued to serve as a platform for India to prevent Central Asia from becoming increasingly vulnerable to Chinese influence. It also enables India to pursue its geopolitical and economic interests in Eurasia, grounded in longstanding civilisational, spiritual, and cultural ties.

The SCO also provided India and China with a platform for direct dialogue, and both nations voiced their willingness to find common ground on bilateral issues despite notable differences. These issues include border demarcation and Chinese investments in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which challenge India's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Forums like BRICS and SCO, led by the Global South, have seen a thaw in bilateral relations. During the bilateral meeting with the PM Modi in Tianjin, Chinese President Xi Jinping stated that it is the "right choice" for both countries to be "friends". PM Modi, in turn, demonstrated India's commitment to advancing relations grounded in mutual trust, respect, and sensitivity, while also highlighting concerns over cross-border terrorism.

In this era marked by wars, tariffs and rising geopolitical tensions, Beijing and New Delhi must collaborate from a long-term strategic perspective, considering their increasing responsibilities to promote multilateralism and a multipolar world. PM Modi's endorsement of the SCO demonstrates New Delhi's understanding of the importance of multilateral forums such as SCO and BRICS to advance India's geopolitical, security, and geo-economic interests. Now, China needs to decide how to progress in stabilising the relationship with India by implementing specific measures, such as granting greater market access to Indian goods and IT services, and pressuring Pakistan to abandon State-sponsored terrorism.

Only then can the SCO move beyond symbolism to become a credible pillar of multipolar stability.

Harsh V Pant is vice-president, and Ayjaz Wani is fellow, Eurasia, Observer Research Foundation. The views expressed are personal



Harsh V Pant



Ayjaz Wani

India's response to HIRE Act must be pragmatic and long-term

IF US President Donald Trump's 50 per cent tariffs on merchandise exports from India have a debilitating effect on our economy, the Halting International Relocation of Employment (HIRE) Act will worsen the damage as it will impact India's services exports to the US. For services, India enjoyed a trade surplus of \$3.2 billion in the last fiscal, exporting an estimated \$28.7 billion and importing \$25.5 billion. Republican Senator from Ohio Bernie Moreno introduced the HIRE Act on September 5. It proposes a 25 per cent tax on outsourcing payments—that is, on any payment made by a US company or taxpayer to a foreign person whose work benefits consumers in the United States. "While

college grads in America struggle to find work, globalist politicians and C-Suite executives have spent decades shipping good-paying jobs overseas in pursuit of slave wages and immense profits those days are over," he observed. Three points need to be made here. First, protectionism in the US is not something that functions as per the whims and fancies of Trump; it is deep-rooted and widespread. It is closely linked to the MAGA (Make America Great Again) movement; there are no signs of the movement weakening; on the contrary, the movement is growing in strength.

Second, the ruling Republicans are MAGA flag bearers. Traditionally regarded as the party of capital-

ists and the rich, it is championing the cause of the man in the street. As Moreno said, "It's time to fight for working-class Americans and ensure that they can work and retire with dignity. If companies want to hire foreign workers instead of Americans, my bill will hit them where it hurts their pockets." Meanwhile, Democrats, who are seen as defenders of the rights of the common people, are unlikely to oppose the measures intended to help the working class. So, a decline in protectionism in the US is highly unlikely in the foreseeable future. Finally, Delhi should double down its efforts to iron out the differences with Washington. Trump's recent utterances hint at his desire

to have better Indo-US ties; he said that India and the US have a "special relationship" and "there is nothing to worry about." Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also "deeply" appreciated and "fully" reciprocated Trump's sentiments and positive assessment of bilateral ties. This mutual goodwill offers a compliant opening. The challenge for policymakers on both sides is to ensure that the broader strategic partnership—covering defence cooperation, geopolitical alignment in the Indo-Pacific, and technological collaboration—is not derailed by trade frictions.

It is in the shared interest of both nations to build on the thaw. They must prevent economic disagreements from spilling over into the

political or strategic domain, and vice versa. India should pursue a two-pronged approach. First, it must press for greater clarity and possible exemptions in the implementation of the HIRE Act, should it become law, to shield at least some categories of service exports from punitive taxation. Second, it must diversify its trade and services markets to reduce over-dependence on the US. While the US remains India's single largest trading partner, an over-reliance on one market makes the economy vulnerable to sudden policy shifts. Expanding partnerships with Europe, East Asia, and emerging markets could provide a measure of insulation. In short, our response should be pragmatic and long-term.

LETTERS

Mutual respect by politicians

FURTHER to your September 9 report, 'Grace in politics: A lesson for eternity from two statesmen', I have observed that mutual respect among politicians of diverse ideologies has become a rarity in contemporary politics. The bonhomie demonstrated by former Union ministers Suresh Prabhu and P. Ashok Gajapati Raju made for a heartening read. A politician's life is like an open book. Their behaviour and speeches are noticed by people, and they remain in their minds. The incumbent Goa Governor Raju and Prabhu's simple goodwill gesture will certainly make the conscious minds to think and think for the better. We need many more such exemplary statesmen to inspire the young generation to take cue and strive for a better society.

Buddha Jagdish Rao, Visakhapatnam

GST rate cut and politics

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi has been urging his MPs to tell the people about GST reforms and rate cuts introduced by the Union government to reduce prices, help businesses to thrive and boost swadeshi products. That being so, why did not the BJP explain to the people the reason for high prices of petrol and LPG, which too are essential commodities? Though international crude oil rates have fallen, citizens of the country did not get any benefit as the retail prices have not been reduced.

P R Ravinder, Hyderabad

Convert energy from garbage

AN overwhelming 20,000 tonnes of waste was cleared from artificial ponds, major and minor water bodies apart from Hussain Sagar by the sanitation wing of GHMC, post-Ganesh idol immersion. My humble request to the organisers is to kindly dismantle idols on the ground itself rather than immerse them in water and use the material for power generation.

G Murali Mohan Rao, Secunderabad-11

Potholes spell danger

EVERY shower in Hyderabad seems to wash away not just the road fillings but also the myriad promises of the civic body. What remains are craters instead of roads, frustration instead of relief, and danger instead of safety. For commuters, every ride now feels like an obstacle course where survival matters more than speed. Areas like Charminar, Shalibanda and Lal Darwaza are living examples of how temporary fixes collapse overnight, leaving citizens to pay the price by way of injuries, delays and stress. The authorities should realise that people deserve roads that lead to their destinations, not detours into danger. Wiser counsel is in understanding that potholes cannot be patched with excuses. The people need lasting solutions, not seasonal makeovers. Roads are the lifelines of a city; let us not allow them to become deathtraps.

Kalishetti Soumya, St Francis College for Women

AI, a partner in progress

THE article "From chaos to clarity: How AI is changing the way leaders work" was both insightful and timely. In today's fast-paced world where endless meetings often end in confusion rather than action, Artificial Intelligence (AI) truly emerges as a tool of transformation. AI's ability to capture key decisions, summarize discussions, and highlight recurring issues is not just about saving time, it is not just a convenience, but it is a revolution, it is about enhancing productivity, accountability, and innovation. For countries like India, where businesses and teams operate across geographies and time zones, the potential of AI in streamlining leadership processes is immense. This shift does not replace human intelligence but supports it, allowing leaders to focus on what really matters. If adopted wisely with secure systems and proper cultural integration, AI can redefine the way organizations function, bringing clarity where once there was only chaos. The future belongs to those who embrace such change early. Indeed, AI is not just a tool, it is becoming a partner in progress.

Nooreen Fatima, Hyderabad

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BENGALURU ONLINE

Severe depression, anxiety and relationship struggles on the rise among city youth

BENGALURU: This World Suicide Prevention Day, Mpower – an initiative of the Aditya Birla Education Trust, founded by Neeraj Birla – is amplifying youth mental health awareness through engaging on-ground activities at SSIMVR College and other campuses across Bengaluru. Designed for students aged 18 to 21 years, these initiatives include the 'Jenga of Hope', 'Hope Hunt', and open-mic sessions, creating safe, stigma-free spaces for dialogue and self-expression.

The effort is part of Mpower's larger mission to address Bengaluru's rising mental health challenges by giving young people influential platforms that spark reflection, encourage peer support, and normalise conversations around emotional wellbeing.

The urgency behind this effort is undeniable. Bengaluru is facing a hidden mental health crisis. High academic pressure, family conflicts, and the loneliness of city life are hitting the youth hard. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), over 100 suicides were reported in Bengaluru in 2024, showing just how intense urban life can get for young people and working professionals. Data from Mpower's Bengaluru centre at Indiranagar further underscores the concern, revealing that young women aged 15–34 make up the majority of high-risk individuals seeking help for suicidal ideation – often linked to severe depression, anxiety, and relationship struggles.

As part of its youth-led preventive approach, Mpower also activates COPE (Counselling and Outreach for Peer Empowerment) Clubs across colleges in the city. These clubs create safe spaces for mental health dialogue through activities like Jenga of Hope, Hope Hunt, and student-led open mics.

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

Judicial outreach in High Courts: Apex court calls for procedural integrity

APOLOGIST



CR SUKUMAR

THE Supreme Court of India's recent intervention in Andhra Pradesh Gramseva Vikas Bank v. Yugandar & Anr. underscores a critical issue: the importance of procedural discipline within the writ jurisdiction of High Courts. This landmark case brought to light a significant deviation from established judicial norms when a division bench of the Telangana High Court, while hearing a writ appeal against an interim order, chose to unilaterally summon and decide the main writ petition on its merits. This action, which was inconsistent with foundational judicial principles, drew a clear admonition from the Supreme Court.

The incident serves as a crucial point of reflection on the structural, procedural, and institutional implications of such deviations and highlights the need for Chief Justices and judicial collegiums to ensure procedural integrity.

Foundational principles of writ appeals:

The writ jurisdiction granted under Article 226 of the Indian Constitution is a powerful remedy for the protection of fundamental and legal rights. Its extraordinary nature is balanced by procedural safeguards that ensure fairness, efficiency, and a coherent judicial hierarchy. A writ appeal, especially when filed against an interim order, is inherently limited in scope. Its purpose is to review the correctness of the interim relief granted, not to delve into the sub-

stant merits of the entire writ petition.

The Supreme Court has consistently affirmed this limited scope. It has repeatedly clarified across landmark cases that writ appeals should be confined to their stated purpose and should not be used to adjudicate the writ petition's merits. This principle is vital for maintaining procedural integrity and judicial discipline.

The Telangana High Court's division bench deviated from this established practice by prematurely taking up the main writ petition and deciding both matters simultaneously. This action raised concerns about jurisdictional overreach, undermined the authority of the single-judge bench, and could potentially foster a "forum shopping" di-

Judicial restraint and upholding procedural propriety:

From a jurisprudential perspective, the incident highlights several key principles:

Judicial hierarchy; separation of powers: The structure of single-judge and division benches has been designed to maintain order and accountability. Allocation of cases is an administrative function vested in the Chief Justice. By taking up the writ petition directly, the division bench's action went against this established administrative framework, which could disrupt the judicial balance.

Procedural fairness: Deciding a writ petition's merits in the context of an appeal against an interim order can risk depriving parties of a complete and fair hearing. Procedural safeguards are essential to upholding the rule of law and protecting litigants' rights.

Judicial restraint and institutional legitimacy: The judiciary's legitimacy is tied to its adherence to jurisdictional boundaries. Actions that extend beyond a court's designated purview



Reasoned orders are the keystone of judicial accountability and transparency, enabling litigants, the legal fraternity, and the wider public to understand the basis on which decisions are made. The absence of well-founded reasoning erodes trust and impedes the development of coherent jurisprudence.

can weaken the doctrine of precedent, introduce inconsistency, and potentially erode public trust.

This event can be seen as a sign of broader institutional challenges that require a renewed focus on reinforcing judicial discipline and procedural rigor.

Recommendations for procedural and administrative reforms:

To address these systemic issues, the following measures deserve consideration: **Institutionalising procedural governance:** Chief Justices and collegiums should establish and formalise clear protocols that ensure intercollegium and substantive matters are handled distinctly unless a specific reallocation is explicitly authorised by the Chief Justice.

Judicial training and sensitisation: It is crucial to conduct regular educational programs for judges to emphasize the importance of adhering to jurisdictional boundaries and procedural norms.

Strengthening administrative oversight: Collegiums should actively monitor case disposal trends to identify and address procedural deviations, promoting a culture of accountability.

Enhancing case allocation transparency: Implementing more transparent, digitally enabled case assignment systems, with audit trails can help prevent un-

authorised bench assumptions.

Encouraging judicial restraint: Benches must exercise conscious restraint and avoid overstepping their designated jurisdiction to reinforce predictability and public confidence in the judicial process.

Role of technology in ensuring justice:

In addition to the procedural and administrative reforms already mentioned, there is a crucial need to leverage technology to address systemic inefficiencies. Delayed justice is often synonymous with denied justice, and the massive backlog of over six million cases across High Courts is a testament to this issue.

An effective solution lies in evolving a robust online system for case tracking. This system would provide transparency and accountability by allowing judges, lawyers, and litigants to track the status of cases that have been pending for extended periods.

The system should:

Flag long-pending cases: Automatically identify cases that have exceeded a reasonable timeline for disposal, prompting judicial review.

Provide detailed case history: Offer a clear, chronological record of all procedural steps, including adjournments and bench changes, to identify points of delay.

Facilitate accountability: Allow for an audit trail (audit log) that helps Chief Justices and collegiums pinpoint bottlenecks and evaluate judicial performance based on procedural adherence and case disposal rates.

Enhance public trust: By making the process more transparent, such a system can rebuild public confidence in the judiciary's commitment to justice.

This technological solution would not only help manage the current backlog but also prevent future delays by creating a more disciplined and predictable judicial process.

Ratio decidendi:

In addition to reinforcing procedural discipline, it is imperative that all judicial benches commit to delivering reasoned judgments that clearly articulate the ratio decidendi or obiter dicta. Reasoned orders are the keystone of judicial accountability and transparency, enabling litigants, the legal fraternity, and the wider public to understand the basis on which decisions are made. The absence of well-founded reasoning erodes trust and impedes the development of coherent jurisprudence.

By mandating that benches explicitly delineate their legal reasoning and the principles guiding their conclusions, High Courts can ensure that every judgment not only resolves the dispute at hand but also contributes meaningfully to the body of law. This practice mitigates arbitrary decision-making and allows higher courts to engage in effective oversight, thereby enhancing the quality and predictability of judicial outcomes.

Encourage feedback channels and whistleblowers:

Equally critical is the institution of systematic judicial audits overseen by Chief Justices and collegiums, drawing on anonymous public complaints and feedback channels.

Shouldering the TPCC responsibility with pride

AMARAVATI NAGARAJU

"When a leader thinks beyond self and works for the larger good, society prospers," are the pearls of wisdom passed on by a schoolteacher that echo in the mind while reflecting on the political journey of Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) president Mahesh Kumar Goud, who has completed a year in office.

For a party with more than 135 years of history, entrusting the reins of its Telangana unit to a leader, who started from the scratch as an ordinary worker, underscores the Congress ethos of industry and upward mobility within its ranks.

From cadre to State chief:

Goud's rise to the TPCC presidency last September was not accidental but the culmination of years of persistence and service. His elevation as the first Backward Class (BC) leader to occupy the post in Telangana came at a decisive moment, the last after Congress defeated BRS and put an end to its decade-long rule. His leadership symbolised the party's recognition of social justice and grassroots contribution.

Working under the guidance of

Mahesh Kumar Goud completes one year as State Congress chief

Sonia Gandhi, Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi, and with the support of AICC general secretary K.C. Venugopal and state in-charges, Goud has functioned in close coordination with Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy, Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, and other ministers to strengthen the Congress both as a ruling party and as a political organisation.

Balancing governance and organisation:

Occupying the TPCC president's chair when the party is in power has not been without challenges. Expectations of workers and citizens, who played a crucial role in the party's rise to power, are quite naturally immense. Goud has sought to bridge governance and organisation by initiating outreach programmes such as 'Andhavanilo Prajnapathinibhulu', where Ministers, MLAs and MPs meet citizens regularly at Gandhi Bhavan.

This model, widely welcomed, has reinforced the party's claim of being a party of public accountability and responsive governance.



Welfare and development:

The Revanth Reddy-led government has rolled out a slew of welfare schemes—free bus travel for women, AarogyaSri coverage enhanced to ₹10 lakh, free electricity up to 200 units, subsidised LPG cylinders at ₹500, farmer loan waivers, and more. As TPCC chief, Goud ensured that the schemes were communicated and delivered effectively through party cadre across Telangana.

He has been instrumental in mobilising grassroots campaigns to promote flagship programmes like Indra Mahila Shakti, Indira Mahila Housing Scheme, Rythu Bharaosa and Indira Mahila Shakti Bharaosa for agricultural labourers. The Con-

Goud has functioned in close coordination with Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy, Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, and other ministers to strengthen the Congress both as a ruling party and as a political organisation.

gress government's expansion of BC reservations to 42 per cent following the caste census, in which Goud played a significant role, has been hailed as a landmark in social justice. His earlier announcement of the BC Declaration in Karamadhyam as working president and later overseeing the caste census as TPCC chief remain his political career's momentous milestones.

Outreach and mobilisation:

Beyond governance, he has spearheaded public mobilisation through initiatives such as the Janabitha padayatra. The march, now into its multiple phases, has garnered strong public response,

with students and youth actively participating in symbolic acts of shramdaan (voluntary labour).

He has also led Telangana Congress in national-level campaigns, including the AICC's 'Jai Bapu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan' movement against the BJP's alleged authoritarianism, and supported Rahul Gandhi's 'Vote Adhikar Yatra' to highlight electoral malpractice.

A symbol of social justice:

Mahesh Kumar Goud's ascent to the TPCC hot seat is viewed as a powerful statement—that a leader from a backward community could rise to the State Congress pinnacle.

Looking ahead:

Under the slogan 'Telangana Rising 2047', the Congress envisions a roadmap for the State's long-term development. With Revanth Reddy driving governance and Goud consolidating the party organisation, Telangana Congress is positioning itself to sustain both public trust and grassroots strength.

Goud is being hailed as a guide to youth, while demonstrating that politics, when rooted in service and accountability, can indeed be transformative.



Opinion

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2025

Elevated yields

The signal from the bond market shows nervousness about govt borrowings

BOND YIELDS HAVE retraced after finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman reassured the markets that the government will not borrow more than what it has planned. The benchmark yield, which had hit a recent high of 6.60%, is now hovering around 6.4620%. The markets had been somewhat nervous thinking the government might need to borrow more than ₹14.8 lakh crore (gross) due to weak direct tax collections—gross tax receipts between April and July are up only 0.8% year-on-year due to the lower personal income tax collections. Moreover, there's the potential loss of ₹48,000 crore revenue for the current year after the goods and services tax (GST) rate rationalisation. A financial package for exporters, which is still in the planning stages, could mean additional government spends. The high supply of state loans was also weighing on investors. The government is obviously banking on buoyant demand to minimise the loss of revenue as GST cuts would make 99% of products cheaper. Also, households now have more purchasing power thanks to the income tax cuts.

The fiscal math, however, could get complicated if there is a shortfall in tax collections and the nominal GDP growth comes in lower than the assumed 10.1%—in Q1, it grew just 8.8%. The fiscal deficit for the four months to July was close to 30% of the targeted amount for the full year—higher than the 17% increase in the year-ago period—which is good for the economy but has probably worried the bond markets. However, the finance minister seems determined to stay on the path of fiscal consolidation, so the deficit is unlikely to exceed the targeted 4.4% of GDP. Since we have just won an upgrade from S&P this would be the right approach. In that case, however, the government would need to either curtail expenditure on some fronts or raise more via disinvestment and strategic sales. The total budgeted expenditure of ₹50.63 lakh crore, therefore, might be pruned somewhat.

The FM's reassurance should have seen bond yields soften more than they have. But the bond markets probably apprehend that the curveball that the US has thrown in the form of a 50% import tariff will see the growth momentum moderate. The robust 7.8% GDP growth in Q1 notwithstanding, the potential loss of exports and the consequent loss of jobs and incomes, bond markets fear, will slow the economy. Since the private sector is reluctant to invest meaningful sums, it fears the government would need to continue to do the heavy lifting by borrowing significantly, if not immediately, sometime later in 2026. One must concede their fears are not altogether irrational.

In this context of elevated yields, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Sanjay Malhotra's observation that "while the banking channel is crucial, transmission through risk-free sovereign bonds is equally important, as it serves as a benchmark for pricing in other segments of the market" is instructive. The higher sovereign yields have already pushed up corporate bond yields, prompting some issuers to postpone borrowings. In fact, some banks have tweaked their marginal cost of funds-based lending rate upwards, albeit marginally. This must be disconcerting for the central bank, which is the government's debt manager, at a time when the effort has been to bring down the cost of money. One should not be surprised to see the RBI stepping in to support the demand.

Don't want to be 'peasant'? Try thematic investing

YOU'VE GOT FIVE more years—maybe less. In a fast-changing world turbocharged by President Donald Trump's executive orders and artificial intelligence (AI), people need to make investments that can transform their lives, or risk being left behind.

The speed of wealth creation by the privileged few is there for all to see. In just a few weeks, the Trump family raked up about \$1.3 billion from two crypto ventures, each less than a year old. With the Bitcoin price hitting a record high—thanks in part to the president's Genius Act, which allows for the broader adoption of digital assets in traditional finance—the newly wealthy are splurging on luxury travel, flying private jets, and cruising the Mediterranean.

As for the rest of us, even well-paid professionals are having a tough time finding a safe harbor. Artificial intelligence is disrupting the white-collar labour market. While top AI researchers can make \$100 million a year, thousands of tech jobs are being cut by the likes of Salesforce Inc. and Microsoft Corp. The situation is even more dire in China, where those in their mid-30s already worry their careers are near an end. There is now talk of overproducing elites and computer programmers. New graduates from China's prestigious Tsinghua University are certainly not getting good financial returns on their schooling.

In a world where, in former Google executive Mo Gawdat's words, "unless you're in the top 0.1%, you're a peasant", how can families ensure that they stay in the shrinking middle class? These days, even households making \$300,000 a year struggle to pay for elite college tuition bills.

One solution is to have a small slice of thematic investing in your wealth portfolio, which involves identifying technology trends and the stocks that might benefit. After all, with the dominance of Big Tech in market indexes, it's become almost impossible to generate excess returns via old-school factor investing, which builds portfolios based on certain common characteristics, such as price momentum or market size.

Of course, the big hurdle is that you must look beyond earnings. If you believe the improvement in AI's capability is non-linear, then you have to recognise that future earnings growth could be exponential, and the current elevated valuation is justified.

Recent sharp price upswings in some of China's tech stocks have gotten some commentators worried about irrational exuberance. On September 1, Alibaba Group Holding Ltd.'s shares soared 18% after the company reported a sales surge in the cloud division—the business most closely tied to the AI boom—even though quarterly earnings were mediocre at best, with total revenue growth largely flat. Meanwhile, some say that chip designer Cambricon Technologies Corp., a new market darling that trades at 250 times 2025 earnings, has become way too expensive.

This is not the right way to look at China's AI opportunities. Think of thematic investing as poor man's venture capital. Silicon Valley's financiers do not look at a start-up's near-term earnings. Rather, they are more interested in total market size, an industry's competitive landscape, as well as whether the company has a technological edge.

Through this lens, Alibaba and Cambricon are not necessarily bad bets. AI Cloud has the most comprehensive product offerings among its peers and might gain more sales as Anthropic stops selling AI services to Chinese companies. Meanwhile, Nvidia Corp.'s decision to halt production related to its H20 AI chips, tailor-made for China, can also bring new clients to Cambricon.

To be sure, venture capital funds routinely make risky bets that don't pan out. So someone readying herself for thematic investing must be prepared to lose everything. As a result, these stocks should only be a small slice of a portfolio.

In a world of rising wealth inequality, we have to play a bit offensive to be defensive. When a revolutionary technology has descended upon us, we have no fear. Position yourself for a seismic shift and make AI your friend, not foe.



SHULI REN

Bloomberg



ON AUGUST 6, the Reserve Bank of India notified the RBI (Co-Lending Arrangements) Directions, 2025. At first glance, the directions appear to be incremental changes to an existing framework. But a closer look reveals that they reshape the foundation of how banks, non-banking financial companies (NBFCs), and fintechs will collaborate in extending credit. The new framework widens opportunities, imposes tighter risk-sharing obligations, and sets the tone for the next phase of India's credit ecosystem.

Co-lending emerged in India as a hybrid model combining the best of both worlds. NBFCs and fintechs, agile in origin and distribution, could reach underserved borrowers in small towns, semi-urban centres, and niche segments. Banks, with their lower cost of funds, provided the balance-sheet support to finance these loans. In theory, both parties gained—NBFCs earned fee income and continued customer engagement, while banks got exposure to segments they struggled to reach.

The RBI's first attempt to formalise this model came in 2020, restricting it largely to priority sector lending (PSL). Soon, concerns were raised with respect to higher effective borrower rates, inadequate disclosures, and NBFCs acting mainly as originators with minimal balance-sheet exposure. By 2023-24, the RBI was scrutinising whether such practices were resulting in regulatory arbitrage and systemic risk.

The new directions are the regulator's response and an attempt to mainstream co-lending arrangements (CLAs) while curbing their excesses. To begin with, co-lending is no longer confined to PSL. Any loan, secured or unsecured, can be originated under a CLA between regulated entities, not just banks and NBFCs. This opens the gates for broader participation, including housing finance companies.

Further, each co-lender must retain at least 10% of the loan exposure on its books. This "skin in the game" require-

ment ensures that lenders do not offload risks entirely to their partners. Additionally, the use of default loss guarantees or DLGs, where one party promises to absorb losses up to a cap, has been restricted to 5% of loans outstanding in respect of loans under CLA. This prevents an illusion of risk transfer and guards against hidden leverage.

The directions mandate enhanced disclosures—quarterly and annual publication of co-lending partners, weighted average interest rates, fees charged and paid, and DLG details. Escrow accounts are compulsory for all collections, and tighter know-your-customer rules have been prescribed. Loan transfer timelines are also specified, reducing scope for regulatory arbitrage.

The originating regulated entity (RE) must ensure that any loan under a CLA is transferred only to the designated partner RE according to the agreement and the key fact statement at the time of sanction. If such transfer cannot be completed within 15 calendar days, the loan remains on the originating RE's books and can only be transferred to other eligible lenders following applicable directions. Moreover, any subsequent transfer of loan exposures originated under CLA, whether to third parties or between REs, must strictly comply with applicable directions and requires mutual consent of both the originating and partner REs. Collectively, these requirements signal that the days of opaque "back-to-back" loan originations are over.

Over the medium term, co-lending could evolve from a niche regulatory experiment into one of the primary channels of credit delivery

The directions will reshape the co-lending landscape, bringing both opportunities and challenges. On the positive side, they create a new growth avenue for NBFCs by allowing co-lending across all loan categories, lifting them from scale beyond the narrow PSL channel. This could unlock long-term growth potential while enhancing their credibility through greater transparency. Banks, in turn, benefit by leveraging the NBFC distribution network without having to build their own last-mile reach, which could expand access to formal credit in historically underserved regions. From a systemic perspective, the RBI's insistence on risk retention and caps on DLGs ensures that no participant can fully distance itself from loan performance, thereby reducing moral hazard and encouraging a more balanced partnership.

The framework also introduces challenges—compliance with escrow accounts, IT upgrades, and detailed reporting will raise costs, straining smaller NBFCs and driving industry consolidation. Additional costs may be passed on to borrowers, thereby undermining the goal of financial inclusion. Further, operational frictions like system coordination and stricter timelines could erode the model's fintech-driven efficiency by slowing down disbursements. Thus, while the framework strengthens resilience, it risks dampening the agility that gave co-lending its edge.

Globally, co-lending or collaborative lending models have taken diverse forms.

SANDEEP PAREKH

Managing partner, Finsec Law Advisors



In the US, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation has promoted partnerships between large banks and minority depository institutions to channel funds to underserved communities. These arrangements emphasise trust, governance, and community focus—elements the RBI is now embedding through mandatory disclosures.

In Europe and East Asia, big techs often collaborate with banks—the latter provides low-cost funding while the former contributes towards underwriting models and distribution. The Bank for International Settlements has cautioned that such partnerships disproportionately benefit fintechs unless risk-sharing is properly designed. India's insistence on a 10% retention echoes this learning, ensuring that originators cannot offload risk entirely.

The directions are neither overly liberal nor excessively restrictive. They represent a calibrated attempt to harness the promise of co-lending while putting guardrails around its risks. The framework's success will depend on its execution, particularly regarding whether lenders invest in technology to streamline compliance, whether costs are contained, and whether transparency indeed builds trust with investors and customers.

In the near term, smaller NBFCs may face pain, and credit costs could inch higher. But over the medium term, co-lending could evolve from a niche regulatory experiment into one of India's primary channels of credit delivery, fuelled by banks' balance sheets and NBFCs' last-mile reach. The challenge for all participants will be to avoid viewing the new rules as a compliance burden alone. If treated instead as an opportunity to build transparent, resilient, and scalable lending partnerships, the directions could mark the beginning of a more balanced, and more credible era of joint lending in India.

Co-authored with Aniket Singh Charan and Pragna Garg, associates, Finsec Law Advisors

The silent de-dollarisation

Recent episodes of tariffs, sanctions, and interference of the US in economic decisions of sovereigns would only hasten the shift away from the dollar



MADAN SABNAVIS

Chief economist, Bank of Baroda

US TREASURIES ARE considered the safest foreign asset as the dollar continues to be the main global currency. In fact, the US virtually controls the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) payments system, as all banks get linked to this set-up. When the Ukraine war started, all payments to Russia were blocked by the US which had imposed sanctions on the aggressor. The blow was severe but also a signal to other nations of such possibilities. US treasuries, hence, are still preferred by all central banks, but things have been changing.

The US's infallibility was questioned when the debt ceiling issue emerged on several occasions. These limits were then raised, but the markets have focused on exploring alternatives to the dollar. This is why countries have been diversifying their forex holdings, even as the dollar remains dominant.

A look at the ownership pattern of US treasury securities is interesting. Over the last 10 years or so, the US's total public debt increased from \$18.15 trillion in March 2015 to \$36.21 trillion in March 2025—an increase of almost 100%. The share of foreign holdings, largely those held by various central banks, was as high as 34% in 2015. It has come down to 24.9% in March 2025. This does reveal two things that are reflections of each other. First,

central banks are diversifying their holdings. Second, the US government is less dependent on foreigners for subscribing to its debt, which is compensated for by domestic holdings.

Further, the holdings of the Federal Reserve have come down from 41.4% in March 2015 to 31.8%. This can be explained by the fact that when the Fed went into the quantitative easing mode, the banks tended to sell their treasuries to the Fed for liquidity. As this process eased, the Fed's share tended to move downwards. Mutual funds have increased their treasury holdings—the share has gone up from 6.4% to 12.2%. The support provided by the Fed is still very significant, at almost a little less than a third. This can be contrasted with the Reserve Bank of India's holding of central government debt—12.13%. Clearly, the US government's dependency on the central bank is greater.

The same also gets reflected when the share of currencies in overall forex reserves at the global level is considered. Between 2016 and 2025, International Monetary Fund data shows, the dollar's share has come down from 65.5% to 57.7%. In contrast, there has been an increase for other currencies like the euro (19.6% to 20.1%), pound sterling (4.7% to 5.2%), yen (3.7% to 5.1%), and renminbi (from virtually nil to 2.1%). Such diversification is also the result of the gradual change in the balance of power across the world economy. While the dollar is still dominant, countries are investing in other hard currencies. The euro will continue to be the second most dominant currency as all member countries hold their forex assets in this form. It will get progressively popular as its acceptability has been growing, given the orderly management of the economy since the 2011 euro crisis.

It has also been observed that central banks have been increasing their gold holdings as part of their forex reserves over time. World Gold Council data for June 2015-June 2025 shows some interesting patterns. All big economies have increased the share of gold in forex reserves. Covid-19 was the turning point, followed by the Russia-Ukraine war, leading to sanctions being imposed by the US. With the tariff issue causing further uncertainty, gold becomes the natural safe haven.

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Gold share in forex reserves rose from 5.9% to 13.1% for India, from 1.7% to 6.7% for China, 8.3% to 16.6% for the UK, 10.1% to 19.4% for South Africa, and 6.3% to 13.2% for Australia. In a way, there is a case to believe that countries are de-risking their interests from the idiosyncratic policies followed in the US. Even developed countries like Germany, Italy, and France have increased their share of gold holdings by over 10 percentage points during this period. It is not surprising that the price of gold has received an impetus due to this demand factor.

The recent episodes of tariffs, sanctions, and interference of the US in economic decisions of sovereigns would only hasten this shift away from the dollar. The world has already started moving towards more free trade agreements as well as economic blocs that the US is opposed to. As these agreements become stronger and wider in terms of coverage of nations, it is natural that the currencies used will tend to change. The payments systems will also see the rise of alternative channels to SWIFT. The lesson is that the US needs to be more flexible in taking on the role of the anchor nation and currency vis-à-vis developing and maintaining the global economic order.

Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Don't put all trade eggs in one basket

India can no longer bet its fortunes on a single market. The way forward is to be agile in the short term, and resilient enough for the long haul. We can tilt towards the Association of South East Asian Nations, Africa, West Asia, and the European Union, where demand is steady and tariffs are low. Mini-deals, sectoral pacts, and digital trade accords can open quick pathways.

Exporters could then reposition from price competition to value niches in pharma, textiles, information technology-enabled services, etc. Structurally, we can expand the export base with design-led manufacturing, green tech, and digital products. Export hubs with ready infrastructure and smoother logistics must be the norm. Tariffs will rise and fall, but if we switch to an adaptive export strategy, we can weather this storm.

—Narayanan, Navi Mumbai

Indo-US ties in a multi-polar world

Apropos of "Thaw in Indo-US ties?" (FE, September 9), Donald Trump's U-turn was expected sooner or later. But his aides' (like Howard Lutnick) comments renege on India's reasons to trust the US. One thing that can be said for sure is that Trump and the US have realised they cannot take India for granted. India has stood its ground firmly so far and we should not allow

our farmers' interests to be compromised at any cost. The trade deal with the US should happen and it will happen, but on mutual terms. While dealing with Trump, caution should be the name of the game. It is possible to have a stable Indo-China relationship along with a strategic Indian-American partnership in a true multipolar world.

—Bal Govind, Noida

Write to us at letters@expressindia.com

US, Don't Aim HIRE & Shoot US in the Foot

Outsourcing tax will especially affect the Valley

Last week, Republican senator from Ohio Bernie Moreno introduced the Hiring Incentives to Restore Employment (HIRE) Act in the US senate. It seeks to impose a 25% tax on US companies outsourcing jobs overseas. While the objective seems MAGA-ficent — pushing US firms to hire more Americans — if the bill becomes law, it would be the US shooting the US in the foot. Looney Tunes cartoon-style. Outsourcing has allowed US Inc to retain its competitive advantage, which increases its global employment footprint, including in the US. A tax on outsourcing would push the activity outside US jurisdiction through corporate layering. The process will be aided by rising concerns over immigration into the US. In a scenario where global supply chains are being truncated by near-shoring, loss of economic advantage for the US will certainly benefit other countries.



The US has the world's biggest number of MNCs, drivers of global trade in goods and services. Taxing payments to foreign persons whose work benefits consumers in the US would impact the country's trade balance — not in a good way. Tariffs and taxes are borne by consumers, and instead of raising domestic production, they could lower consumption. The results, as economists from across the globe have pointed out, would be a US recession causing serious damage to the world economy.

Automation is rendering tax policy ineffective against employment outcomes. AI, developed primarily in the US, is expected to lead to widespread job displacement. The early harvest will be among the jobs US companies typically outsource to low-skilled workers abroad. The tax on outsourcing will particularly affect Silicon Valley, which has spread its research infrastructure across the world. AI holds out the promise of higher economic growth, but the picture on employment is unclear. The technology will disperse from the US, where software job losses are routinely making headlines. AI poses the more imminent threat to US jobs than outsourcing. Tax measures, Trump-eters, should accept the new reality.

Making Aadhaar Count Makes Sense

Complying with the Supreme Court's Monday order, EC on Tuesday ruled that Aadhaar will be recognised as one of 12 identity documents for the Bihar SIR exercise. This is a step in the right direction. The top court's order, now extended to all voters, builds on its August 22 directive, which allowed voters excluded from the draft rolls to apply online using Aadhaar, or any of the earlier 11 EC-recognised documents. True, the top court's recent order came after the SIR exercise had concluded, limiting its immediate impact. But it can prove useful if and when SIR is conducted nationwide. EC starts a 2-day conference for chief electoral officers today to assess preparedness for rolling out a nationwide SIR. This will also be helpful to familiarise authorities.

EC's refusal to recognise Aadhaar in the first place was surprising considering it has become the go-to document for citizens and service providers alike. While it's true, as the apex court itself acknowledged, the poll panel's other argument — that it can be forged and, therefore, doesn't merit inclusion — doesn't hold water. Forgery is hardly unique to Aadhaar. Every government-issued document, from ration cards to passports, is vulnerable to misuse. Singling out Aadhaar on this ground alone appears inconsistent, especially when it is already the most widely used and accepted form of ID across public and private services.

EC's core mandate is to enfranchise, not exclude. Every step in cleaning up electoral rolls must serve this purpose. By taking an anti-Aadhaar stand, it had only opened itself up to needless accusations of bias. The more constructive path is to work towards ensuring total Aadhaar-legitimacy, rather than sideline it.



JUST IN JEST

'Awe-dropping!' or 'iWolf!' these iGuys are masters of incrementality

Big, Fat Apple Slices!

By the time you're reading this, a few of you have probably already come back from Apple's Cupertino HQ with your latest haul of iGizmos that have already been hailed as 'iCool'. With Tuesday's launch of the thinnest iPhone to date, Apple Watch series 11 that's one whole number ahead of series 10, and updated AirPods, Apple insists that all this is 'awe-dropping!' And the villagers — sorry, consumers — will get it hook, livestock, and synch-er. So, has the proverbial bird chieved the proverbial 'Wolf!' again? You bet the 0.3 mm shaved off the latest iPhone model, yes. Tim Cook knows how to put lipstick on a pig and call it the Year of the iPig. The crowds at Steve Jobs Theatre in San Francisco gasped. And the rest of the world will gasp seeing — and reading about — them gasping. Not at cool features, but at how Apple still manages to sell déjà vu wrapped in titanium.

Apple's version of crying 'Wolf!' is exclaiming 'Innovation!' every September. And we sprint to the nearest Apple Store like a Pavlov non-wolf. Somewhere not too deep inside, we know the upgrades are incremental. And, yet, we return. Because paying a higher price than last year's iStuff is a ritual. And in this cult of Cupertino, even the thinnest iPhone casts the fattest shadow. Next year, expect the iPhone 18: semi-invisible. After all, who'd want to make it invisible in one go?

SWAMISPEAK When the American public gaze goes public over their president's signature Is it a sign of our Times?

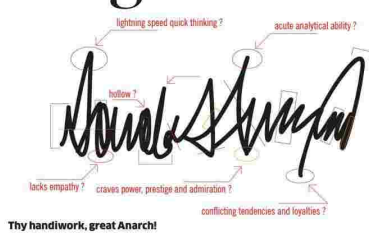


Swaminathan S Anklesaria Aiyar

Only in the US could the main current topic of discussion and giggles be whether the president's signature looks like, well, public hair. Yes, you read that right. With the US House Committee releasing an image with a Trump-signed letter, the US in 2025 is parsing the aesthetics of presidential penmanship as though it were a Rorschach inkblot of democracy.

When The Wall Street Journal runs its monochrome on you, you think you've either made it to Fortune 500 or FBI's watchlist. This time, though, the paper of record for hedgefund interests has decided to moonlight as a graphologist. Its latest allegation, stemming from the 'Epstein Files', isn't about conspiracy cover-ups or clandestine cocktail parties, but about handwriting. Specifically, Donald J Trump's signature looked like a fuzzy gloop.

WSJ has long savaged Trump for not releasing in full the 'Epstein Files', thousands of documents gathered by investigating agencies and submitted under subpoena to US Congress. These include correspondence of Jeffrey Epstein, a top Wall Street financier who passed away in prison in 2019 after being convicted first in 2008 of sexual abuse, and then again in 2019 of sex trafficking. He had many friends in high places, including Trump. WSJ recently claimed to have unearthed a 2013 'Happy Birthday' note from Trump as part of a book with letters from famous personalities presented to Epstein on his birthday. Found and included in the 'Epstein Files', the birthday book has now been released by



Thy handiwork, great Anarch!

US Congress to the public. The note is framed by a hand-drawn silhouette of a naked woman. The note is in the form of a scripted dialogue. Voice over: There must be more to life than having everything. Donald: Yes, there is, but I won't tell you what it is. Jeffrey: Nor will I, since I also know what it is. Donald: We have certain things in common. Jeffrey: Yes, we do, come to think of it. Donald: Enigmas never age, have you noticed that? Jeffrey: As a matter of fact, it was clear to me the last time I saw you. Donald: A pal is a wonderful thing. Happy Birthday — and may every day be another wonderful secret.

What will readers make of this last line? A cheeky understatement? A dig in the ribs from a man who in 2005 had said, 'You can always grab them by the pu*ty' on an Access Hollywood recording, which was leaked to the public in October 2007?

The 2003 note to Jeffrey Epstein is framed by a hand-drawn silhouette of a naked woman and is in the form of a scripted dialogue. Trump's reply to WSJ's first revelation was, 'I never wrote a picture in my

life. I don't draw pictures of women... It's not my language.' Also, internet sleuths quickly uncovered dozens of Trump doodles — including cityscapes, the Empire State Building and even a money tree. Some of these, bearing his signature, had sold for thousands of dollars at auctions. WSJ and others even pointed to his own 2008 book, Trump Never Give Up How I Turned My Biggest Challenges Into Success, where he admitted doodling buildings in his cityscape of skyscrapers for charity.

Never has Trump shown the slightest embarrassment when discovered. He said the woman-shaped note was a fake, and filed a \$30 lawsuit against WSJ. But that may be unsustainable, now that Congress has revealed the contents of the birthday book. Graphologists may have the last say.

This drama has brought new excitement to WSJ. Once accustomed to dissecting interest-rate shifts, it has now become America's go-to for visual lunacy. By injecting Trump's doodles into financial reportage, WSJ has produced headlines so wild they don't need crypto to take off.

Whether this signature is indeed Trump's or a prank, we don't know. But we do know that America's definition of news just expanded. America has always loved turning minor mysteries into televised spectacles. Handwriting analysis has been applied to ransom notes, love letters and even the Declaration of Independence.

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But signatures, like hairstyles, are prone to wildly different interpretation. One person's 'unmistakable Trump' is another's 'my toddler with a crayon after three Red Bulls'. The same squiggle could be viewed as skyscrapers, barbed wire or — if you squint just right — follicles. Like beauty, it lies in the eye of the beholder.

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The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

QUAKE IN NEPAL

Pent-up discontent has pushed country's youth to take to streets. Delhi should keep a close eye on the situation

THE MESSAGE FROM Nepal, where Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli resigned on Tuesday amid the worst unrest in years, is clear: Ignore the youth at your peril. The social media ban by a fossilised leadership out of touch with realities in a young country was a trigger. Nepal's youth were frustrated with crumbling health and education systems, and disillusioned by entrenched corruption and nepotism. That their anger erupted after the ban on 26 platforms, including Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, X, and YouTube, reflects a deeper churn in the Himalayan nation. The government's brutal response, which left at least 19 dead and more than 200 injured, has only fuelled the rage of the youth. Protesters, who defied curfew orders, torched the homes of ministers and senior politicians, including that of the ousted PM.

The "Gen Z" demonstrations should be seen against the backdrop of Nepal's fraught political landscape. As this newspaper reported, almost every senior political leader in the country faces some form of corruption charge. They include Oli and five former prime ministers — Sher Bahadur Deuba, Prachanda, Madhav Nepal, Baburam Bhattarai, and Khil Raj Regmi. The misgovernance has led to nationwide discontent. On social media, terms such as "Nepo Babies" and "Nepo Kids" have been trending, as the lavish lifestyles of political family scions are contrasted with the economic hardships of ordinary citizens, especially the youth, who have faced unemployment and low wages. Inequality, compounded by climate vulnerabilities and natural disasters, has driven many young Nepalis to leave the country. According to a World Bank report, 82 per cent of the workforce remains in informal employment, far above global and regional averages. Meanwhile, power has continued to circulate among the same ageing, colluding leaders through shifting alliances of convenience in what has become a cartelisation of politics. Disenchantment has grown to such an extent that protests, earlier this year, demanded a return to the monarchy, abolished in 2008 after a decade-long civil war. The recycling of political leadership also shines a light on a disturbing reality — the youth lacked a meaningful political channel to voice their grievances. It's no surprise that they took to the streets.

This is not the first time in the recent past that youth-led movements have toppled regimes in India's neighbourhood. Last year in Bangladesh, anti-quota protests snowballed into a full-fledged anti-government uprising that ended Sheikh Hasina's 15-year rule. In Sri Lanka, in 2022, corruption and economic mismanagement that led to soaring inflation and acute food and fuel shortages sparked a revolt that brought down the Rajapaksa family. India should continue to monitor the situation in its neighbourhood and remain vigilant. In the wake of the turmoil in Nepal, New Delhi should keep a close watch on how the political situation in the country unravels. It should be alert to a Bangladesh-like regime change and be ready to safeguard India's interests amid the flux.

THE 12TH DOCUMENT

SC order on Aadhaar being a valid document for inclusion in Bihar's electoral roll is welcome. EC must heed its spirit

THE ELECTION COMMISSION of India's (EC) Form 6, through which citizens apply to have their name included in the Electoral Roll, asks for applicants' Aadhaar details "for the purpose of authentication of entries". The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the voters' list in Bihar excluded arguably the most ubiquitous proof of identity in India from the list of 11 documents for inclusion into the final electoral roll. This discrepancy was not a mere oversight — it symbolised what appeared to be a fundamental shift in one of the country's most important, independent and respected institutions. On Monday, the Supreme Court bench comprising Justices Surya Kant and Jaymal Bagchi ordered that the EC include Aadhaar in the list. The directive has corrected an approach, which, by all accounts, was becoming exclusionary. Moving forward, the EC must respect the spirit of the verdict as much as its letter.

In addition to its independence, the EC's credibility has been built, over decades, on the back of a simple and powerful idea: No citizen — rich or poor, in a high-rise in a big city or in a barely-accessible village in the Himalayas — will be denied the right to vote. In practice, this idea requires a robust process and periodic revisions to ensure accurate electoral rolls, which ensure the inclusion of every citizen and, as a corollary, the exclusion of non-citizens. Unfortunately, in the rushed SIR in Bihar, the focus seemed to be on the corollary rather than the fundamental principle. In the past — for example, before the 2007 Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections — such exercises were conducted through door-to-door verification of voters and over longer periods. The onus of "proving" voters' eligibility was not on the elector but on the EC. The SIR, in effect, sought to reverse that burden. By mandating the inclusion of Aadhaar — a biometrically verified document that arguably forms the basis for India's welfare architecture — the Court has eased that burden, while also making it clear that Aadhaar is not a proof of citizenship, just as many other documents in the list of 11 were not.

It shouldn't have taken a court order for the EC to include the 12th document in Bihar's SIR. As early as July, the SC had suggested that Aadhaar be included in the list of accepted documents for the exercise. The EC has said that the SIR will be conducted across states. With the exception of recent events, the Commission has had few blemishes on its record. Moving forward, it should live up to that record — a judge from the judiciary.

PURULIA TO PALESTINE

Venice Film Festival award for Anupama Roy recognises an artist who has found ways to give expression to silenced voices

EMPHASISING THE NEED to take cinema to the hearts of the common people, Ritwick Ghatak once said, "We need to take mobile vans to villages to exhibit cinema." Decades later, a young woman from a village would reverse the journey — she would carry a story from rural Bengal to Venice, marking a historic moment for Indian cinema. On September 7, Anupama Roy became the first Indian to receive the best director award in the Orizzonti section at the 82nd Venice Film Festival for her debut feature *Songs of Forgotten Trees*. In that moment, she embodied a rarely recognised fact: Some spaces still celebrate films "which are not fitted into the boxes".

Roy's film, a tale of two migrant women in Mumbai — one an aspiring actor and part-time sex worker and the other, a call centre employee looking for a suitable groom — echoes her own journey from Purulia district's Narayanpur village to Mumbai, a city of unfulfilled aspirations. Her lived experience, understanding of the anxieties of migrants, and the complexities of urban lives shaped her storytelling. Coming from a place where "girls are married off early, given rations instead of books in government institutions", with the memory of her friend Jhooma, who was married at 13 under a state scheme, only to be "vanished" thereafter, Roy has stood against such erasure — silencing of these women and their aspirations.

Roy is not selective solidarity. She stood by Palestine on a global stage: "Every child deserves peace, freedom, liberation, and Palestinians are no exception... It's a responsibility at the moment to stand by Palestine." When she was a teenager, her parents would discourage Roy from pursuing her dreams due to the uncertainties associated with the filmmaker's profession. They would ask, "Will you become another Satyajit Ray?" Perhaps, she will. Perhaps not. She has, however, already made her mark as Anupama Roy.



AMITABH MATTOO

NEPALIS ON the boil. A generation is in revolt at home, even as tens of thousands flee abroad every month. Together, the dynamics of street protest and silent exodus signal a crisis not just of governance but of survival. For India, the implications are immediate and profound. What happens in Nepal does not stay in Nepal, it reverberates across an open border, shared rivers and a deep cultural kinship. The question is whether New Delhi can respond with wisdom rather than reflex, learning from history to avoid missteps that could turn sympathy into resentment.

The Gen Z protest that erupted after the government banned 26 social media platforms is unlike anything Nepal has seen. Spread across all 77 district capitals, it has claimed at least 19 lives. Yet, this is not another cycle of palace intrigue or regime change. It is a generational cry for systemic transformation, for governance that is accountable, and constitutional reform that is credible and institutions that inspire trust.

For young Nepalis, the blackout of Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and X was not merely about apps. It was the last straw confirming what they already suspected — that a corrupt, stagnant system is unwilling to listen. If the protests are the loud revolt, migration is the quiet rebellion. More than 4,00,000 departures annually, an average of more than 1,000 a day, hollow out the very demographic that should be building Nepal's future.

Remittances sustain the economy; they are, indeed, the lifeblood of the state. But they also embody a paradox: The absent are financing a system they no longer inhabit or believe in. Those who stay behind challenge the state in the streets. Both stem from the same erosion of trust.

But the roots of this crisis lie even deeper. Nepal's domestic politics has become a source of instability. The resignation of Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli underscores the volatility of Kathmandu's coalition system and the exhaustion of a leadership style built on sharp rhetoric and nationalist posturing. His departure does not resolve Nepal's instability; rather, it deepens uncertainty about succession, shifting alliances and the credibility of political institutions. The major parties — the Nepal

India should appear reassuring to Nepal's protesters, and support governance reform discreetly

An unstable Nepal risks exporting volatility across a porous border. Any collapse of state capacity will be felt in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, in Sikkim and Uttarakhand. The flows of people, ideas and anger are too intimate to be quarantined. India cannot afford complacency. History offers a sobering reminder. In Bangladesh, student protests initially animated by local grievances were quickly refracted through an anti-India lens. Perceptions of overbearing interference by New Delhi turned sympathy into hostility.

Congress, CPN-UML and Maoist Centre — remain consumed by tactical manoeuvres and leadership rivalries rather than structural reform. Pushpa Kamal Dahal continues his balancing act, while Sher Bahadur Deuba searches for relevance. The constitution, hailed in 2015 as a landmark, has yet to deliver stability. Instead, frequent changes of government, blurred lines between governance and patronage and the persistence of corruption have eroded public faith in institutions. For Nepal's Gen Z, this political theatre has lost legitimacy. They see a system more invested in power games than in delivering jobs, justice or dignity. This erosion of credibility explains why the protests cut across geography and class, and why the exodus is accelerating.

When a country loses its youth to martyrdom in protests or to migration abroad it risks undermining its national security foundations. Economic growth falters, political legitimacy withers and social cohesion frays. For Nepal, this convergence of revolt and exodus is existential. For India, it is strategic.

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India must not repeat this mistake in Nepal. Heavy-handed diplomacy, overt political alignment or the temptation to lecture will be counterproductive. Respect for sovereignty coupled with quiet but firm engagement is the wiser path. Bilateral irritants persist. Disputes over cartographic claims, energy cooperation and cross-border infrastructure demand deft handling. For New Delhi, the challenge is to engage without appearing to dictate, to reassure without being patronising.

First, India must first listen to the youth. It must demonstrate that it hears Nepal's young

voices through educational partnerships, cultural exchanges and digital initiatives that give them agency. The symbolism of scholarships and internships may matter as much as hydropower deals. Second, it should support governance reform discreetly. Assistance in digital infrastructure, cyber regulation and institutional strengthening should be framed as partnership, not prescription. Third, it must prepare for political uncertainty. Oli's resignation has left a vacuum that will be filled by shifting alliances. India must keep channels open to all parties, civil society and especially to Nepal's restless youth. Finally, India must demonstrate strategic patience, trusting Nepal's capacity for course correction, while remaining a dependable neighbour.

The Gen Z protests and the youth exodus are two sides of the same coin. Both signal a generation unwilling to accept the status quo. Whether they remain in Nepal or depart, their message is unmistakable: Legitimacy must be earned, not inherited. If Nepal's leaders do not hear it, the state itself risks erosion.

For India, the lesson is equally clear. Strategic interests are best served not by tactical manoeuvres but by nurturing trust — among leaders, yes, but above all among the people. The border that unites is too open to allow suspicion to fester. Nepal stands at an inflection point. The largest youth movement in its history and the largest exodus in its history are unfolding simultaneously. Both are protests against a state that has failed to deliver. Both threaten to hollow out the country's future.

India cannot dictate Nepal's destiny, but it can choose how it responds. If it acts with wisdom, humility and foresight it can help ensure that Nepal's transformation is peaceful, democratic and enduring. If it miscalculates, forgetting the lessons of Bangladesh, it risks turning goodwill into grievance.

The stakes are stark: A neighbour either renewed or unravelled. The choice, in part, is India's.

The writer is professor and dean of the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and an honorary professor of International Relations at the University of Melbourne



SRIRAM VEERA

EL MUNDO, A Spanish newspaper, captured the stereotype about Carlos Alcaraz and Janik Sinner shortly after the Spaniard's triumph at the US Open. "[He] reminded us of the most important difference between an artist and an engineer... While Alcaraz's magic flowed wildly, Sinner accumulated all the unforced errors he never makes. Bang, bang, bang. The cyborg was human, and there is no finer human than the Spaniard."

One can understand the inherent temptation to reach out for that trope. Alcaraz has the magical drops and slices, and the mind-boggling talent to make abrupt changes in lines and lengths of his shots. He also seems more human with his gasps of joy and fist-pumps. He drags us into the battle as if we are playing alongside him. Sinner keeps us at a slight distance. Remarkably, it seems he keeps himself too at a distance with his masterful control over his emotions.

A synopsis of their games has got the tennis world to draw this conclusion: Alcaraz, who has been inconsistent in the past, has to play perfect tennis to beat Sinner. Sinner, who has been "predictable" in the past, has to either wait to pounce on Alcaraz's inconsistency or get beyond his comfort zone. Be that as may be, what's the future of this great rivalry?

It's what Sinner and Alcaraz said after the US Open final. Sinner had not only absorbed the defeat, but already knew what he needed to do: "I'm gonna... trying (sic) to do some changes, trying to be a bit more unpredictable

SINCARAZ ERA IS HERE

Self-awareness and a hunger to improve drive Alcaraz and Sinner

as a player and because I think that's what I have to do." Alcaraz too hit the nail on the head: "The consistency of my level during the whole tournament has been really, really high, which I'm really proud of, because it's something that I've been working on..." That self-awareness and deep-rooted desire to do what's needed to improve set these two apart from the rest.

Sometimes back, Sinner's first tutor Riccardo Piatti had distilled the essence of his former student: "A competitive arrogance bordering on ruthlessness" (*Un'arroganza competitiva asettata e cattiva*). Piatti had also introduced a mind coach Riccardo Ceccarelli to Sinner. Ceccarelli helped Sinner build his "mentality monster", bringing decades of science-based mental training methods.

The thing that Ceccarelli aims for and that is seen amply in Sinner is an "economic brain". "What does it mean to have an economic brain? It means that you are not affected too much by emotion, doubt, anxiety, which means overthinking, high consumption, and tension," Ceccarelli said. In a chat with Carole Bouchard's Tennis Sweet Spot, the good doctor talked about one specific exercise of playing table tennis. "They switch off lights, play table tennis against a shooting ball... trying to reach a high level of performance, but with the feedback of how much you activate the body and the brain being in front of you. So you get to learn to be fast and precise, but with the muscle relaxed and the mind free..."

It's not a surprise then that Sinner seems a prototype for a way of playing that people are terming cyborg-ish. "Janik is now a leader of himself, and he knows what he needs. So this is our goal. I want to help you develop a deep self-awareness. You need to know yourself in your strong points and in your weak points, in an honest way, because sometimes we try to hide... We have to focus on finding the weaker points, and the more we find, the better chance we have," Ceccarelli says.

Perhaps that's why Sinner seems to have the ability to bounce back. He has been constantly improving his game from serve to forehand. Just check the whip he unleashes on that forehand for starters: The racket actually faces behind before he whips up and over to pummel that ball.

Or, check Alcaraz's tweaked backhand that Andre Agassi gushed over a few months ago. He yanks the racket back with a straight right arm, and after an almost unnatural pause, rams it in the dot. Agassi had talked about its effect on the opponents: "They don't know if he's going to hold, pull it across..." he said.

Sincaraz, as the tennis world calls them now, sweat and these nuances and are constantly updating themselves. One might show his emotion on court, the other might seem cold and calculating, but that's just their on-court personalities. In the end, both care — and that's the most human trait out there.

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SEPTEMBER 10, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

CONGRESS IN PUNJAB

THE PRIME MINISTER, Rajiv Gandhi, asserted that the Congress (I) was fighting the Punjab elections seriously, would come back to power and provide an effective government to the state. It had put up candidates stronger than those of other parties, he said. Talking to a group of editors, Gandhi said that the complaint that the party had put up weaker candidates was from a group of senior party men but Congress would be stronger in the field without them.

THAI TURMOIL

THAI TROOPS CRUSHED a coup attempt

masterminded by a disgruntled former Army Colonel after a 10-hour confrontation in which authorities said four people were killed and 59 wounded. Among the dead were two Western journalists caught in a hail of gunfire in the centre of Bangkok from tanks manned by rebels. The dawn putsch, involving up to 500 rebels who commandeered 22 tanks, collapsed after the government issued a "surrender or die" ultimatum.

BOEING'S OFFER

IN A BID to stay in the race for the sale of new aircraft to the Indian Airlines, the Boeing company has come up with an al-

ternative "time-bound" offer. The new offer, made just before the IA board in New Delhi to discuss and take a decision on the selection of new aircraft for the airline, is for the sale of the 140-seater Boeing 737-300 jetliner at a cost of about \$25 million apiece.

IRAN-IRAQ WAR

IRAQ SAID THAT its forces had crushed an Iranian offensive in the northern sector of the Gulf war zone, killing thousands of Iranian soldiers. A statement read over Baghdad Television by a military spokesman said: "We have crushed the Iranian offensive in the northern sector after a day-long battle."

THE IDEAS PAGE

Who wants to live forever?

Slowing ageing and extending lifespans could transform societies, producing older but more active populations. Social consequences of longevity research could be profound



RAJA MANDALA
BY C RAJA MOHAN

THE GEOPOLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE of the Tianjin summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Beijing military parade will be debated for some time. But a brief exchange between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping may turn out to be far more consequential. For it pointed to the fascinating idea of transhumanism.

During a live broadcast of the parade commemorating the 80th anniversary of Japan's surrender in World War II, Putin and Xi were overheard talking about the possibility of extending human lifespans. Putin said: "Biotechnology is continuously developing. Human organs can be continuously transplanted. The longer you live, the younger you become, and you can even achieve immortality," Xi replied: "Some predict that in this century, humans may live to 150 years old."

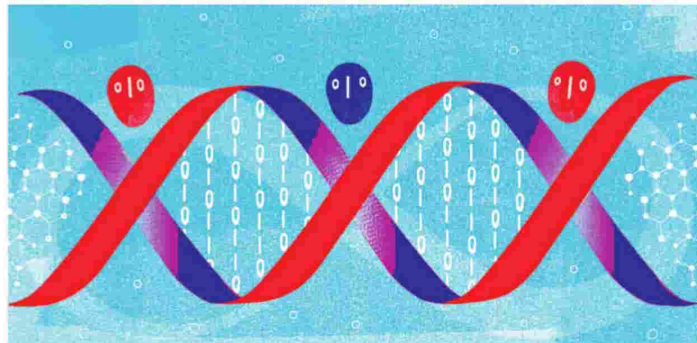
Later, Putin confirmed to reporters that he and Xi had been reflecting on biotechnology. "Modern means of health improvement, medical means, even surgical ones related to organ replacement, allow humanity to hope that active life will continue differently than it does today." Immortality has long been a quest of human beings. All mythologies record this temptation in different ways. But the goal is recognised as elusive and that mortality is very much part of life on earth. Immortality is certainly not round the corner, despite significant advances in science and technology. But extending life to longer periods, the transhumanists think, is within reach.

That two of the world's most entrenched rulers are interested in living longer is hardly surprising. Putin has been in power for a quarter of a century, and under current constitutional arrangements, can remain president of Russia until 2036. Xi, who took over as China's supreme leader in 2012, has already removed the term limits that constrained his predecessors. Both leaders are convinced that they are men of destiny. So why not take advantage of science and technology in extending their life and reign?

While Russia and China are investing in anti-ageing research, the greatest flow of capital and brainpower into transhumanist technologies is still in Silicon Valley. If Putin and Xi are intrigued by the prospect of longer lives, the Valley's tech bros are obsessed with it.

According to a report in *The Wall Street Journal* over the weekend, Silicon Valley is pouring billions of dollars into start-ups, research labs, and nonprofits dedicated to longevity. Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, and Peter Thiel are among the most visible champions. Bezos has backed Altos Labs, a biotech company seeking to reprogram cells to reverse ageing. Thiel has invested in multiple anti-ageing ventures and has long argued that "death is a problem to be solved."

Musk, meanwhile, goes beyond anti-ageing to the fusion of human cognition with machines. His Neuralink project is already experimenting with brain-computer interfaces to help paralysed patients regain function; he insists that humanity must "merge



C R Sasikumar

with AI" to remain relevant.

The Valley's billionaires are not alone. Philosophers and scientists have been building the intellectual scaffolding for transhumanism. Oxford's Nick Bostrom has defined it as an effort to transform the human condition through the ethical application of science and technology. Its three pillars are super-longevity (radical extension of life), super-intelligence (cognitive enhancement), and super-well-being (the elimination of suffering and the expansion of human capability). The transhumanists believe that technological progress is at hand to liberate us from biological constraints. They view ageing, disease, and even death not as destiny, but as engineering challenges that can be solved.

The transhumanist agenda rests on rapid progress in the growing convergence of several scientific frontiers.

One of these is genetic engineering and longevity science. Tools like CRISPR have raised hopes of repairing defective DNA, delaying ageing, and rejuvenating organs. In neuroscience, brain-machine interfaces like Neuralink imagine direct communication between brains and computers, restoring lost capacities and eventually amplifying intelligence.

AI-based cognitive enhancement is another such frontier. Outsourcing parts of human thinking to AI systems could radically expand reasoning and memory. The potential of cyborgs and digital consciousness to preserve bodies or "upload" minds into digital systems remains speculative, but is seriously debated in transhumanist circles.

Cybernetics and augmentation tools like prosthetics, exoskeletons, and bionic implants are already advancing rapidly, blurring the line between human and machine. Militaries, unsurprisingly, are among the most interested in building "super-soldiers".

The social consequences of longevity research could be profound. Slowing ageing and extending healthy lifespans could transform societies, producing older but more active populations. With birth rates collapsing across much of the world, such a development could provide an answer to demographic decline. Instead of shrinking workforces and spiralling welfare costs, societies might see citizens productively engaged well into their second century. These technologies also make it possible to imagine journeys into deep space and the "colonisation" of other celestial bodies.

But transhumanist technologies also risk

With birth rates collapsing across much of the world, such a development could provide an answer to demographic decline. Instead of shrinking workforces and spiralling welfare costs, societies might see citizens productively engaged well into their second century. But transhumanist technologies also risk deepening inequality. Access to radical life extension or cognitive enhancement will not be universal. In societies already scarred by disparities of wealth and power, the prospect of a biologically privileged elite — literally living longer and thinking faster — will raise sharp political and ethical questions.

deepening inequality. Access to radical life extension or cognitive enhancement will not be universal. In societies already scarred by disparities of wealth and power, the prospect of a biologically privileged elite — literally living longer and thinking faster — will raise sharp political and ethical questions. Worse still, the deployment of these technologies could lead to a technological dystopia with its temptations for designer babies and eugenics.

Religious traditions condemn the ambition to "play God". Immortality through technology appears mock doctrines that locate eternal life in divine grace. Concepts like "mind-uploading" trash the idea of the human soul. By promising engineered perfection, transhumanism risks eroding what makes us human: Our vulnerability, our limits, even our mortality. For critics, the movement is a secular parody of religion, offering salvation without transcendence.

Beyond this, there is posthumanism — a more radical current that rejects the assumption of human exceptionalism. Posthumanists argue for dissolving the boundaries between humans, animals, machines, and the environment. Where transhumanism seeks to perfect humanity, posthumanism imagines a future beyond it.

Putin and Xi are unlikely to live to 150, let alone achieve immortality. History suggests that political mortality is harder to avoid than the biological one. Political change may preserve whatever biological extensions new technologies promise. Czar Putin and Emperor Xi can't delay forever their deaths in heaven with Peter the Great and Karl Marx. Their fates might be sealed well before science catches up with their ambitions.

But these technologies and debates are here to stay. Even more consequential is the emerging debate on what it means to be human. India's spiritual and philosophical traditions are well equipped to engage with these ethical issues.

To be effective, though, India needs to invest a lot more into the emerging technologies underlying the enterprise of transhumanism. The objective can't be lengthening the lives of one political class or the super-rich but to deploy them for collective good at home and contributing to the global regulation of their safe and ethical use.

The writer is contributing editor on international affairs for *The Indian Express*

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The young folks, or members of Gen Z, are gathering today at Maitighar Mandal in Kathmandu to say 'enough is enough'. They will no more silently tolerate one after another injustice heaped upon them. The government would be foolish to take them lightly."

— THE KATHMANDU POST, NEPAL

The global stage, on our terms

Pact with European Free Trade Association reinforces India's image as a trusted partner



SMRITI IRANI

THE RECENT SIGNING of the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) between India and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) — its comprises Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein — has rightly been hailed as a landmark. It is India's first comprehensive trade agreement with a grouping of developed European economies. The pledge to promote investment of about \$100 billion over 15 years in India and facilitate up to 1 million direct jobs is an unprecedented commitment in a free trade agreement.

TEPA is not just a trade pact, but a strategic statement symbolising India's transformation into a globally integrated, confident nation that places its own priorities at the centre of global cooperation. It shows that India can negotiate on equal terms with advanced economies, securing commitments that prioritise its long-term interests. It reinforces India's image as a trusted partner and also a vote of confidence in India's vision of an Atmanirbhar Bharat and its Make in India strategy.

One of the most immediate benefits from TEPA will be enhanced market access for Indian goods and services. EFTA countries have agreed to eliminate or reduce tariffs on 92.2 per cent of tariff lines, representing 99.6 per cent of India's exports by value and to provide duty-free treatment for all non-agricultural products. For Indian exporters of organic chemicals, textiles, gems and jewellery, and industrial products, this is a new opportunity. For consumers, it promises competitive prices and more choices.

India has secured commitments across 128 sub-sectors from Switzerland, 114 from Norway, 110 from Iceland, and 107 from Liechtenstein. These commitments would benefit India's information technology professionals, business service providers, and skilled workforce, reinforcing India's role as a leading services hub of the world.

However, far beyond the tariff concessions and enhanced market access, TEPA's power lies in enabling strategic and technological collaborations for India, thereby providing access to the wider European market. More importantly, EFTA's advanced capabilities in precision engineering, pharmaceuticals, health sciences, renewable energy, and frontier technologies align with India's needs. With its skilled talent pool, India can not only absorb these technologies but also adapt, scale, and innovate them to meet the demands of its domestic market and beyond.

This synergy comes at a critical moment. India's pledge to achieve Net Zero by 2070 demands a complete reimagining of its energy ecosystem. The target of installing 500 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2030 is ambitious but achievable, provided partnerships are forged to access finance, research, and innovation at scale. TEPA will help by opening avenues for

European green finance, technology partnerships, and capital earmarked for sustainability. For a country balancing the twin challenges of economic development and climate action, this infusion of trust and resources could not be timelier.

India's clean energy march is already impressive. As of July 2025, the country has achieved a total non-fossil fuel energy capacity of nearly 243 GW, including 116 GW of solar, 52 GW of wind, and nearly 50 GW of hydroelectric power. This is 50 per cent of its installed electricity capacity from non-fossil fuel sources, five years ahead of the target under Nationally Determined Contributions to the Paris Agreement. Along with hydro, geothermal energy is finding fresh attention, and green hydrogen is being positioned as the fuel of the future. Yet, the challenge remains of ensuring a stable base-load power source to complement the renewables which work intermittently. This is where nuclear energy presents a compelling solution. Here lies one of India's most significant untapped advantages, its thorium reserves. India holds nearly a quarter of the world's thorium, a fuel that is clean, safe, and abundant. Unlike uranium, thorium does not pose the same risks of proliferation and fits squarely into our future energy security vision.

India's three-stage nuclear programme has long envisioned thorium as its eventual goal, but scaling it up has remained a challenge. This is where TEPA may play a key role and serve as a catalyst.

With the EU's Sustainable Finance Taxonomy classifying certain nuclear activities as aligned to its objectives, India can potentially tap into European funds earmarked for green transitions to support pilot thorium projects. Collaborative research with partners like Norway, which has led in thorium fuel irradiation testing and has a specialised research ecosystem, can accelerate the research and practical rollout of thorium in India's energy mix. By developing thorium energy, India would, in time, secure more stable base-load power and export technology, expertise, and even reactor designs to other nations.

TEPA is, therefore, a template for how India will engage with the world in the years ahead — confidently, strategically, and with a sharp eye on aligning partnerships with domestic aspirations. The tariff cuts and market access will bring immediate relief to exporters and service providers. The binding investment commitments will channel capital into industries that create jobs and expand capacity. The technology transfers and strategic collaborations will strengthen India's march toward Net Zero, while also supporting ongoing nuclear-energy-related innovation.

In an era where trade is increasingly tied to resilience, supply chain diversification, and climate commitments, TEPA is both an economic and diplomatic asset. It is proof that India's economic diplomacy is now assertive, visionary, and aligned with the imperatives of a Viceroy Bharat. By harnessing the strengths of its partners and combining them with the talent of its people, India is setting the stage for an energy-secure, innovation-driven, and climate-resilient future. The road ahead is long, but with TEPA, India has set a new benchmark for what future global partnerships must aspire to achieve.

The writer is a former Union Minister



YASHOVARDHAN JHA AZAD AND RISHAV RANJAN

THERE ARE MANY issues the authors of the Indian Constitution did not deliberate upon for the simple reason that they could never conceive of situations where bills would lie in the President's or Governors' offices without reason, or jailed chief ministers or prime ministers would run governments from prison. Those early decades saw Lal Bahadur Shastri resign over a railway accident, taking moral responsibility, and there was no question of a minister remaining in his post after being arrested.

As a former police officer, I consider the prospect of arresting a sitting chief minister daunting. There are sanction requirements under the Prevention of Corruption Act, prior approval under the Code of Criminal Procedure, and legislative privilege if a session is in progress. These are not shields of defence, but checks rooted in the spirit of the Constitution — an arrest of a person carrying the people's mandate must never be casual. The Constitution (One Hundred and Thirtieth Amendment) Bill, 2025 raises concerns at three levels: It unsettles the Constitution's basic structure, it ignores judicial precedents, and it weakens the collegial sanctity of the council of ministers.

The Bill provides that a Prime Minister, Chief Minister or minister who remains in custody for 30 consecutive days on charges carrying a punishment of five years or more, must be removed. The President or Governor is

A double failure

Bill on removal of ministers charged with crimes is bad law, liable to be misused

bound to act on the advice of the head of government, and if no advice is given, the office falls vacant automatically. Reappointment is technically allowed once custody ends.

Legislators are disqualified under the Representation of the People Act, but only after conviction. The Bill lowers that threshold to pre-trial detention. As observed with several Prevention of Money Laundering Act cases, bail is constrained by the notorious twin test under Section 45. Custody is then extended by repeated supplementary prosecution complaints filed by the Enforcement Directorate, which delays the trial indefinitely. A 30-day custody trigger under the Prevention of Corruption Act, prior approval under the Code of Criminal Procedure, and legislative privilege if a session is in progress. These are not shields of defence, but checks rooted in the spirit of the Constitution — an arrest of a person carrying the people's mandate must never be casual. The Constitution (One Hundred and Thirtieth Amendment) Bill, 2025 raises concerns at three levels: It unsettles the Constitution's basic structure, it ignores judicial precedents, and it weakens the collegial sanctity of the council of ministers.

The Bill provides that a Prime Minister, Chief Minister or minister who remains in custody for 30 consecutive days on charges carrying a punishment of five years or more, must be removed. The President or Governor is

damaged in public perception.

The Bill centres power since only the PM or CM may advise removal. The collegial sanctity of the council of ministers is reduced to the discretion of one. The concern is not technical; it is constitutional. Concentration of such authority undermines the balance the framers envisaged.

A judicial review of the President's or the Governor's order for the removal of ministers is available. In *S.R. Bommai* (1994), SC held that while the advice of the PM to the President or CM to the Governor cannot be examined, the factual basis of action taken can be tested. Courts may therefore look at whether the 30-day custody condition was lawfully met. But that is little consolation. By the time courts decide, the elected leader is already removed and the people's choice set aside.

In *A.R. Antulay* (1988), the Court struck down procedural shortcuts that bypassed the rights of an accused under Article 21. Removal on the basis of custody alone, without judicially tested thresholds such as framing of charges or conviction, is a constitutional shortcut.

The Bill thus weakens the basic structure of the Constitution. It shifts the decisive power from Parliament and courts to the unelected executive. This erodes parliamentary democracy and the rule of law and affects a dilution of judicial review, all of which the SC has protected as part of

the Basic Structure.

The Joint Parliamentary Committee must now decide. If accountability is the goal, the remedy should be tied to judicial precedents, not to the power of an investigative agency. Without such safeguards, the amendment risks making equality before law a mask for executive overreach.

There is a dilemma before the nation. The Bill *prima facie* satisfies the concern that those in jail cannot be allowed to govern. After all, government officers under judicial or police custody for more than 48 hours face suspension. So should the Bill be scrapped only because of the dangers of misuse? The biggest challenge against the Bill and ED is that they are active against Opposition politicians, sparing those from the ruling party. If cases are mounted against the Opposition, and with bail conditions being stringent, it's quite possible that the threshold of 30 days will be crossed in most cases. But this Bill fails on both counts — not only is it liable to be misused given the precedent, but it is also bad in law. As the largest democracy, we cannot afford to have such an enactment.

Azad, former IPS officer, served as Central Information Commissioner, Secretary Security, COI and Special Director, Intelligence Bureau. Ranjan is an advocate at the Supreme Court

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

GEN Z REVOLT

THIS REFERS TO the report, "19 killed in Gen Z protests against Nepal social media ban, corruption" (IE, September 9). The protests in Nepal left Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli with no option but to resign. By firing bullets at students protesting the nationwide social media ban, the government sealed its fate. Social media platforms are central to political debate in Nepal. The disillusionment with the government over corruption, censorship, inequality, and lack of transparency and economic opportunities spilled over into the streets and escalated into clashes with the police. The government should have observed restraint.

David Milton, Marathwada

RAY OF HOPE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Set a higher bar" (IE, September 9). India's victory as hockey champions in Asia has ignited hope. Eight Olympic gold medals in hockey is a rare feat. But it is distressing that since the Moscow Olympic Games four decades ago, India has not won a medal. The Olympic gold medal has been out of reach for India. In this context, the Asia Cup laurel is a morale-booster for the team.

Jiji Panicker K, Chengannur

SCOUT NEW MARKETS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Trade must go on" (IE, September 9). The tariff issue has taught India to expand its trade horizon beyond American soil. Asia and the EU offer more markets for the consumption of Indian products than the US market. Even if the US rolls back its tariff reduction, India should not slacken its efforts to scout new markets. India has a trade deficit with many countries — the time has come to augment exports to these countries through free trade agreements or preferential trade agreements. This is needed for India to become a manufacturing hub. Tariffs have only expedited the efforts in this direction.

Devendra Awasthi, Lucknow

WELCOME MOVE

THIS REFERS TO the article, "A nudge to business" (IE, September 9). The simplification of GST is a welcome change. With fewer slabs and less confusion, compliance will be easier for businesses and consumers. Reforming the GST in this way, after four decades, is a transparent and predictable taxation process, which helps build trust and promote economic growth. The reform is a practical step towards the true ease of doing business.

Vaibhav Kishor, Ludhiana

EXPLAINED GLOBAL

WHY FRANCE'S GOVERNMENT HAS COLLAPSED, WHAT COMES NEXT

FRENCH PRIME Minister François Bayrou handed in his resignation on Tuesday, a day after losing a confidence vote that plunged the country into a fresh political crisis.

President Emmanuel Macron has said he will appoint a new Prime Minister in the coming days, who would have to form a new government.

Bayrou, 74, was ousted after his minority government called for 644 billion of budget cuts to tackle France's mounting public debt. He was the fourth Prime Minister in two years under Macron, whose second term in office has been dogged by political instability.

What triggered political instability?

The roots of the political crisis in France go back to June 2024, when Macron took a gamble and called snap parliamentary elections just two years after he was re-elected.

Macron made the decision following a bruising loss of his Renaissance party in the European Parliament vote, which had taken place earlier that year. The President hoped to achieve "a clear majority in serenity and harmony".

However, the elections resulted in a hung, divided Parliament — the National Assembly — split among three groups. The left alliance, which won the most seats, fell far short of a majority. The far-right National Rally got the most votes, but did not have a majority. Macron's centrist coalition lost seats, but it was a significant third bloc.

This situation has made it difficult for any Prime Minister to garner the necessary support to pass Bills and the yearly budget. Michel Barnier, who was appointed Prime Minister last September, lasted only three months until he was ousted over the budget.

Bayrou has suffered the same fate. He had to resign just under nine months after he came to office last December. Bayrou had argued that France's debt crisis could be tackled only by slashing government spending.

Why is France in a debt crisis?

For decades, France's government has spent more money than it has generated. This has forced the country to borrow to cover its budget.

In early 2025, the government said that its public debt stood at €3,345 billion, or 114% of the country's GDP. This is third only to "the highest public debt



French Prime Minister François Bayrou resigned on Tuesday. AP

in the eurozone after Greece and Italy, and equivalent to almost €50,000 per French citizen, according to a report by the BBC.

The budget deficit last year was 5.8% of GDP, while the corresponding figure is likely 5.4% for this year. France also has an ageing population, with fewer workers being taxed and more citizens drawing the state pension, which has resulted in massive public spending.

That is why Bayrou wanted to slash the deficit by redefining generous social programmes, including state pensions. On Monday, he said that France was on "life support" and addicted to spending.

However, attempts to curtail social benefits have been politically difficult in France, as has been made clear by conflicts in 2023 over Macron's decision to raise the retirement age to 64 from 62.

What happens now?

Although Macron has said that he will soon appoint a new Prime Minister, it will be a difficult task for him to find a name sufficiently unobjectionable to at least some of the parliamentary opposition. The President took a week to find the last two Prime Ministers — Barnier and Bayrou — and choosing the third will not be any easier.

Bayrou is expected to continue as caretaker till the time the next Prime Minister is appointed.

There has also been a demand for early parliamentary elections, especially from Marine Le Pen's National Rally. However, there is a strong opinion that a new vote would be unlikely to change much.

Far-left parties have called for Macron's resignation, but he has rejected the idea.

ANAGHA JAYAKUMAR

EXPLAINED GLOBAL

Why is Kathmandu burning?

A day after 19 young protesters were killed in firing by police in Kathmandu, Nepal's capital was engulfed in flames, and the country appeared to have no government left. PM KP Sharma Oli resigned, and President Ram Chandra Poudel was at an undisclosed location under the protection of the Army



An aerial view of smoke rising from the Federal Parliament of Nepal, in Kathmandu, after it was set on fire during anti-government protests on Tuesday. PTI

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE

NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 9

'Gen Z' protesters, enraged by the repressive actions of the KP Sharma Oli regime, set fire to government buildings, offices of major political parties, and the homes and offices of top political functionaries, including several former Prime Ministers on Tuesday.

Several Ministers and politicians were attacked and injured by protesters who defied a curfew and roamed the streets of Kathmandu and some other cities in Nepal. Military helicopters rescued members of the Oli cabinet and most others who were targeted.

Who are the protesters on the streets of Nepal's capital, and why are they angry?

A couple of months ago, some Facebook pages, including one called Next Generation Nepal, began to post on the grim political situation in Nepal and the massive corruption in high places.

No specific individuals appeared to be promoting the posts, but it was clear that most of them belonged to a generation that was born between 1995 and 2012, the cohort known as "Generation Z", or "Gen Z".

The young people, teens and those in their 20s, expressed their anger and frustration at the corrupt political system — and the immunity that politicians who have run Nepal by turns since the republic was created in 2008, have given themselves from investigation or accountability.

The criticism especially targeted the extravagant lifestyles of the children and wards of senior politicians, and expressions like 'Nepo Babies' and 'Nepo Kids' trended online.

A couple of weeks ago, the government banned 26 social media platforms, including prominent ones like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, X, and YouTube, for failing to register with the authorities by a certain deadline.

The digital ban took away the primary avenue that Gen Z was using to vent, comment, and seek solidarity among themselves, and greatly aggravated their anger.

The frustration boiled over on Monday, when large numbers of young people came out on the streets, and 19 were killed after police and security forces opened fire.

The protesters did not put forth any specific demands other than the lifting of the

POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN NEPAL

KP Sharma Oli became PM on July 15, 2024, and resigned on Tuesday. Nepal has had 14 governments since 2008, not one of which has completed a full five-year term.

UNTIL 1951, Nepal was ruled by monarchs from various dynasties, including the Ranas, who had a system of hereditary PMs. The Ranas were ousted in 1951, and a parliamentary democracy was established.

IN 1961, King Mahendra banned political parties and returned to a centralised system of government known as "Panchayat", which consolidated his power.

IN 1990, some parties launched a campaign, popularly known as the "People's Movement", to restore multi-party democracy. King Birendra lifted the ban on political parties and ended the "Panchayat" system.

ban on social media, which was fulfilled on Monday evening. In more general terms, they sought an end to corruption, social inequality, and the lack of job opportunities.

Whose houses were attacked on Tuesday?

The protesters had planned a rally near Parliament House, but the excessive use of force by the government on Monday provoked an explosion of fury. Protesters, some of whom were seen carrying weapons, went on the rampage against prominent political figures and buildings and symbols of government.

They burnt or vandalised the residences of at least five former PMs — Oli, Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', Madhav Kumar Nepal, Jhala Nath Khanal, and Sher Bahadur Deuba. Some of them were roughed up before they could be rescued by the Army.

Rajyalaxmi Chitrakar, the wife of former PM Khanal, died after suffering serious burns when their house in Kathmandu was torched. Deuba and his wife Arzu Deuba, who is Nepal's minister for foreign affairs, were assaulted, and the former PM sustained serious injuries.

Finance Minister Bishnu Prasad Paudel and Member of Parliament Eknath Dhakal

— both of whom are close to Oli — were stripped and paraded.

Arzu Deuba's house in western Nepal's Dhangarhi, and Prachanda's residence in Chitwan were razed to the ground.

The protesters also set ablaze Nakkhu Central Jail in Lalitpur in the Kathmandu Valley and set free Rabi Lamichhane, chief of the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) and a powerful critic of Oli, who was imprisoned there.

With the government having resigned, who is in charge in Nepal now?

No clear way forward was visible on Tuesday. There were demands for the dissolution of Parliament. The unprecedented situation pointed to a further deepening of constitutional crisis and potentially, the collapse of the current system and the constitution.

Army Chief General Ashok Raj Sigdel has appealed for calm and is believed to have urged politicians including Kathmandu Mayor Balen Shah to move forward towards national reconciliation.

Could the Army step in to play a significant political role?

Nepal's Army said it would take charge of

security operations from Tuesday evening, and appealed to the public to cooperate with the forces.

It is unlikely that the Army will step into a direct political role. However, it will probably have to take the responsibility of facilitating dialogues among the political players, along with maintaining peace and tranquillity in the absence of the government.

Where does the political opposition in Nepal stand in this crisis?

The protesters have targeted almost all senior political leaders in the country.

Balen Shah, a former rapper in his 30s, and RSP leader Lamichhane, a former television anchor, have expressed support for the Gen Z protesters. The pro-monarchy Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) is considering resigning from parliament en masse.

Does the former King of Nepal figure anywhere in the present situation?

The former King, Gyanendra Shah, has sent a message of commiseration to the families who have lost one or more members in the violence, and he has wished a speedy recovery to those who have been injured.

He has also issued an urgent appeal to all sides to sit together and find a solution to the crisis, which suggests that he may be willing to play a role similar to the one envisaged for the monarch by the country's pre-republic constitution.

It is likely that an interim government will be formed after a decision is reached on the political agenda.

How is India looking at this situation?

India will be deeply concerned as its next-door neighbour burns. But it will find itself facing a delicate situation, as it is seen as being aligned more closely with some sides of Nepal's bloody politics. India lost its traditional goodwill with the monarchy and the Nepali Congress when it led the international initiative to abolish the monarchy, and bring the Maoists to the centrestage of Nepali politics.

Late on Tuesday evening, Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired a meeting of India's Cabinet Committee on Security, which discussed the developments in Nepal.

"The violence in Nepal is heart-rending. The stability, peace and prosperity of Nepal are of utmost importance to us," the PM said.

HOW SCIENTISTS TESTED SHARED SENSE OF COLOURS AMONG HUMANS

AFTER DECADES of brain research, scientists still aren't sure whether most people see the same way, especially when it comes to colours.

They do, however, understand which parts of the brain handle vision. It is even possible to deduce what one is seeing by looking at an MRI scan showing which parts of the brain are lighting up. Researchers would first show a subject in the machine several images, mapping out how their brain responded. Then, they would randomly show one of the images, and based on the brain activity, guess the image.

In new research, Andreas Bartels, a professor of visual neuroscience at the University of Tübingen in Germany, and Michael Bannert, a postdoctoral researcher in Bartels' laboratory, used that technique to find out if most humans have a shared sense of colours.

Fifteen people were placed in an MRI machine and shown expanding concentric



PAPER CLIP

NEW RESEARCH

ric rings that were red, green or yellow. They calculated an average colour-induced response in the brain. This response was then used to reliably predict the colour and brightness of what the 15th person was looking at.

The researchers reported their findings in a paper published Monday in *The Journal of Neuroscience*. They indicate that colour experience is very similar for different people.

And yet, people definitely do not always see colour the same way. Remember "The Dress"? A decade ago, millions of people globally experienced the vagaries of human vision when looking at the photograph. The neurons in everyone's retina would have sent roughly similar visual signals to the brain, but their brains interpreted the signals very differently. "Colours are not just a physical property," Bartels said. "Colour perception always includes a calculation by the brain about the illumination." **THE NYT**

Bhupen Hazarika at 100: Why 'the voice of Assam' continues to resonate

SUANSHU KHURANA

NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 9

ASSAM HAS begun its year-long birth centenary celebrations of poet, singer, composer and filmmaker Bhupen Hazarika, who was born on September 8, 1926. In a tribute to the legendary artist in *The Indian Express*, Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrote, "More than just a voice, he was the heartbeat of the people. Generations have grown up listening to his songs, each word resonating with themes of kindness, social justice, unity and deep-rooted belonging."

For Hazarika, who passed away in 2011, the Brahmaputra river remained an enduring metaphor. So much so that his name has often been equated with the river, next to which he grew up, lived, and died.

Early life and musical learning

Born in unified Assam in 1926 in Sadiya,

a village next to the Brahmaputra's deepest point, Hazarika was the eldest of 10 children. His grandfather established a school at Sibasagar. His father, Neelkantha Hazarika, began by teaching at this school before moving to Cotton College in Guwahati.

Hazarika often credited his understanding of music to his mother's lullabies and the tribal music of Assam that he grew up around. In fact, one can spot the touches of the lullabies in his film, the Dimple Kapadia-starrer *Rudali* (1993).

Hazarika's talent was spotted when, as a 10-year-old student of Tezpur Government School, he sang at a public event. In the audience were poet, playwright, and founder of Assamese cinema Jyotiprasad Agarwala, and composer, writer and political activist Bishnu Prasad Rabha.

After this, from 1936 to 1940, he accompanied Agarwala on his trips to Kolkata, where he recorded a couple of songs, one of them being in Agarwala's film *Indramalati*

(1939). He also learned music from Rabha.

After school, Hazarika studied political science at Banaras Hindu University, where he was fascinated by the shehnai of Ustad Bismillah Khan and would often visit him to understand the nuances of Hindustani classical music. In 1948, after working briefly with All India Radio, he got a scholarship and went to do a PhD in Mass Communication from Columbia University in New York.

Music as social conscience

Both Agarwala and Rabha were active participants in the Independence struggle against the British. Agarwala also introduced Hazarika to the political writing and satire of Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw. While at BHU, Hazarika knew former PM Chandra Shekhar well and attended many political meetings with him. He felt that there was political indifference towards

the Northeast and the cultural richness of his region was ignored. He also understood caste better, and wanted to fight against it when he couldn't marry an upper-class Brahmin woman.

While in the United States, Hazarika was deeply influenced by American folk music as a tool of protest and resistance. After returning from the US, Hazarika joined the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA).

Hazarika and the ULFA

In the turbulent early 1980s, when there was an uprising against illegal immigration and a fear of cultural erasure in Assam, Hazarika's songs, originally written against the system, became popular.

The Assam Accord of 1985 led to some peace. When the ULFA was founded with Paresh Barua as its commander-in-chief, it had the support of many, but the contin-

ued violence led to disillusionment among people.

At an event marking 50 years of AIR Guwahati in 1998, Hazarika as chief guest spoke of peace, following which he received a phone call from Barua, who is reported to have told him that he also wanted peace. Hazarika even offered to be the mediator between the Union government and ULFA.

"I used to do many road shows before — one-man shows from village to village. During those shows, I have met many angry young men who have said to me, 'Dada gaana chhod do our gun lo lo.' (Leave your song and pick up the gun). I told them that my gaan (song) is my gun," he said in an interview with *The Rediff*.

An expansive career

Hazarika composed extensively for Bengali films from West Bengal as well as Bangladesh. He met filmmaker Kalpana Lajmi in the 1970s and composed the score

for her first film *Ek Pal* (1986), followed by *Rudali* (1993) and *Daman* (2001). The two developed a very close personal and professional relationship that lasted until Hazarika's death in 2011.

In his long career, Hazarika wrote and composed over 1,500 songs, made 14 films, scored music for about 70, edited magazines (*Amor Pratidindi* and *Pratidinew*), authored books and won numerous awards, including the Dadasaheb Phalke for his lifetime contribution towards Indian cinema and the Padma Bhushan. He also headed several organisations, including the Sangeet Natak Akademi and Assam Sahitya Sabha.

In 2010, the Bangladesh government announced its highest civilian honour for Hazarika.

Hazarika also had a short political career. He fought independently and was an MLA from 1967-72. He joined the BJP and also contested the Lok Sabha election from Guwahati. However, he lost to Congress's Kirip Chaliha.



In Manipur, trust eludes peace process

Efforts towards peace and normalcy in Manipur have, yet again, encountered obstacles. Two recent developments were dubbed as signals of progress in the strife-torn state – the renegotiation and signing of a tripartite agreement with two Kuki-Zo insurgent groups and the state government on the Suspension of Operations (SoO) with rebel groups, and an assurance from the Kuki-Zo Council to facilitate free movement of commuters and goods on NH 02. These moves unravelled within hours of their announcement, as the Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), which claims to represent the Meiteis, stated that the revival of the SoO would legitimise the violence it said was being perpetrated by Kuki groups. It also noted that the Manipur administration lacked the constitutional and moral authority to negotiate the pact. An influential Kuki-Zo group also rejected the agreement to ensure free mobility on the highway and warned against more “unilateral decisions”. The United Naga Council, meanwhile, has announced a trade embargo from Tuesday to protest the fencing of the India-Myanmar border and the scrapping of the free movement regime on NH 02.

Former Chief Minister N Biren Singh had unilaterally terminated the SoO, aggravating the situation in the state. The decision further confirmed Singh's image as a leader who is partial to his own Meitei community in its longstanding conflict with the Kukis. The blockade of the highway had partitioned Manipur between the valley, which is dominated by the Meiteis, and the hill areas where the Kukis have the upper hand. Its reopening could have enabled free movement of people and goods between the two parts of the state, which now exist like two regions on either side of a border.

The SoO renegotiation and the reopening of the highway appear to have been initiated as part of a run-up to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's scheduled visit to the state. That these moves were rejected by some of the groups shows that not all stakeholders were involved in the discussions. The situation in Manipur is complex, and any effort towards resolution needs to be built on wide-ranging consultation, involving all relevant parties. With a serious trust deficit in play between the administration and the warring groups, this process becomes long-drawn and difficult. Dialogue becomes even more complex under the Central rule. The state Chief Secretary has said that “all signed agreements will be honoured.” If that means imposition of the agreements, it would not make a difference on the ground and might even exacerbate the situation.

Consensus is key. Moves such as the SoO renegotiation have not found all-round support

Staunch alignment with the US has made India appear neither realist nor idealist on the global stage

JAGDISH RATTANANI

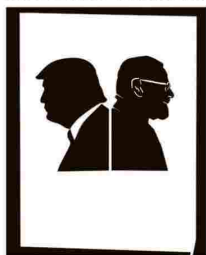
It is not uncommon to hear that foreign policy is about national interests, not moral principles. Looking at the way Donald Trump has upended carefully nurtured global agreements – from trade to climate change – it should be clear that short-termism, defined in the narrowest possible way, is the staple of American foreign policy today. While Trump is blatant and often unsophisticated, the policy is not necessarily out of sync with American traditions. Nothing makes this clearer than former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's remark (attributed to him by the Nixon era diplomat Alexander Haig, who said he heard it) in the 1970s: “America has no permanent friends or permanent enemies, only interests.”

Other administrations might speak in a different tone, but the effect of their actions has been no different. Consider Barack Obama, Nobel Peace Prize winner, who killed more people in drone attacks on Afghanistan than any other President firing from military drones. In his defining 1939 book on international relations (*The Twenty Years Crisis: 1919-1939*), E H Carr spoke of the political necessity of “cloaking interests in a guise of moral principles” – a century-old observation that remains an enduring insight into the operational realities of American foreign policy.

In today's context, given the suddenness of the removal of the cloak and the nakedness of American policy, the question is: how does India respond? It is a positive sign that India has not caved in to American demands. These are demands that the nation cannot and must not meet, notably in terms of removing controls on agro and dairy imports, which the US has been pushing for a long time. The import of Russian crude by India has been on the list of the grouses; it serves America to push India to open its markets even more. Now that India does not bend, and was

hit with a 50% tariff – among the worst treatments of all nations – what are the lessons that stand out? Given the new and nasty threats emerging from the US that IT and other services will soon face tariffs, the question is urgent.

Further, as India takes on an important counterbalancing effort and works on newer alliances and revisits partnerships, related questions on how the country manages the tightrope become even more important. The most significant event was the very visible participation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the 25th Heads of State Council meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) at Tianjin. Pictured with the Chinese Premier



Xi Jinping and the Russian President Vladimir Putin, did not India send out an important message to the US? Did not the US President react immediately, blowing hot and cold? First, he complained that India and Russia were lost to China, and then stressed a special relationship between the US and India, welcomed immediately by Modi. But as Shashi Tharoor quite correctly asks: Can India forget Trump's insults and the tariffs?

Learnings and losses

That India stands punished despite all the coysing up to Trump should make it clear that overzealousness is never a good ticket and is even counterproductive, particularly if it gets seen as desperation to be included in a given global order. This holds whether the tilt is towards one side or the other. India has already burnt its fingers being

overenthusiastic on one side.

To orchestrate and then overread the significance of events like ‘Namaste Trump’ or ‘Howdy Modi’, to overemphasise what is being called personal chemistry, or to wholeheartedly align with the US, seen for example in the way India abstained from a UN General Assembly resolution in June 2025 calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, have been a double whammy: they did not make India stand on principle – showing up as neither a realist nor an idealist. The losses weigh heavily on the Indian side. Incidentally, the entire SCO bloc of nations voted for the June resolution, which was titled: ‘Protection of civilians and upholding legal and humanitarian obligations’. No one from the BRICS nations, the SCO bloc, or indeed South Asia (other than India) abstained, pointing to a misalignment in Indian orientation vis-à-vis the SCO nations.

The argument from some quarters that India will command global attention and will be courted because it is an economic powerhouse that will soon be the world's third-largest economy carries limited appeal. There is, of course, a high interest in India, but with a sharp focus on how its market can be made available for Western businesses. On exports, India does not have a well-diversified portfolio and is overly dependent on the US, enabling that country to squeeze and threaten as it has.

In all this, it is interesting that India has made use of Gandhi to build on the policy of “strategic autonomy” in response to Trump's actions. An unnamed top government spokesperson has been quoted as explaining, India's reaction to Trump in these words: “We have followed the Gandhian satyagraha model... You hit us, surely it hurts us... but we will not hit back. Nor will we do your bidding or sign on the dotted line.” This has the marks of reaching for a high moral ground, but Gandhian satyagraha will demand much more from India. It will challenge India in aligning with Israel while it bleeds Gaza. And it will raise many other difficult questions that, if followed through, will help India stand erect and tall in a world that still bows to Gandhi.

(The writer is a journalist and faculty member at SPJIMR, Syndicate: The Billion Press)

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

Lessons from the slow seasons

Embracing life's slow cycles teaches us valuable lessons about patience and resilience

VIKRAM V

Living in Riyadh, we've just emerged from the peak of summer, where temperatures soar to nearly 50°C, making outdoor activity nearly impossible. As September arrives, the weather begins to ease, but the real winter arrives only by mid-November. I have lived in the Middle East now for more than fifteen years and by all means should have been acclimatised. Yet, the impatient part of me wonders year after year – why couldn't summer disappear a bit earlier and winter come in a bit sooner?

Then I paused to reflect. Nature doesn't rush. It moves in slow cycles, indifferent to our impatience, yet full

of wisdom for those who observe. The transition from summer to winter doesn't happen overnight; it unfolds gradually, minute by minute, day by day. And in that quiet persistence lies a profound lesson. A number of times we feel a particular moment or a year or even a single day is a drag, yet decades pass in a blink of an eye, and therein lies the amazing paradox of nature.

Often, when we're stuck in difficult phases, we act hastily, trying to force change. If that doesn't happen, we consult an astrologer who suggests a solution which often coincides with a turn in the cycle for the better! But just like the seasons, life too moves in cycles. Few experiences teach you more about life's highs and lows than cycling through mountainous terrain. I was a cyclist and experienced it firsthand. The upwards sloping road is a drag, while the downwards sloping one is a breeze. And this repeats in cycles over a long cycling route, pretty much like the undulations we face in real life. With patience and

equanimity, even the harshest periods pass, giving way to renewal.

Take the amazing case of the giant redwood tree native to California. They are the largest trees in the world and native to groves of the Sierra Nevada mountain range of California. Some of these trees live for more than four thousand years. During a recent visit to a museum in Washington, I stood in awe before the massive trunk of one such tree, which was around three thousand years old. These trees grow slowly over a number of years, reaching majestic heights and growing much slower in width. Contrast that with our desire to double our money in three months. While that may be unrealistic, what is possible is multiplying wealth manyfold – if we have the discipline to wait it out for a long time and resist the urge to tamper with our investments in moments of market volatility anxiety.

Nature teaches us that enduring growth is never rushed. It's cultivated with patience, resilience, and time.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Reverting to ballot papers defies logic

Karnataka's decision to revert to ballot paper instead of EVMs is based on the specious argument that ballot paper is tamper-proof, unlike EVMs. (In polls, trust outweighs method, Sep 9). This argument is misconstrued and apparently stems from the fact that Congress suffered a series of electoral reverses, alleging that electronic voting machines have been tampered with. In fact, EVMs have been subjected to the Supreme Court's scrutiny and certified as tamper-proof, but

Congress suffers from self-induced mistrust. The system of ballot papers is cumbersome, costly, and takes a lot of time to produce results, besides being liable to tampering by strong-arm methods. Ultimately, if Congress loses again, which system will it blame? The whole system depends on integrity. EVMs are well-tested and, resorting to ballot papers is a retrograde step in this electronic age.

HR Bapu Satyanarayana, Mysuru

Nothing wrong

Appropos ‘In polls, trust outweighs method’ (Sep 9), there is nothing wrong with the Karnataka government's decision to use paper ballots for the coming local body elections. Recent revelations about the working of the ECI have raised significant concerns about its integrity, impartiality, and professionalism. Several incidents of EVM tampering have been reported in recent years, and these cannot be dismissed, given that new techniques may render even stand-alone machines susceptible to manipulation. People's trust in the voting process is the foundation of our democracy, and only paper ballots can promote it. Even EVMs are costly to manufacture, maintain, and store. By using recycled paper, we

can limit the environmental impact of paper votes. Booth capturing and vote stuffing are relics of the past, which can be minimised with stricter security and digital oversight. There must be valid reasons why even the most advanced nations rely solely on paper ballots. Let a trial run of paper ballots in the state's smaller local elections retest their effectiveness.

Kamal Laddha, Bengaluru

Do it with dignity

Appropos ‘Mizoram's beggary ban: Reform or denial?’ (Sep 9), Mizoram's ban on public beggary, if executed with care and without harming human dignity, is a welcome decision. The state Cabinet's intent to prohibit public begging should not be merely to give the world an

impression that the state doesn't have poor people, but it should be done with an absolute goodwill to rehabilitate the poorest. Many nations have tried to prevent public beggary but have not succeeded. Beggary exists due to governments' failure to compassionately address people's poverty caused by unemployment, homelessness, and wrong socio-economic policies. Making a law banning public beggary is easier than enforcing it; the solution lies in creating adequate job opportunities, providing education and shelter for the poor and marginalised.

JA Nataraj, Bengaluru

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

SPEAK OUT

Weshouldonlybuy swadeshi goods, why buy foreign items now; especially when GST has been reduced?



Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Union Minister

Those are my principles, and if you don't like them... well, I have others.

Groucho Marx

TO BE PRECISE

TO KEEP YOU POSTED ON HIS HEALTH!



IN PERSPECTIVE

Oli's fall at a digital flashpoint

Gen Z fury engulfs Nepal. Rebuilding trust in democracy will be a formidable challenge

K S TOMAR

Former Nepal Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli seemed to have walked down the same road as Bangladesh's Sheikh Hasina, with strikingly parallel political trajectories now ending in turmoil. What began as simmering resentment among Nepal's Gen Z – angry at rampant corruption, broken promises of post-Covid recovery, and a sudden ban on 26 social media platforms – has exploded into a full-blown street revolt. The violence has claimed more than 22 lives. Mobs torched the houses of the outgoing PM, ministers, and MPs.

With the police overwhelmed, the army has stepped in, urging protesters to abandon arson and destruction. Nepal's greatest challenge lies not just in quelling the violence, but in its leaderless character. The protestors – an amorphous blend of youth activists and anarchists – have no identifiable leadership. The original flashpoint, the social media ban, has already receded into the background. The demand now is larger: jobs, accountability, and a clean break from political rot.

For now, experts dismiss fears of an army takeover, insisting democracy is not in imminent danger. But unless the new government finds a way to address the grievances of a restless generation, the flames on Kathmandu's streets could return stronger than before.

Notwithstanding the decision to lift the ban on social media platforms, peace will return only when the leaderless agitators are brought to the negotiating table, an uphill task for any regime. Nepal has been a country where political battles can spill out onto the streets. On September 8, that familiar turbulence returned, but with a distinctly 21st-century twist. This time, the spark was not royal absolutism or constitutional deadlock, but the government's abrupt decision to unplug the digital lifeline of its youth: social media.

What the State described as enforcement of “digital regulation” was seen by millions as an assault on free expression and connectivity. For a country where over 90% of internet users rely on these platforms for news, remittances, tourism promotion, and even daily commerce, the blackout was not just inconvenient; it felt like suffocation.

Oli argued that extremist elements hijacked the protests, while officials insisted the 26 defaulter were only being penalised. Yet, on the streets, this looked less like legal enforcement and more like political censorship. The move exposed the State's growing in-

tolerance of dissent at a time when ruling politicians faced allegations of corruption.

The eruption of anger reflected deeper frustrations. Fourteen governments in 16 years, spiralling prices, and dynastic privilege have left citizens disillusioned. Social media had become the only real public square for youth and cutting it off meant silencing their voice. The revolt spread without party banners or central leadership, making it harder for security forces to contain. Earlier bans on TikTok and tightening internet laws had already raised suspicion that the State was edging towards authoritarianism. Into this volatile mix entered pro-monarchy forces. Though marginalised since 2006, they staged a massive rally a few months ago that showed royalist sentiment was far from extinct. Analysts believe such elements infiltrated the current protests, adding muscle to the revolt.

Moment of reckoning

The country's challenge is formidable. While misinformation, cybercrime, and hate speech are legitimate concerns, equating governance with internet shutdowns risks branding the State as repressive. The fragile economy compounds the troubles. Inflation has eroded household incomes, youth unemployment remains high, and dependence on remittances leaves the country vulnerable to external shocks.

At its core, the crisis stemmed from the government enforcing sweeping rules without dialogue or transition. In a society where social media is the primary tool of connection, protest, and survival, the Oli administration badly miscalculated the depth of resentment. Yet, there is one striking difference from Nepal's past upheavals: the absence of anti-India rhetoric. During my posting in Kathmandu while covering the restoration of democracy, I witnessed communists routinely accuse New Delhi of interference. This time, with communists in power, Oli has avoided pointing fingers at bilateral ties. Meanwhile, Beijing has no incentive to encourage unrest as its relations with Kathmandu are currently smooth.

The lesson from this revolt is clear. In today's world, curbing online spaces is as combustible as curbing the ballot box. Just as past generations fought for political freedoms, today's youth are battling for digital rights. Lifting the ban is only the first step, but dialogue with young citizens and leaderless agitators remains the real test. Unless democratic accountability is restored, Nepal risks sinking deeper into its old cycle of protest, repression, and instability – only this time fought both on the streets and in cyberspace.

(The writer is a strategic affairs columnist and senior political analyst based in Shimla)

Present flaws must inform future city

The Karnataka government's plan to build the Greater Bengaluru Integrated Township (GBIT) at Bidadi, touted as India's first ‘AI City’, is nothing short of audacious. Spanning 9,000 acres, it is envisioned as a second central business district (CBD) for Bengaluru, powered by Artificial Intelligence and digital twin technology (which uses historical and real-time data to mirror current conditions and simulate future scenarios). With its promise of sustainable living, cutting-edge industries, and lakhs of jobs, GBIT could become a global showcase of futuristic urban planning. But the warning signs are clear: unless the government avoids the mistakes that brought Bengaluru to its knees, GBIT will collapse under the same weight of poor planning, unchecked growth, and civic apathy. Karnataka is being offered a second chance, and it must not squander it.

The first hurdle is land acquisition, with a section of farmers raising the red flag. The government has floated a ‘landowner-as-partner’ model, offering compensation and developed plots to affected families. However, unless this process is transparent, fair, and participatory, GBIT will follow the ill-fated Aerospace City, where years of protests forced the state to abandon the project. Without the trust of farmers and other land owners, GBIT will never take off the ground. Equally crucial is to ensure that GBIT does not become a carbon copy of Bengaluru's dysfunction. The capital's endless traffic snarls and crumbling infrastructure are the product of car-centric planning and unregulated real estate. GBIT must flip this model on its head. Public transport should form the backbone of the city, with metro, suburban rail, or bus rapid transit tightly integrated into compact, walkable neighbourhoods.

Wide, obstruction-free footpaths, cycling lanes, and car-free zones should be non-negotiable. If GBIT is designed around cars, it is doomed from the start. Environmental safeguards are also vital. GBIT must embrace ‘sponge city’ principles with permeable pavements, rejuvenated lakes, and ecological corridors to guard against flooding. Zero-waste policies and strict enforcement against violators should define governance, not remain hollow promises. The pledge of 100 acres of green space must be sacrosanct, not quietly eaten up by builders.

Governance will ultimately decide GBIT's fate. A powerful, politically insulated, and accountable township authority must be created to enforce zoning laws, demolish illegal constructions without hesitation, and use technology for real-time monitoring. GBIT is Karnataka's rare opportunity to build the city Bengaluru should have been. If the government succumbs to short-term greed, it will create not a model for the future, but Bengaluru 2.0 – another sprawling, broken, and unlivable metropolis.

With intent, the proposed GBIT could be a model of sustainable living and accountable governance

Greed vs legacy: Bengaluru's heritage sites under siege

CAPT G R GOPINATH (RETI)

Don't pawn the state's heritage family jewels to builders. It is a sacred bequest that we have to leave for posterity.

Nobel Laureate for Literature V S Naipaul once said that the Indian way of life is a blend of the old and the new. Bengaluru has ancient parks, historic and stunning monuments; art and cultural spaces like Lal Bagh and Cubbon Park; the High Court, the Vidhana Soudha, and the Raj Bhavan; the Bangalore Palace set amid 200-odd acres of woodland; Tipu Sultan's Summer Palace; St Mark's Cathedral; the Bull Temple; the Chitrakala Parishat; the Ravindra Kalakshetra; the classic Divya Sheshadri Iyer Public Library; the Venkappa Art Gallery and Museum; heritage marketplaces like KR Market and Russel Market; the Chinnaswamy Cricket Stadium; the Brigade Grounds; the Race Course; the Bangalore Golf Club (BGC); the Jakkur Flying School; and many more.

The history of these landmarks is illuminating, revealing the foresight, prudence and cosmopolitan vision of our forefathers, who built a city that would stand alongside other great cities like London, Paris and Rome that would usher in modernity while preserving heritage.

Take, for instance, the Bangalore Golf Club. Established in 1876 by the British Army on a 60-acre plot, it remains the oldest club outside the British Isles to operate on its original site. In 1885, an order during the reign of the Maharaja Krishnarajendra Wodeyar confirmed the land as a free assignment for the specific purpose of golf, prohibiting construction or other activities.

There were attempts to shift the golf club and convert it into some other foolhardy project. It was saved by appealing those in power by allotting them out-of-turn permanent membership in the club.

With the skyrocketing prices of real estate in Bengaluru owing to the rush of modern manufacturing facilities and information technology creating jobs and new constructions for residences and office

spaces, and the flood of migrants pouring into the city every day from rural Karnataka and from across India's more backward and remote regions, everyone is looking at land in Bengaluru with the lenses of an avaricious real estate developer.

There was a proposal to cancel the lease of the iconic Bangalore Race Course, started originally by the British Army in the 1800s. In 1951, the Karnataka government allocated 85 acres in High Grounds, blending colonial charm with the thrill of racing. The aim was to turn it into real estate for ministerial quarters by shifting it to the bonedocks. Thankfully it was thwarted by activists who opposed it and litigation. Today it's a top-tier racing club.

Now the gaze has turned on another historic coveted piece of real estate – the 200-acre Government Flying Training School (GFTS) based at the Jakkur Aerodrome with a rich legacy of aviation training in India.

The visionary Maharaja of Mysore, Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar, gave the land in 1948 to the Government of Karnataka for the exclusive purpose of starting a flying school to train pilots and allied aviation ac-

tivities. The first Indian woman pilot, Usha Sundaram, earned her commercial flying licence from these hallowed grounds, making it a unique institution in the country's aviation space. A Karnataka NCC Battalion has been operating out of the Jakkur Aerodrome for many years for young boys and girls cadets to train them on flying to join the Indian Air Force.

It has also ushered in private sector helicopter flying by making it a household name for use by VVIPs of government, corporates and investors from around the world who wish to land in remote factories or to fly tourists to spots like Hampi, Belur and Halebeedu, Mysore and Kabini game parks; for emergency air-ambulance missions rescuing serious accident victims and patients from remote sites to Bangalore hospitals.

With the advent of eVTOL (electric vertical takeoff and landing aircraft), which are silent, lift off like a helicopter and fly like a plane, eliminating noise pollution and air pollution, a big concern of environmental protection lobbies, Jakkur in the heart of the city is ideal for converting it into vertiports to reach the city centre or nearby

towns – without shutting or shifting the flying school. eVTOLs are not science fiction; they are already flying passengers in New York, Miami, Dubai and Guangzhou, China, out of vertiports on limited routes over short distances.

It was reported a couple of days ago that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah called a meeting of GFTS officials to discuss many aspects of the flying school. He announced that the government was considering acquiring 3-4 acres of land along the funnel of the runway to its east to extend it, as the Metro flyover had shortened the effective runway length, preventing slightly larger planes from taking off and landing for both training and passenger flights. The meeting was also attended by senior bureaucrats and a couple of ministers.

However, a few of them submitted a proposal to the CM stating the Jakkur Flying School has been operating in fits and starts over the years and not generating enough revenues befitting its real estate potential of Rs 20,000 crore or more to be converted to a more lucrative, spanning new golf course along with a complex and other facilities.

The motives seem blatantly obvious.

Ideally the group who attended the meeting should have requested the CM to look into the maladministration of the GFTS over the last three decades, from the early 1990s when the set-up in. They should have pushed for a time-bound study on how to restructure and resuscitate it with recommendations for generating revenue and recommended aspects of the flying school and its grounds that can be outsourced to the private sector for allied activities of aviation, including drones and manufacturing of electronics and high-tech, high-value electrical parts of aircraft to many startups instead of one mega-corporation.

Bengaluru already has 6-7 golf courses. And if someone fancies more, welcome; go ahead and build it beyond the city. If Cubbon Park or Lal Bagh is sold to Disneyland or Universal Studios as in Hollywood, certainly it will make oodles of money. Do we have the right to pawn the state's heritage family jewels? It is a sacred bequest that we must leave for posterity.

(The writer is a soldier, farmer, and entrepreneur)

The rise of 'digital dopamine' is rewiring our brains, prioritising instant online gratification over meaningful real-life experiences

JAKE AUCHINCLOSS

You own the most valuable real estate in the world. Deep inside your brain is the nucleus accumbens, a pea-sized bundle of neurons. When you do or anticipate something rewarding, dopamine is released in this part of your brain, motivating you to repeat that behaviour.

Corporations are spending hundreds of billions of dollars to capture this reward system. The miners and merchants of dopamine use bits of software – social media, pornography, online gambling and other apps – to deliver quick hits of the chemical, keeping you coming back for more and cutting out the real world.

This is digital dopamine, and it's carving a fault line in our society. On one side is the online realm, where everything is instant, easy and alone. Lots of money can be made there, but little meaning. On the other side is the shrinking terrain of real life, where meaning is made.

As the father of three children under 6, I do not want their brains programmed by corporations, like software. And as a congressman on the committee that oversees much of technology and commerce, I know there are deeper forces at work here. In our laws and in our markets, America has stacked the deck in favour of virtual reality over our material reality.

And it's about to get a lot worse. To power the artificial intelligence boom, Meta, Google and the other tech titans are investing sums in infrastructure, such as data centres and semiconductor factories, not seen since the railroad age. AI is being incorporated into relationship bots, immersive experiences and neural implants. Phones and other consumer technology will soon become even more addictive.

For a preview, look at the plight of adolescents, particularly young men, who are at the frontier of the digital dopamine realm. Their nucleus accumbens is highly sensitive. Their pre-frontal cortex, which is vital for controlling behaviour, is underdeveloped. This combination can lead young men to aggressively seek novelty and status.

Societies have always wrestled with those instincts. But today, our society is routing young men to online sports betting, pornography and bot-infused social media platforms, like Meta, whose policies at one point deemed it "acceptable" for bots "to engage a child in conversations that are romantic or sensual."

In this realm, it's all digital reward, with no in-real-life effort. Young men are the worse for it, in both work and love. That's not only a failure; it's a warning about a technology that will soon saturate our culture.

Americans do not want this. Just look at the outcry from state and local lawmakers of both parties when House Republicans tried to ban states from regulating AI.

We need to take action to both regulate the online realm and make IRL effort more rewarding.

Start with online. The Consumer Product Safety Commission insists that pharmaceutical companies put medications in child-safe bottles. It should do the same for apps that deliver digital dopamine. Labels



Digital dopamine is consuming America. It's time for IRL

could inform adults that using these apps comes with risks, and laws could restrict children's use.

To develop strong, empirically sound standards, app developers should have to share anonymised data about user behaviour with scientists studying the effects of digital dopamine, so that we can fully understand the effects of their products.

Meta, for example, recently revealed in court that, on average, people spend only 7 percent of their total time on Instagram viewing content from friends. Most of the time, they're consuming short videos recommended by its AI-powered algorithms. Those algorithms are fundamentally changing Americans' sense of self and society. They should not be corporate secrets.

This kind of medical approach will be more effective than roundabout antitrust action. The platforms and business models for dopamine mining are changing quickly. Rather than chase corporations as they shape-shift, regulators should focus on that pea-sized bundle of neurons where feedback loops of pleasure and pain get twisted into addiction.

Our in-real-life terrain also needs up-

grades. We need to foster an economy that works like Legos, a game of patience and skill that involves building things together, not Monopoly, which is all about extraction. For too long, our economy has holed more like Monopoly, and it has deprived too many Americans of jobs with meaning and purpose.

America needs to build five million more homes, generate gigawatts more nuclear and geothermal power, and manufacture more ships than the Chinese Navy. Where government is getting in the way, like with zoning codes that stifle housing development, lawmakers should cut through the red tape. Where corporations are too vested in the status quo, like oil conglomerates and defence contractors, the government should challenge corporate power and level the playing field for start-ups.

Our IRL terrain especially needs more innovation in what's called tough tech. Tough tech companies use frontier science and engineering to solve the world's hardest material problems, from climate change to disease, by inventing technologies in fields like fusion energy, cell biology and AI-powered robotics.

We need more people to run the construction sites and factories powered by this technology. Otherwise, America will fall behind China. We should establish 1,000 new trade schools across the country. Along with trade unions, these schools can enlist the next generation – particularly young men, who are struggling in school – to sweat and strive offline.

When I joined the Marines 15 years ago, the corps gave me camaraderie and competence in service of a mission bigger than me. The infantry made me a better man. But young Americans should not need to carry an assault weapon to help the nation, or themselves. We must recruit them into building the real world.

Social order is not spontaneous. If we want IRL effort to triumph over digital dopamine, our public morality must reflect that. We ought to expect of one another an ethic of improvement, both national and personal. And we should insist that technology serves, not subverts, that ethic.

(The writer is US Congressman (Democrat) and represents Massachusetts' Fourth Congressional District)
The New York Times

Authors are not marketing tools

SREELATA MENON

After embarking on a spree of publicity tours, Harpreet Kaur's *Birds of a Feather* finally called a halt. She could afford to. Her masterpiece had made the *New York Times*' best-seller list in its first week. Even fifty long years after her book knocked sales figures out of the park, she had the BBC camping outside her house, hoping for a look in.

Although she wouldn't oblige, and now famously expected her book to speak for itself, what does it tell you? As an author if you want your books to do well, you need to have visibility. You need to get out there and market yourself. You need to be here, there and everywhere.

Yet, good books if positioned right should, shouldn't they, without the author flim flam find their market? In today's publishing world, apparently not.

Authors are expected to be – writer, publicist, social media strategist and stage performer, all rolled into one. The lines between creativity and commercial hustle have blurred. It has set the trend for every author's nightmare – publicity hunt.

While marketing is absolutely and irrefutably important in the book world, the idea however that authors should serve as marketing tools for their own work seems kind of problematic. It necessarily shifts the focus from storytelling to salesmanship.

An author is a writer and creative story-telling is what he or she does. A writer is not a sales person and should not be required to be one. If to publicise, market or sell was what an author wanted to do, wouldn't he or she have opted to become a PR executive or a marketing person?

However, that's exactly what editors and publishers presently expect their authors to become. And that's unfair. Every body knows that writing and marketing need completely different expertise. Writing is an act of creation.

An author's primary role is to create narratives that challenge, inspire or resonate with his or her readers mentally – not engage with them frontally. It is a behind-the-scenes operation that is quiet, solitary and mind consuming. Marketing, on the other hand demands visibility, performance, and people skills. Both are thus fundamentally at odds.

The need to market might well, take the joy out of the writing.

ing too. Even becoming psychologically challenging. Authors are not trained marketers nor are they commodities or products. They are not mobile posters or social media influencers and shouldn't be made to perform like them.

It's not that authors don't dream of becoming wealthy by reaching their readers. They obviously do, but they are also just people who have simply signed up to write stories. When publishers offload what should be their chore on to authors, they risk damaging the very talent they rely upon to produce good content.

It's often mentally unnerving, and even demeaning, for most authors to get upon stage and promote their books by holding them up like they are new babies. While many writers do enjoy engaging with audiences to promote their work, not everyone likes the limelight.

By all means, engage with those who do. Harness them and involve them and sales might skyrocket. However, should the success of a book only hinge on the author's Instagram strategy, conversation skills or stage presence? Shouldn't it be valued for its creative output rather than his or her ability to sell it?

To turn authors into promotional tools might even put their innate creativity at risk. So, let's uphold, promote and celebrate authors as artists, not advertisers. Marketing should be a happy choice and not a criterion for success. Let's not insist on what most authors across the board, dread – in-person book launches or in-conversation sessions that force them to perform before an invited audience to entice them into buying their books.

Though these gatherings have become the norm, an author's presence should ideally only be peripheral to all marketing strategies. For who knows, too much public exposure and hype might even backfire.

Readers might get put off and authors might get writer's block. When writers are free to just write, the world gets better books – and isn't that a win for everyone? May publishers realise, sooner than later, that they – why else are they in the business – shouldn't have to call on authors to promote, market, sell and turn those books into money spinners.

An author's role is to only create, write and provide them with – yes, those tough best sellers.

(The author is a freelance writer)

OUR PAGES OF HISTORY

50 YEARS AGO: SEPTEMBER 1975

Virtual death of SEATO

Bangkok, Sept 9

The Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation, often cited as a basis for America's intervention in Vietnam, celebrated its 21st birthday today, but seemed unlikely to reach its 22nd anniversary. The only two South-East Asian members of the organisation, the Philippines and Thailand, have conferred and agreed that SEATO's original role to contain China and stop the advance of Communism in the region was no longer valid. Both have established diplomatic relations with China and were seeking ties with the new Governments in Indo-China.

25 YEARS AGO: SEPTEMBER 2000

No parallel between E Timor and Kashmir: Jaswant

New York, Sept 9

India on Friday termed as absurd a parallel drawn by Pakistan Chief Executive Gen Musharraf between Kashmir and East Timor. External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh said there is no need to respond to absurdities and added that East Timor is an occupied territory while Jammu and Kashmir is an integral part of India. Out of 63 heads of state who spoke at the UN on Thursday, only two leaders came from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia spoke on Kashmir. "That is the index of their support," Mr Singh said.

OASIS | SURYAKUMARI DENNISON

The triumph of tolerance

You Are Approaching ZERO TOLERANCE JUNCTION, proclaims a sign by a busy road, where traffic regulations are strictly enforced. Penalties are immediately imposed on those caught breaking the rules.

The phrase 'zero tolerance' is commonly heard in the context of terrorist attacks. A head of state, whose country has been the scene of a mindless massacre, vociferously declares zero tolerance for the barbaric bloodbath.

'Zero tolerance' is also used to censor corruption, discrimination, violence against women and other infringements of the law. At a school or college orientation programme, students might be informed that the

institution to which they have just gained admission has a zero-tolerance policy towards misconduct. While it is perfectly permissible to treat the evils that plague society with zero tolerance, we must be careful to reserve categorical condemnation for atrocities against the weak and vulnerable.

On no account should we display zero tolerance towards our fellow human beings. Such an attitude would turn us into harsh, inflexible individuals, ruthlessly rejecting everyone who thinks or acts differently from us. There are lessons to be learnt from

the life of the 16th-century sage, Sant Eknath Maharaj. Born in Paithan (a town in modern-day Maharashtra), on the banks of the Godavari, he was the epitome of tolerance. Every day, he would make his way to the river for his morning ablutions.

A neighbour, who was aware that Sant Eknath was famed for forbearance, set out to provoke him into losing his composure. Since the vile abuse he hurled was met with smiles, the self-styled adversary resorted to emptying buckets over the freshly bathed holy man. On one occasion, he did so several



DECCAN Chronicle

10 SEPTEMBER 2025

3rd S. Asian domino falls as Gen Z ousts Nepal PM

The Asian Spring has felled another "strongman" leader. The restlessness of youth, acutely reflected in their openly violent demonstrations against political leaders and symbols of authority, has dethroned Nepali Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Oli, much as it did the Rajapakses of Sri Lanka in July 2022 and Sheikh Hasina Wajed of Bangladesh in August 2024.

The power of youth has never been so accentuated as in these three upheavals that are reflective of the deep dissatisfaction in emerging generations about the ways of those who govern encouraging rampant corruption whose living symbols are visible in the prosperity that nepotism breeds freely. Many political leaders, ruling and former, became the target of public wrath after agitating students were fired upon.

A ban on social media was the trigger that set off the violent chain of events on Monday that saw at least 19 young people killed by law-keeping forces, the torching of homes of ministers and leaders, including the private residences of the Prime Minister and President, and agitating students encircling ministers in the parliament building which was also set on fire.

The pattern of Asian leaders fleeing under pressure continued with Mr Oli, the head honcho of the Communist party that headed a tense coalition with the Nepali Congress, and who like the Rajapakses and Sheikh Hasina needed the help of the armed forces to be extricated as the protesters closed in, breaching police barricades and overpowering the helpless laws and order machinery.

There should be a lesson in this Nepali entanglement for democratic governments which think nothing of shutting down the Internet or banning popular global social media platforms at the merest sign of social strife. Such media may offer effective means of communication and, perhaps, allow the sowing of revolutionary thoughts, but they are just the medium that can spread a message, and not the problem, or solution, itself.

In free and open societies like the three Asian democracies which fell most recently, social media has become a window to the world of the people. They cannot be denied their right to the information and opinion highways just because rulers of many nations do not have the thick skin to face criticism. Social media does not necessarily create dissent though it could be a convenient medium for the spread of such a social phenomenon.

Gen-Z is how the Nepali youth described themselves as they rebelled against his rule and protested the social media ban volubly. By the time the government allowed the social media back online, a reckless police force had fired first students setting off even greater violence with the agitators even seizing arms and brandishing them while going on an absolute rampage on Tuesday.

Creating jobs to give youth a life to a secure future and a life worth living in third world economies is not the simplest job. And youth unemployment runs at 17.2 per cent in Nepal from where thousands migrate to India and elsewhere in search of jobs. That jobs seen the least of the priorities of those who govern — on the basis that they can capture a proportion of the public vote sufficient to capture power — is the most noticeable failing of Asian nations and economies.

For Nepal, there may be little to gain in trying to guess whether this uprising sprung from a former king of Nepal triggering a return to monarchy movement or a foreign hand playing a role as was suspected in Bangladesh last year. What they need most is stable control to restore order and find a way to put back a democratically elected government in place. But to ensure that these lessons of democratic insurrections are never forgotten is a different matter altogether.

Let's hope new V-P unbiased

The election of National Democratic Alliance (NDA) candidate C.P. Radhakrishnan as vice-president on Tuesday ended a series of events that began with the abrupt and unexplained resignation of the incumbent Jagdeep Dhanraj on July 22 with two more years to go in the second highest constitutional office in the country. The NDA enjoys a clear majority in the electoral college comprising the members of the Rajya Sabha and the Rajya Sabha and hence Mr Radhakrishnan's election was a foregone conclusion.

Mr Radhakrishnan, hailing from Tamil Nadu, a state that has still remained out of the grasp of the saffron front, has a reputation of maintaining warm relations across party lines and is expected to run the Rajya Sabha as its chairman with a democratic spirit. His predecessor, Mr Dharamvir, carried a reputation for his abrasive style which steamrolled the Opposition, quite contrary to the practices of the House of Elders. Indeed, he not only denied the Opposition its legitimate say in the running of the House but also went to the extent of insulting even senior leaders for failing to support him. His replacement will be a great service to the nation if Mr Radhakrishnan effected a course-correction and brought the parliamentary practices back on the rails.

Election campaigns in India have of late plunged a new depth with parties engage in the worst form of mudslinging at one another. The stakes are very high in the forthcoming Assembly and general elections, too, and it will call for a determined effort on the part of all the parties to end this trend. The vice-presidential election in which the result can almost be foretold could have shown the way forward but, unfortunately, it was not to be. The ruling party took the candidature of a former Supreme Court judge as an occasion to denigrate his judicial pronouncements. It will do every party and the nation good if they can reimagine their campaigns. It is still better late than never.

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M.P.
Nathanael

Troubled Manipur at the crossroads: Citizens see Modi's visit as ray of hope

Despite the lingering uncertainty over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Imphal on September 13, preparations are on in full swing in Imphal and Churachandpur where he is due to meet local citizens and address them. The PM's much-awaited trip after the May 3, 2023 mayhem that had the state sent a ray of hope among citizens that the situation will alleviate their miserable plight and the state will head towards normalcy.

That, however, remains a far cry given the hostility that still simmers among the two warring groups, Meiteis and Kuki-Zo. Over 265 people from both communities have been killed and 60,000 displaced from their homes in the past two years.

The PM's proposed visit has hastened talks between the home ministry officials and the affected parties. The Kuki-Zo groups met MHA officials on September 4 and inked a tripartite agreement, with the Manipur government being a signatory. The first meeting between MHA officials with Kuki-Zo groups in April this year ended in a stalemate as they had insisted on a "separate administration". The talks that resumed in June went in a positive direction with the Kuki-Zo groups consenting to changes in the terms and conditions for the Suspension of Operations (SoO).

The Kuki-Zo group comprises 17 outfits of the Kuki National Organisation and seven of the United People's Front, who signed the SoO agreement on

August 22, 2008. It was extended on a yearly basis till last year when then Manipur CM N. Biren Singh refused to be part of it. He advised the Centre to abrogate the SoO agreement, due to alleged violations. With his exit in February this year, the doors were open for the Centre to proceed.

In the September 4 New Delhi meeting, the SoO was finally extended with modified terms, including relocation of seven camps out of 12. Two camps have been closed. Unfortunately, the 76,000 allowance to surrender Kuki-Zo militants was discontinued after violence engulfed the state in May 2023, which led to their violating the ground rules. This will now be credited directly to their bank accounts. They also have to deposit their weapons with the nearest armory of CRPF or ISF, and will be subject to strict checks by the Joint Monitoring Committee headed by the chief secretary.

The opening of the Dimapur-Imphal NH2, another major issue, also seems to have been sorted out with the Kuki-Zo outfits calling off the blockade that had led to enormous misery for the Meiteis living in the valley. Vehicles with essential goods, fuel and medicines had to be escorted by the CRPF, but the movement of Meiteis was banned. While the Kuki-Zo claim the road was kept open, the stretch passing through Kangpokpi, which is dominated by Kukis, was avoided by Meiteis. They say the security forces' buffer zones will remain a prohibited area

for both communities, as part of the agreement.

While the Centre glazes over the opening of NH2 and renewal of the SoO agreement, the Meitei representatives by the Coordinating Committee of Manipur Integrity (COCOMI) has condemned the extension of SoO, which it opposed alleging that Kuki-Zo outfits had indulged in violence. They ignore the fact that Arambil Tengol (AT) cadres and other splinter Meitei groups had looted 5,688 weapons from police armories along with a huge haul of ammunition in May 2023, and used them against Kuki-Zo tribes. Over 1,500 weapons are yet to be recovered.

When two Arambil members were arrested for their role in the May 2023 violence by the CBI in June this year, the valley saw fresh violence with Meiteis demanding their release. Two AT cadres were arrested on August 30 with sophisticated weapons in Imphal.

With no signs of hostility abating between the Meiteis and the Kuki-Zo, the Centre has a crucial role to play in the return of normalcy to the state. While the Kuki-Zo group that signed the pact on September 4 is an outfit of the armed surrendered insurgents, civil society has accused the group of not being a representative of the Kuki-Zo at large. The Village Volunteers Coordinating Committee, representing the civil society, has rejected the agreement to open NH2, claiming that the decision was taken without consulting most of their clans. In a press statement on September 7, the Kuki-Zo

group accused the Press Information Bureau of twisting the agreement by replacing "shall be followed by a tripartite dialogue with KNO and UPF to pave the way for a negotiated political settlement under the Constitution of India in a time-bound manner" with "need for a negotiated solution to bring peace and stability to the State of Manipur". This has irked the Kuki-Zo community, which aspires for Union territory status with a legislature. Ironically, while hostility continues between the Kuki-Zo and Meiteis, the latter vehemently oppose a separate administration for the former.

Meanwhile, a report of the Independent People's Tribunal under the aegis of PUCL, comprising renowned judges and bureaucrats led by Justice Kurian Joseph, has said: "The violence which erupted on May 3, 2023, was not spontaneous but planned, ethnically targeted and facilitated by state failures." The tribunal heard over 150 victims of violence and went through thousands of written statements and documents to arrive at this conclusion. The COCOMI has rejected this report as being "biased and politically engineered".

The assertion that the ethnic violence has been engineered by vested interests needs to be probed. The CBI has to delve deeper into the origin of the clashes and book the culprits. The SIT that was instituted in 2023 is yet to submit its report.

The writer is a retired CRPF IGP

Subhani



Nepal in fix: Can it douse youth fury, calm region?



Syed Ata Hasnain

We have seen this before — most recently in Bangladesh, a few years earlier in Sri Lanka, and now in Nepal. Each episode has its own causes and local colour, but they share an unerring pattern. A combustible mix of youthful anger, sudden symbolic triggers (an Internet shut-down, a quota decision, the collapse of basic services) and the slow-burn failures of governance. If the "youth bulge" can be demographic dividend, left untended — unemployed, unskilled and politically marginalised — it can quickly become a political accelerant.

Nepal this week leapt back into the spotlight as thousands poured into Kathmandu after a sudden social media ban, storming zones and the nation's Parliament. The government's attempt to regulate platforms failed to comply with a Supreme Court-backed directive and a minority ultimatum to resign. Protesters' point local grievance officers and obey Nepal's social-media rules. What began as online fury transformed into mass demonstrations, violent clashes, curfew and Army deployment, with at least 19 people dead and many injured. Protesters forced their way into restricted areas; the security forces used teargas, water cannon, rubber bullets and even aerial firing in attempts to disperse crowds.

The scale of violence and the scale of mobilisation left hospitals treating dozens in critical condition and Kathmandu under tight restrictions. Why are Gen Z and younger millennials so central to these upheavals? Demography matters. South Asia's youth cohort is large — potentially an economic engine — but scholarship shows a clear and troubling correlation. Where high youth cohorts confront unemployment, weak governance and exclusionary politics, the

probability of political unrest rises. Put bluntly, a concentration of restless, digitally connected youth is a gift to mobilisers and a headache for brittle polities.

To understand what's happening, you need to view this from three angles. Nepal's history of fragile democratic experiments; the organising power of a mobile, media-savvy youth cohort; and a theoretical playbook — crafted by Gene Sharp, the American political philosopher — that maps how non-violent movements topple or cripple regimes. I witnessed this in the Kashmir Valley in 2008 and then 2010 when the stone-throwing mobs went berserk. Nepal was a monarchy until 2008, and the country's politics have been punctuated by chronic instability and a decade-long Maoist insurgency (1996-2006) that killed thousands and left scars on state-society relations. That history shapes how the Army and police respond to disorder, and how political elites use nationalist frames to push back. Forces seldom learn from the past.

There is also a playbook. No political scientist has unpacked the mechanics of leaderless, rapid, non-violent contention better than Gene Sharp. In his seminal magnum opus *From Dictatorship to Democracy*, Sharp lays out how decentralised movements can erode a regime's sources of authority through symbolic defiance, strikes, non-cooperation and the strategic use of communications networks. Where social media exists, those mechanisms accelerate, where it is shut down, they adapt. Protesters decentralised, often encrypted channels: the Black Net. Sharp did not predict every specific uprising, but he showed how networks, symbols and persistence can make power brittle.

Bangladesh in mid-2024 offered a warning. What began on campuses over a job quota decision quickly

Gen Z protests over a sweeping social media registration crackdown have thrust Kathmandu into crisis — dialogue, not repression, is the only route back to stability

broadened, met by a harsh crackdown that produced mass arrests, and a chaotic political transition with regional reverberations. That episode showed how quickly a student movement can transform into a national crisis, and how heavy-handed repression does not restore order so much as deepen grievance and spill instability across borders. Nepal's current turbulence must be read against that cautionary backdrop.

Nepal's government faces an urgent choice: de-escalate and allow mediation, or double down and deepen the crisis. The smarter path is immediate damage control — rescind blunt measures. Kathmandu had briefly blocked 36 platforms, including Facebook, WhatsApp and X, a ban it rescinded the following day after deadly protests, with the government promising inquiries and several ministers announcing resignations. It must restore communication channels, allow impartial probes into deaths, and offer mediated dialogue. Prime Minister K.P. Sharma (It) was forced to resign Tuesday as the protests intensified, with the homes of top political leaders set on fire. He said it was to help calm a dialogue. Using the Army for urban crowd control in a country scarred by insurgency is unwise; it readiness to assist only on request are the wisest policies for neighbours and for those who care about domestic resilience in South Asia. The region's youth can be its greatest asset — treated respectfully and invested in — or its most dangerous liability. It depends how we make our choices.

Humility, restraint and readiness to assist only on request are the wisest policies for neighbours and for those who care about domestic resilience in South Asia. The region's youth can be its greatest asset — treated respectfully and invested in — or its most dangerous liability. It depends how we make our choices.

The writer, a retired lieutenant-general, is a former GOC of the Srinagar-based 15 ("Chinar") Corps

LETTERS ONLY INDIANS CAN VOTE

The verdict given by the SC that AadharCard as the acceptable proof of identity of the voter was enough to enable him to vote. But elections in India are meant only for legitimate citizens and not for all who sneak into the country. If illegal entrants are allowed to vote simply on the basis of Aadhar Card which can be easily obtained with the help of the clandestine facilitators there will be far reaching consequences. For this reason, the CAA and the NCR were mooted by the BJP Government which were opposed by the INDI alliance tooth and nail for selfish reasons. It is unfortunate the SC has not mentioned in its judgement about the importance of above two enactments brought in by BJP to weed out non-Indians from polls.

S.Nagarajan Iyer
Coimbatore

FINE GESTURE

The Tamil Nadu government has instituted awards towards the development of Tamil language and thereby honoured four news readers this year with a citation and cash award of Rs. 25,000 each for their skills of pronunciation and diction for exhibiting their work during 2023. This award will give more impetus for budding talents and the recognition by this government on this is laudable for their fine gesture.

A.P. Thiruvadi
Chennai

BULLET TRAIN

Witnessing PM Modi ride the bullet train with the Japanese PM fills us with optimism. This act signals accelerated India-Japan collaboration on high-speed rails. With Mumbai-Ahmedabad on track for 2028, Bullet Trains promise faster journeys and economic boom. May this partnership speed India toward a brighter, connected tomorrow.

TS KARTHIK
CHENNAI

Mail your letters to
chennai@deccanmail.com

Market signals

A combination of factors has pushed up bond yields

There is considerable anxiety in the financial markets over the rise in bond yields. As reported by this newspaper, commercial banks and other stakeholders have made several suggestions to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), aiming to ease pressure on the bond market. It has been suggested that the RBI extend the bond issuance till March rather than concluding the annual sale in February. This will help reduce the weekly supply of bonds. Stakeholders have also suggested changes in the way state-government bonds are sold to reduce the spread. It has also been said that issuing ultra-long duration bonds like those with tenors of 30-50 years should be reduced. Banks have also underscored that the weekly issuance of bonds has increased significantly.

While the measures suggested by stakeholders may ease some pressure, it is worth debating why yields have risen and how they are likely to move in the coming quarters. The yield on 10-year government bonds has increased by about 20 basis points since the Monetary Policy Committee of the RBI decided to frontload the rate cut and reduced the policy repo rate by 50 basis points in June. Theoretically, after a bigger than expected rate cut by the central bank, bond yields should ease. However, in this case, market participants decided not to go by the book. One plausible reason could be that the market interpreted the June policy statement, and the subsequent August statement, along with the inflation projections, as the end of the rate-cutting cycle. The August policy statement, the latest, projected the inflation rate at 4.4 per cent in the fourth quarter of this financial year. It is further expected to increase to 4.9 per cent in the first quarter of 2026-27. Since the monetary policy needs to be forward-looking, as things stand, there is virtually no space for further rate reduction.

The financial markets may also be pricing in possible fiscal pressure. The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council last week decided to rationalise the rate structure. According to the government, this could have a revenue implication worth ₹48,000 crore. In the coming quarters, a lot will depend on how demand in the economy responds. However, from a longer-term perspective, the council has further reduced the average GST rate, which could have implications for longer-term fiscal sustainability. The average rate before the rationalisation exercise was about 11.6 per cent, compared to a 15-15.5 per cent revenue-neutral rate recommended by a government committee. Structurally lower GST rates and collection could impair the ability of both the central and state governments to reduce their fiscal deficit and borrowing on a sustainable basis. Further, the Union government, starting next financial year, will move to a new fiscal framework where it will aim to keep the central-government debt on a declining path as a percentage of gross domestic product. While this will give the Union government greater flexibility in managing the Budget than in committing itself to a fixed annual target, it could also create uncertainty in the bond markets.

Further, the global conditions are not favourable. Higher yields in advanced economies will affect demand for Indian-government bonds. Foreign portfolio investors, for instance, have purchased Indian bonds worth \$542 million so far this financial year, as against over \$14.5 billion in 2023-24. Therefore, given the monetary, fiscal, and external environment, the chances of a meaningful softening of bond yields remain low. A lot will depend in the near term on market expectations of inflation.

Healthy outcomes

Address gaps to make infant survival universal

India has reached an important milestone in public health. The latest Sample Registration System (2023) data reveals that the country's infant mortality rate (IMR) has dropped to 25 per 1,000 live births — the lowest ever and a steep fall from 129 in 1971. This reflects decades of steady progress in immunisation, maternal- and child-health programmes, and overall improvement in sanitation and nutrition. States like Kerala (5) and Manipur (3) showcase how strong primary health care and decentralised planning can deliver outcomes comparable with advanced economies. Yet, progress remains patchy. Larger states such as Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh still report an IMR as high as 37, pointing to sharp regional and rural-urban gaps.

The World Health Organization-United Nations Children's Fund immunisation report (2025) underscores a worrying vulnerability: More than 900,000 Indian infants missed all vaccines in 2024. Despite broad coverage, these gaps risk reversing gains by leaving communities exposed to preventable outbreaks. Alongside immunisation, maternal and child nutrition remains a critical weakness. The National Family Health Survey-5 (2019-20) shows that anaemia affects 52 per cent of pregnant women and 67 per cent of children under five — figures that directly undermine birth outcomes, cognitive development, and infant survival. The persistence of such high levels of anaemia reflects not just dietary insufficiency but also poor access to iron supplements, and inadequate antenatal care. Equally troubling is the fragile state of maternal and newborn care infrastructure. The availability of quality care during pregnancy, delivery, and the neonatal period often determines survival. Yet, many primary health centres in poorer states lack obstetric facilities or essential equipment, leaving mothers dependent on informal or unsafe options. Madhya Pradesh, one of the states with the highest IMR, reportedly faces a staggering 70 per cent vacancy in child specialists, crippling its newborn-care capacity.

Bridging these gaps requires a multidimensional response. Kerala's success highlights the value of investing in primary health care, community participation, and local governance. Replicating these principles in high-burden states is essential. Nutrition intervention must go beyond Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and the Poshan Abhiyaan to ensure universal access to fortified foods, iron supplementation, and dietary diversification. Innovation like Telangana's Arogya Lakshmi programme, which provides one hot cooked meal daily to pregnant and lactating women, could be adopted by other states. Equally, behaviour-change campaigns are vital to improve maternal diets, breastfeeding practices, and vaccine uptake.

On health care, expanding special newborn care units, upgrading community-health centres with round-the-clock obstetric services, and filling vacant specialist posts should be prioritised. Greater investment in the training of Accredited Social Health Activists and incentives could strengthen service delivery and create awareness to counter vaccine hesitancy. India's decline in the IMR is a milestone worth celebrating, but it must not obscure the persistent inequities in maternal and infant care. Only by simultaneously resolving gaps in infrastructure, workforce, nutrition, immunisation, sanitation, and social equity can India ensure its infant survival gains become truly universal and sustainable.



A way forward

Having reduced slabs and rates, the GST Council should set eyes on further reforms

Last week's decision on revamping the goods and services tax (GST) regime was the third such exercise in the eight years since its launch in July 2017. How different was this third exercise at revamping GST? And how much more different should it have been?

First, the differences. The decisions of the GST Council on September 3 resulted from far by the biggest such exercise. Over 450 goods and services will see their GST rates change from September 22. From a taxation point of view, this is substantially more impactful than the Union government's annual Budgets during the pre-GST days.

The rate rationalisation this time will impact over 420 goods covering a vast range of sectors, including food, tobacco, agriculture, fertilisers, coal, renewable energy, textile, health, education, consumer electronics, paper, transportation, sports goods, toys, leather, wood, defence, footwear, construction, handicrafts and machinery. In addition, as many as 34 services in sectors such as transportation, job work, construction, local delivery and insurance will see their rates change.

In comparison, the first two exercises were much smaller in both range and impact. In November 2017, just four months after its launch, the GST Council changed rates for as many as 94 categories of goods. The second exercise, even smaller than the first, took place 13 months later in December 2018. Only about 17 categories of goods saw their rates change.

The timing of these decisions, however, was somewhat similar. The third exercise has taken place a few months before the crucial state Assembly elections in Bihar later this year, to be followed by equally important Assembly elections in West Bengal, Kerala and Tamil Nadu in the first half of 2026. The first exercise at rate rationalisation took place a few weeks before Assembly elections in Gujarat in December 2017, and ahead of elections in Tripura and Karnataka in the first half of 2018. And the second

exercise took place a few months before the general elections of 2019. But a key difference in this respect is that the first and second exercises were conducted very soon after the launch of the GST regime and even before tax collections under the new system could attain the desired stability. Not surprisingly, the pace of tax collections subsequent to the first two rounds of rate rationalisation took an adverse knock.

In contrast, the third exercise has been completed after eight years and deliberations over the nature of the changes to be introduced have taken place for well over a year. And the collections rate has also stabilised, even though not at the desired level. Last year's net GST collections as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) were still a little lower than those in the pre-GST years.

An even bigger difference this time is in the nature of the rate rationalisation. Both in 2017 and 2018, all the changes in rates were unidirectional — they were all brought down to the lower slabs without any change in the number of duty slabs. The 2025 exercise is not just about reducing the rates, but also about raising them in addition to bringing down the number of main slabs.

Barring a dozen odd items, almost all goods and services are being clubbed under two slabs — 5 per cent and 18 per cent. And this rationalisation is sought to be achieved by reducing the rates for about 380 goods and 24 services. In addition, rates for about 40 goods and 10 services are to be raised.

It is this relatively less talked about decision to raise rates on about 50 items that has given the government the confidence of containing the revenue impact of such a large number of rate cuts. Based on the collections in 2023-24, the government's estimate of the revenue impact of the rate reduction is about ₹93,000 crore in the current year.

However, the rate increase decision has reduced that impact by about ₹45,000 crore and brought down

RAISINA HILL
A K BHATTACHARYA

Time to rethink quality standard system

RAJEEV KHER, ANIL JAURHI, & VIMALENDU CHAUHAN

India's approach to enforcing product standards through quality control orders (QCOs) under the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) Act has rapidly expanded over the past decade, now covering over 800 product categories. This surge in mandatory regulation reflects a recognition of historical gaps in consumer protection and a growing desire to safeguard domestic producers from the influx of substandard imports. However, beneath the intent to protect public health and foster quality lies a complex and often problematic reality. India's regulatory framework, centred on BIS as a combined standard-setter, certifier, and enforcer — risks undermining both industry competitiveness and consumer welfare.

A 2016 amendment to the BIS Act broadened the government's authority to mandate compliance with compulsory standards. This shift was principally motivated by international trade considerations, as QCOs proved useful tools for protecting domestic producers and managing the growing trade deficit. Indian products faced strict technical regulations, particularly in developed markets, while imports into India encountered limited technical countermeasures. QCOs thus emerged as strategic levers to level the playing field. QCOs may have grown out of trade challenges, but their rationale as instruments of consumer protection cannot be overstated.

While legitimate objectives underpin the drive to enhance technical regulations, India's regulatory model raises serious questions. The BIS — a body historically designed as a national standards organisation tasked with voluntary standardisation and certification — has been entrusted simultaneously with standard-setting, certification issuance, and enforcement of compliance. This consolidation of roles conflicts with international best practices and guidelines such as those of the World Trade Organization's Technical Barriers to Trade Agreement, which advocate institutional separation to prevent conflicts of interest and ensure transparency.

In most advanced economies, these roles are distinct. Regulatory agencies create and enforce mandatory technical regulations, national standards bodies develop voluntary standards often aligned with international frameworks, and accredited third-party conformity assessment bodies increasingly

undertake product certification and testing. Notably, the national standards bodies in developed economies like the United States and most European countries are industry-led and private, and are conceptually vested with a regulatory role. This is in contrast to such bodies in developing, low-knowledge economies, where these are governmental and are hubs of regulation. This functional separation enhances credibility, prevents dominance of a single agency, and facilitates mutual recognition agreements with foreign regulators — enabling smoother export and import processes.

India's BIS-centric model contrasts sharply with this approach. By being the standard-setter, certifier, and enforcer, BIS faces a conflict between promoting standards and imposing punitive enforcement powers. For manufacturers, especially micro, small and medium enterprises, this model translates into onerous compliance costs. The lack of differentiation in compliance rigour between high-risk consumer products and industrial B2B products, based on risk, further exacerbates economic inefficiency.

Moreover, India's enforcement infrastructure is stretched thin. Market surveillance conducted by BIS lacks systematic capacity, resulting in inconsistent follow-up and weak deterrence. Contrast this with more mature regimes where independent market surveillance agencies work closely but separately from certification bodies, leading to more effective enforcement and consumer protection. Unlike several neighbouring countries that have secured international accreditation for certification by their standards bodies — a prerequisite for mutual recognition agreements — BIS has so far not taken accreditation under applicable international standard-ISO/IEC 17065. Consequently, Indian certifications are often not accepted abroad, forcing exporters to repeat testing and certification processes, which adds cost and delay. India's inability to pursue mutual recognition agreements with major trade partners consequently weakens export competitiveness and undermines the stated goal of QCOs as trade enablers.

India's regulatory strategy also needs proper alignment with complementary institutional mechanisms for comprehensive skills development, financial capacity building, and stakeholder involvement. Despite these challenges, the rationale for technical regulation remains compelling and essential. Inadequate product safety standards expose consumers to hazards and

the overall impact to ₹48,000 crore for the current year. The government hopes to absorb the impact over time depending on the tax buoyancy level, triggered by the rate reduction, and the improvement in compliance. Whether the government succeeds in achieving this goal or not, the fact is the increased rates for over 50 items have made the government's fiscal task a little less challenging.

Another big difference in the third exercise on rate rationalisation is the manner in which the problem of an inverted duty structure in many sectors like handmade textiles and fertilisers has been addressed, and procedures for claiming input tax credit have been streamlined along with the formation of country-wide appellate bodies to resolve taxpayers' grievances.

What other differences could have made this exercise stand out compared to the previous two rounds of rate rationalisation? One, just as the GST Council took the bold decision to abolish two slabs — of 12 per cent and 28 per cent — it could have improved the GST system's average weighted effective tax rate (which has been falling in the last eight years) by opting for a new slab of, say, 8 per cent after abolishing the existing slab of 5 per cent. Not all is lost though. At the next meeting of the GST Council, it could actually provide a clear road map of gradually raising the 5 per cent slab to 8 per cent in phases in a period of about two years. Restoring the average effective tax rate to its earlier level of about 15 per cent should be treated by the GST Council as an important goal. This will also help fiscal consolidation by boosting revenue collections.

Two, preparations must be made to include petrol and diesel under the GST system. Its inclusion need not necessarily mean that the existing excise rates that are close to 57-70 per cent will have to be brought down to 40 per cent. These rates may well be kept at these levels with the help of extra miles. But once they are under the GST system, every company using petrol and diesel will benefit as they will be able to set off their tax pay-out on these products against their final tax outgo. This will be a huge benefit for companies, including the micro, small and medium enterprises, enhancing their competitiveness.

Finally, the GST tax assessment machinery has to be streamlined. It must become faceless, just as the entire direct tax assessment system has already become fully online, without any human intervention in the normal course. A timeline for making the GST assessment system completely online and faceless would be a good beginning.

The government has a short window of opportunity to bring about these pending GST reforms. They should be implemented well before the next general elections if it does not want the entire exercise to be syncretised by shallow political considerations. Remember that talks about reducing the number of slabs and cutting rates began in 2022, when the GST regime completed five years. The reduction in slabs and rates has taken more than three years to implement, with general elections in between.

A PM in his labyrinth



ADITI PHADNIS

All politicians are complex, but this outstanding book attempts to deconstruct the personality, life and times of one of the most complicated individuals to have become India's Prime Minister. That Atal Bihari Vajpayee was considered the "right man in the wrong party" is an overdone cliché. The book explores the restlessness of a personality who played a pivotal role in insinuating a new way of thinking into power politics and the Indian system — all the time racked by self-doubt.

This is a sequel to an earlier book where the author traces Vajpayee's beginnings but ends that volume at 1977 when the Jana Sangh formally joined the central government with Vajpayee as minister of external affairs. However, the volume stands alone successfully as it picks up the thread from 1977 and charts out how India arrived at its present political moment. It covers the years from the Jana Party's installation as the first non-Congress government until Vajpayee's final vote against the Indo-US civil nuclear agreement in 2008. The preface covers the later years.

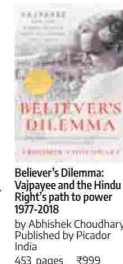
The book is valuable at many levels. In telling the story, the author has interviewed many friends and associates of Vajpayee who are no longer with us: Appa (NM) Ghatate, the lawyer whom Vajpayee counted as one of his closest friends; Madhu Deoplekar, who explained the complexity of the

relationship between the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Jana Party; the contradiction finally emerging as the proximate reason for the unravelling of the Jana Party; and Devendra Swarup, who was a historian of the RSS. All these people have died recently and the author was fortunate in recording their testimony as they were witnesses and primary sources to crucial events in Vajpayee's life. Now in their 90s, Nayabir Salgaonkar sheds new light on Vajpayee's lifelong companion, Rajkumar Kaul; Eric Gonsalves, former ambassador, and others also speak in the book.

Also of great value are the new facts the book brings to light. With confidence, Abhishek Choudhary asserts in the book that the never-married Vajpayee had a biological daughter. This is the first time this has been cited as a fact, though there has been little tattle about Vajpayee's personal life. The author has also recorded the many occasions that Vajpayee considered leaving the Jana Sangh/Bhartiya Janata Party altogether

and forming a new party. An exposition of the relationship between LK Advani and Vajpayee — both when in power and out of it — is frustratingly another book. Vajpayee's distancing from the Advani-led Rath Yatra, even his mockery of it, and then, having to defend the Babri Masjid demolition is one aspect of the relationship. But then there's the "elevation" of Mr Advani as Deputy Prime Minister, the action itself illustrating the power struggle that was on in the background in the government.

The book explains expansively the prevailing circumstances of Vajpayee's tenure as foreign minister and concludes that it was not just dual membership of the RSS that led to the demise of the Jana Party but that leaders like Morarji Desai did not sufficiently appreciate or



453 pages ₹999

accommodate the middle castes, represented by Chaman Singh. This feeling of denial would later explode as the Mandal controversy, led to the emergence of caste and social justice as an organising political principle and push the BJP towards Mandir as Advani tried to avoid the pitfalls caste represented for the organisation. As Prime Minister, Vajpayee had to deal with many threats — ranging from the very stability of the government to his own belief system. RSS leader Dattopant Thengadi's mobilisation of opinion against the economic philosophy (such as it was) of the Vajpayee government would lead Arun Shourie to describe the BJP as "Congress plus a cow". It also makes you wonder whether the Hindu "Right" is an accurate description for the party. And many today who feel

The authors are, respectively, distinguished fellow, visiting fellow, and research assistant at RIS. The views are personal

Operation Sindoor was a lost opportunity in blasting Pakistan off the face of the earth. I would wonder why Vajpayee let go of the opportunity when he had it, by telling the Cabinet Committee on Security when the Kargil war broke out. "Please don't cross the LOC. No, crossing the LOC," the author quotes him as saying in the book. A section on Vajpayee's relationship with Narendra Modi is illuminating. There are a number of minor factual errors in the book. Yashwant Sinha was never an MLA so he could not have resigned from leadership of the Opposition in Bihar in the wake of the hawala scandal. In the preface, the author writes about 2008: "India got its first minority prime minister": "minority" is as in religious? That was in 2004. Nimerical? That happened even earlier. It is not clear. But all this is trivial. The book is a detached and thorough exploration of the actual working of Hindutva in power politics, mandatory reading for all those who want to understand India.

thehindubusinessline.

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Grey zone

US-style retirement savings models may not work

Amidst changing demographics and shorter careers, India could be faced with a retirement crisis in a decade's time. The recent white paper by CRISIL Intelligence and the Association of Mutual Funds of India (AMFI), flagging this challenge and suggesting solutions, is therefore timely. However, whether the solution lies in India borrowing 401(k) plans and IRAs (Individual Retirement Accounts) from the US pension system, as the white paper recommends, requires debate.



According to the white paper, the proportion of seniors in India's population is set to rise from 11 per cent to 21 per cent by 2050, resulting in a senior population of 34.6 crore. Despite mandatory EPF (Employees Provident Fund), only 27.2 per cent of the workers are covered by mandatory pension schemes, compared to 76 per cent for OECD countries. India's pension schemes deliver a pension replacement rate of just 38.9 per cent (this is the proportion of pre-retirement income that retirees will earn). Much of these savings are parked in fixed income avenues, creating a risk of pension corpus under-shooting inflation. The white paper diagnoses the pension challenge correctly, but the solutions offered are inadequate.

It suggests policymakers should promote mutual fund-managed Voluntary Retirement Accounts (MF-VRAs) on the lines of US 401(k) and IRA plans. Workers and self-employed folk will make voluntary and tax-deductible contributions to MF-VRAs through their working life, which are locked in until 60. MF managers will take discretionary calls on how the money will be deployed over the lifecycle of the investor, subject to an initial choice between a conservative, moderate and aggressive strategy. Employers will be required to offer MF-VRAs and make their own contributions to them. The paper argues the MF industry, given its rising popularity and tight regulation by Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), is the best choice for managing pension savings.

These proposals suffer from several flaws. For one, it is not clear how MF-VRAs will co-exist with EPF and NPS — which are mandatory for private sector and government employees, respectively. To assume that savers will have room for further retirement contributions after parking mandatory sums in EPF and NPS and investing in Public Provident Fund and equity MFs, is a stretch. Two, MFs have delivered performance because investors are able to exit funds that underperform. MF-VRA investors though, will be subject to long lock-ins with a limited ability to port between VRA managers. Three, given that MF-VRAs will supplement other investments in an individuals' portfolio, it would be desirable to empower every investor to self-direct fund choices to suit her own risk profile, rather than allow the VRA manager to take this call. US 401(k) plans have been criticised for their high fees, restrictive menu and risky calls. Finally, for a less-affluent economy like India, expanding the coverage of and benefits from government-funded pension schemes is critical to averting a retirement crisis.

POCKET

RAVIKANTH



Zero GST on health insurance – A healthy move

HEALTH FIRST. Insurers must ensure that the benefit of this move is transmitted fully to the people



KK SRINIVASAN
MANAS R. DAS
GANAGA NARAYAN RATH

Finally, zero Goods & Services Tax (GST) on health insurance policies will be a reality soon. In an article titled 'Why 18% tax on health insurance?' in this paper on October 9, 2024, we had given 10 reasons for reducing substantially or abolishing GST on health insurance, and we stand vindicated.

While the decision will help all citizens, the health insurers seem to be somewhat uncomfortable as 'input tax credit' will not be available to them to defray partly the operational costs. This has raised concerns over the full transmission of the GST benefit to the insurance seeker.

Insurance world over has gained a reputation of being focussed solely on profits. But insurance, by definition, is meant to be a low-cost business. Basically, the insurers are required to manage the 'risk fund' created out of premium collections with minimum administrative and distribution costs. However, over time, insurance has turned into a high-cost business with huge internal salaries and commissions to agents, brokers and intermediaries, together accounting for 30-35 per cent per some estimates.

Consequently, the risk fund is eroded upfront, and any increase in claims is offset by increase in premiums. Moreover, insurers enjoy zero credit risk in premium collections, as in India, premiums, by law, are collected in advance.

For insurers, the positive way to render insurance affordable and widely penetrable is to curb operational costs.

However, there could be negative reasons. For instance, there could be: (a) 'product differentiation' favouring higher premium policies, i.e., exclusion of certain facilities or benefits from 'standard' policies and their inclusion in 'premium' policies or (b) delay in claim settlement or random chopping of claimed sums by exploiting weaknesses in the grievance redressal mechanism. The Finance Minister has assured that the government would persuade insurers to transmit the full benefit to the people.

However, if transmission does not happen, the option of disciplinary action against the errant firms must be exercised.

In India, health insurance penetration is low because the insurers believe that generally, the standard of health of Indians is not good enough, living conditions are poor and incidence of diseases is more so that premium rates cannot be kept low enough. As a corollary, they focus on urban and metro areas instead of rural and semi-urban (RUSU) areas.

However, 'health awareness' is spreading in all areas. There are both quantitative and qualitative 'shifts' in food habits and greater focus on physical fitness which will likely continue following the current across-the-board reductions in GST.

Besides, availability of public as well as private health services is slowly but surely improving, especially in RUSU

**Health insurers should
view the issue of
'affordability' as an
opportunity and
penetrate the market**

areas, although affordability remains an issue.

Health insurers should view the issue of 'affordability' as an opportunity and penetrate the market. Moreover, health insurance is a recurrent business — yearly renewals are mandatory to keep a policy alive.

General insurers who also provide health insurance (i.e., excluding the Stand-Alone Health Insurers) have the leverage of cross-subsidising the low health premium by charging more premium in other business segments like automobile insurance, the demand for which is largely inelastic.

And, with reduction in GST on small cars, tractors, etc., this business is set to grow further.

Viewed from this perspective, this provides opportunity for the general insurers to explore new business areas such as catastrophe/climate insurance, which is the need of the hour.

The decision will likely stimulate cross-selling of insurance products by the public sector banks (PSBs) and private sector banks (PvBs). In this respect, the former is better placed than the latter as they own huge database of their customers, including in the RUSU areas, thanks to their participation in the financial inclusion drive. Therefore, for PSBs, customer acquisition cost will be low, unlike PvBs who have to work on this front further.

However, cross-selling needs proper staffing and incentivisation, besides curbs on mis-selling.

The government would find it easier to persuade the public sector general insurance players including PSBs doing cross-selling; however, negotiating with the private sector players (including banks) may pose some difficulties. Nevertheless, we expect 'competition,' coupled with 'economies of scale' that would accrue in the medium term, would make things easier.

THE PRE-REQUISITES

The 18 per cent GST was not the only retardant against health insurance penetration. There are many other kinks that require mending in order to facilitate GST abolition to make the penetration deeper, especially in the RUSU areas.

The insurance business is 'agent-driven' because insurance products are harder to understand than banking products. So the financial literacy drive, which has so far focused on banking, must be extended to insurance with insurance agents playing a crucial role.

People must be nudged to avail themselves of proper medical care which health insurance can facilitate. Here, personal touch, instead of mechanical messages, holds the key.

Poor standard of health especially among the young imposes colossal costs on a nation. The health insurers, among others, must realise this and shrug their profit obsession so that when the country, in the near future, graduates into an upper-middle class economy, they can also reap commensurate benefit.

India also needs an exclusive health insurance regulator.

One of its functions should be to ensure that the insurers, hospitals and Third Party Administrators are kept at arm's length.

There is merit in the argument favouring a regulator for private hospitals which are mushrooming across the country with many of them being corporatised. The hospitals are largely driving medical inflation.

In sum, GST abolition on health insurance is expected to promote 'inclusive insurance'.

Srinivasan is a former wholtime member, IRDAI. Das is a former Assistant General Manager (Economist), SBI. Rath is a former central banker. Views are personal.

Railways' freight reform plan moves at slow speed

Given that rail is a greener and cheaper mode, the Railways must make a serious push to capture more freight traffic

Sudhanshu Mani

The National Logistics Policy (NLP), launched in September 2022, seeks to reduce logistics costs to 8 per cent from the current 13-14 per cent of GDP by 2030, through an integrated, cross-sectoral framework. By promoting infrastructure development, digital integration, and better coordination across stakeholders, the policy aims to create a seamless, technology-driven logistics ecosystem.

The PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan launched in October 2022 complements the NLP by integrating multiple modes of transport into a coordinated network while promoting multi-modal logistics parks and allied infrastructure to boost connectivity and efficiency.

Railways are a far greener and cheaper mode of transport vis-à-vis road or air and enhancing freight carriage by Indian Railways (IR), therefore, is of significance. So reducing logistics costs hinges on raising the modal share of rail freight from around 27 per cent in 2022 to 45 per cent by 2030, increasing average freight train speeds from around 25 kmph to 50 kmph, and achieving originating loading of 3000 million tonnes (mt) by 2027 — objectives that

also formed part of IR's own initiatives like the National Rail Plan (NRP), Mission Rafta and Mission 3000 mt.

The performance of IR so far, in spite of massive infra spending in recent years, has been remarkably underwhelming. Rail freight share has dwindled to about 25 per cent, and average freight train speeds have not improved despite commissioning of Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFCs). Originating loading in FY25 was only 1617 mt, with annual growth of loading and freight earnings at less than 2 per cent in spite of the economy growing at over 6 per cent.

It was, therefore, surprising when Minister of Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari recently affirmed that India's logistics cost would fall to single digits by end-2026, while inaugurating major highway projects with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. But better roads alone cannot achieve this, as long-distance road haulage is inherently costlier than rail. The Minister, however, did not explain how this target could be met given the rail sector's lacklustre performance.

There has been some progress in ULIP, the digital initiative to integrate systems and data sources for seamless information exchange, and in developing Gati Shakti multi-modal



FREIGHT TRAFFIC. Need to speed up

terminals (GCTs). GCTs number 80 today nationwide, though many were redesignated from ongoing works to pad the count, with 200 under plans through public-private partnership. GCTs are expected to leverage the DFCs, which currently operate only four terminals, with six more expected by FY26. Yet, despite these efforts, IR continues to cite "early days" for the lack of freight impact. That excuse wears thin: four years have passed since freight targets were set, and the promised dividends remain elusive.

IR's freight basket of coal, cement, iron ore, steel, foodgrains, fertilizers and P.O.L. has changed little in decades. The share of coal — expected to decline with pithead power plants and climate

concerns — has actually increased. IR's share can rise only by attracting new traffic such as containers, automobiles, bulk cement, flyash, and consumer and perishable goods, whereas progress has been limited to the first two.

Carrying these commodities requires bold initiatives — tariff rationalisation, incentive schemes with genuine autonomy at zonal and divisional levels, development and deployment of special-purpose wagons, augmenting commodity-specific customised containerisation, time-tables freight trains and private partnership. Progress in these areas remains sluggish, and customer-centric efforts rare.

Take flyash, out of about 250 mt available, IR carries only 10 mt. Despite a plan to move it in special containers, the bureaucracy failed to resolve operators' concerns on high turnaround time and uncompetitive tariffs.

Also the much-touted Gati Shakti freight trains focus narrowly on speed of rail transfer, ignoring more critical issues of multiple handling and first-and-last mile linkages. It is high time IR sheds inertia, and crafts imaginative policies to capture traffic that rightly belongs to rail.

The writer is Retd. GM, Indian Railways and Independent Consultant Leader, Vande Bharat project

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Cotton import threat

Apropos, 'Perils of duty-free cotton imports', (September 9), duty-free cotton imports, though framed as an economic stabiliser for the textile sector, have paradoxically dealt a debilitating blow to India's agrarian sector.

Cotton imports have triggered a precipitous price decline, thereby destabilising farm-gate revenues in regions already plagued by monsoonal vagaries and escalating cultivation costs. Farmers, deprived of remunerative returns, confront a dual assault of shrinking margins and heightened indebtedness. This policy, while cushioning

industrial stakeholders, has exacerbated structural inequities in the agricultural economy by externalising costs onto cultivators. A nuanced recalibration is needed — one that harmonises industrial exigencies with agrarian sustainability to safeguard rural livelihoods.

N Sadhasiva Reddy
Bengaluru

A welcome deal

It is with reference to the news 'India, Israel sign pact to further boost trade and investments' (September 9). This is a welcome move. This is a strategic step that will open

new doors for both Israeli and Indian investors, strengthen Israeli exports and provide businesses on both sides.

India is Israel's second largest country partner in Asia. Major exports from India to Israel include pearls and precious stones, chemical and mineral products, machinery and electrical equipment and transport equipment.

P Victor Selvaraj
Palayamkottai (TN)

Market peril

This refers to the Pocket Cartoon (September 9). Hats off to the cartoonist for creating such a

wonderful idea.

For sure, this profit savvy gentleman must be living in a fool's paradise. But the fact also remains that most of the retail investors tend to invest huge sums of money solely with an eye on making some quick money sans doing the proper home work. So it's hardly a surprise that many end up losing money in the stock markets.

All that glitters may not always be gold.

SK Gupta
New Delhi

Reward farmers' struggle

With reference to the news report

'Dairy Board to make Desi 'Starter cultures' (September 9). Much needed measures to curb import dependence and promote Atmanirbhar. However, the success of RUC culture is highly dependent on the struggle of domestic dairy farmers, who have to contend with the uncertainty of unreliable price realisation. Therefore the NDBO must advise big dairy brands to share a portion of profit out of this new venture to level the field for farmers, as a tribute to their toil, if not as a remuneration for their struggle.

Rajiv Magal
Halekere Village (Karnataka)

Uplift women in dairying

Training, targeted support can make a difference

Saurabh Bandyopadhyay
Ajaya K Sahu
Bornali Bhandari

India's livestock sector is experiencing a transformation, and women are at its core. The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) and NCAER (2025) study titled, 'National Skill Gap Study for High Growth Sectors', assessed the skill shortages and gaps in the sector, raising cattle and buffaloes.

The MSDE-NCAER study used the Periodic Labour Force Survey (2022-23) data to show that the employment in the livestock sector increased at a compound annual growth rate of 20.8 per cent between 2017-18 and 2022-23. This sector employed 5 per cent of the country's workforce. And 82 per cent of the women engaged in 'raising cattle and buffaloes' were women.

Despite their dominance in this sector, more than 80 per cent of the female workers were 'animal workers' and were employed either as self-employed workers (79 per cent) or unpaid family workers (20.7 per cent). Only 0.13 per cent of the women workers were Business Services and Administration Managers and 0.01 per cent of the female workers were Managing Directors and Chief Executives.

LOW-PAID LABOUR

Essentially, women are mostly engaged in low-paid, labour-intensive jobs such as feeding, milking, and cleaning. The MSDE-NCAER study also found minimal female representation in skilled or managerial roles. Majority of the female workers in this sector were low-skilled (51 per cent) characterised by illiteracy or literacy below primary education.

Essentially, the problem in this sector is two-fold. First, female workers in the sector are stuck in a low-equilibrium trap. Milk production is also characterised by low productivity. Second, the MSDE-NCAER (2025) study shows that there are skill shortages in formal job roles like veterinary technician/assistant, mechanic-refrigeration and air-conditioning, dairy technologists, and managers of dairy farms.

For the first problem, the Gujarat model shows a way out, where women-run dairies supported by financial assistance and leadership training have elevated their incomes and roles



DAIRY OPERATIONS. Women need to move up the value chain

within the value chain (NDDB Annual Reports). Women-led cooperatives and self-help groups (SHGs) offer promising models that can be replicated across States. However, several structural barriers remain. Limited access to land, financial credit, and market linkages prevent women from scaling up dairy operations. The following measures can address the dual nature of the skill problems:

Recognition of prior learning, re-skilling and upskilling of women milker/animal workers/dairy farmers:

Literacy programmes can be combined with vocational training programmes like Jan Shiksha Sansthan (JSS) programmes in specific blocks;

Mobile training units — delivering on-the-ground technical and business skills in rural areas;

Women-only training centres — equipping women with practical knowledge in AI techniques, fodder conservation, and dairy technology;

Impart knowledge of animal husbandry

Financial inclusion schemes — providing microcredit, subsidies, and insurance for women entrepreneurs (NABARD 2018). **Gender-sensitive dairy policies** — ensuring equal cooperative membership, land rights, and leadership representation (FAO 2009).

Provide entrepreneurship skills for workers likely to be engaged in self-employment

Scholarships for women in dairy science, incentivising higher education for women in veterinary and dairy-related disciplines (U-DISE+ 2022-23).

Scholarships for women in dairy management

The future of India's dairy sector depends on how well we empower women — through education, training, and targeted support.

Bandyopadhyay is a Senior Fellow, Sahu is a Fellow, and Bhandari is a Professor, at NCAER. Views are personal

HIRE Bill shakes up IT players

Trump camp's rallying cry piles pressure on India's tech titans already battling shrinking margins from AI

THE WIDER ANGLE.

PARAN BALAKRISHNAN

It's a private member's bill that's unlikely to win passage. But the Halt International Relocation of Employment (HIRE) Bill introduced in the US Senate has sent a chill through India's software services industry. Add to that the aggressive messaging from far-right activists Laura Loomer, an ally of US President Donald Trump, who is calling on Washington to "make call centres American again."

India's IT giants have no choice but to pay attention. The HIRE Bill proposes a 25 per cent tariff on all work sent abroad. That could devastate India's star IT players, while also hurting scores of other countries. At the same time, it would raise costs for US companies, which would have to get their work done domestically or pay a tariff on anything outsourced. The biggest US firms would be badly impacted, points out Pareek Jain, founder of ELIR Trend, who adds: "This is only to create pressure because they have challenges in their market about employment."

BUSINESS MODEL

But passed or not, the HIRE Bill drives home the fact that India's software services companies will have to rethink their business models and the way they operate. The HIRE Bill is just one danger on the horizon; the greater challenge is AI, which threatens to upend the industry's way of functioning.

Almost all Indian IT players have focused the bulk of their attention on the US. India's tech outsourcing machine sells more to North America than anywhere else.

NASSCOM's annual review estimates the industry will clock about \$282 billion this fiscal year, with over 62 per cent of exports headed there. Any US move to limit or ban outsourcing would result in a massive hit.

Take the big three: TCS derived 48.2 per cent of revenue from North America last year, according to company figures.



TIME TO CHANGE. Indian software giants must now hire top-tier talent capable of working with fast-evolving AI models GETTY IMAGES

Infosys booked 57.9 per cent. Wipro reported around 60 per cent.

It may now be time to look more seriously at Europe and the Global South. Indian IT firms already hold plenty of contracts in Europe, but the US has always been the easiest market. Now, newer fields of operation such as Southeast Asia and Africa may have to come into sharper focus. These markets could be tough to penetrate at first, but a start must be made.

Despite the US row over outsourcing, Indian companies have landed sizeable contracts in recent months. But both the Indian firms and their American clients are keen to downplay the size of those deals to avoid controversy. As a result, several contracts have been structured

Over the last two decades, Indian IT services companies have perfected a model that depends on large volumes of work done by low-paid junior employees

as long-term arrangements, spread over years.

Still, there's a catch. Over the last two decades, Indian IT services companies have perfected a model that depends on large volumes of work done by low-paid junior employees. But AI is reducing the role of junior staff, notes Jain. This means margins are being squeezed on almost every project: the old profit engine — cheap juniors doing bulk work — vanishes, but the replacement model hasn't yet developed the same margins.

"If you reduce the number of junior employees, the overall project margins are coming down," Jain says.

Can Indian companies raise prices to compensate? "Then global companies become more competitive. Your advantage is that your price is less," Jain observes.

The reality is that Indian software giants must now hire top-tier talent capable of working with fast-evolving AI models.

Almost three decades ago, Indian companies muscled into the US and beyond by offering to do work for 25 per cent less than anyone else. Today, they face the danger of being undercut in the

same way, this time by Eastern European rivals wielding AI to drive costs even lower. If everyone uses similar AI tools, projects become more standardised. That makes it harder for Indian IT firms to charge a premium, further squeezing profits.

The only way forward is to start raising salaries and bring in the best talent possible. But heavy investments in AI tools and infrastructure will erode the margin advantage they once gained from cheap junior staff. And that poses another problem: shrinking margins could immediately hit share prices.

One fact is certain: corporations worldwide will continue to need services and people to manage them. "You might need 20 per cent fewer people. But there are so many AI models, so much software. They will need someone to manage all this," Jain says. However, the business model and pricing will be different.

Are Indian companies ready to tackle this new tech world order? That's the giant question looming over the industry. If they don't move quickly, a new challenger could emerge, using new technology to undercut India's old stars.

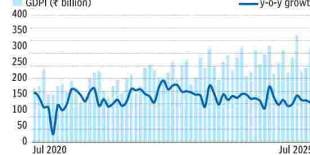
STATISTALK.

Compiled by Dhruval Gunasekaran | Graphic: Visweswaran V

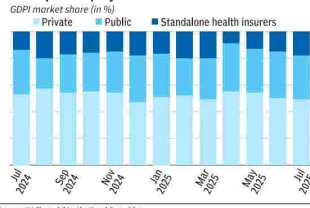
Fire fuels growth as general insurance sector slows in July: JM Financial

India's general insurance industry posted a modest 3% growth in Gross Direct Premium Income (GDPI) in July 2025, according to a report by JM Financial Institutional Securities. The fire segment led with 28% YoY growth, while crop premiums slumped 36%. Fire has been the standout performer, with consistent monthly acceleration from 16% to 28% YoY growth so far in FY26. The motor segment is losing steam, slowing from 11% to 6% growth. Health insurance remains subdued at 3% due to accounting changes, though standalone health insurers (SAHIs) maintained a steady growth momentum. Private players continue to face headwinds, while SAHIs demonstrate resilience so far in FY26.

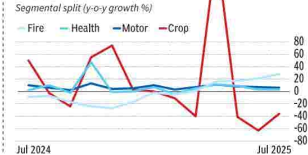
Industry growth volatility persists: moderates to 3% in July from 13% April 2025 peak
Gross Direct Premium Income (GDPI) growth (YoY%) for the industry



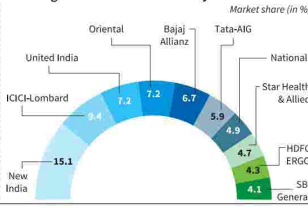
Standalone health insurers gain ground while private players lose market share
GDPI market share (in %)



The fire segment led with 28% y-o-y growth, while crop premiums slumped 36%
Segmental split (y-o-y growth %)



Top 10 players (GDPI basis for YTD FY26) in the general insurance industry
Market share (in %)



thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

September 10, 2005

SAT sets aside SEBI order in UBS Sec case

The Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT) today set aside the SEBI order of May 17, 2005, debarbing UBS Securities Asia from issuing participatory notes for one year. The two-member tribunal said: "We do not find any reason to uphold the orders issued by the market regulators. We also do not find there is violation of SEBI (Foreign Institutional Investors) regulations."

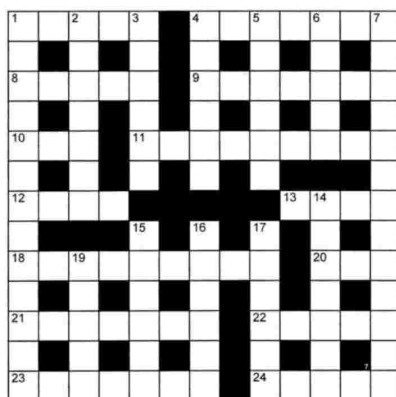
Maruti to roll out diesel cars by end-2006

Upbeat about the potential of 25 million two-wheeler buyers in the last five years upgrading to cars, Maruti Udyog Ltd said it was all set to tap this opportunity with an aggressive product rollout plan and would launch diesel cars by 2006-end.

RBI to approve opening/closing of bank branches annually

The RBI will now give aggregate approvals on an annual basis for the opening, closing, or shifting of all categories of branches and offices, including ATMs. According to a notification issued by the central bank, the approval will be given through a "consultative and interactive process" and would be valid for one year from the date of communication.

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2779



EASY

ACROSS

- The earth (5)
- Highly wicked, atrocious (7)
- Give up, transfer money (5)
- Inert, lethargic (7)
- Type confusedly mixed (3)
- Getting louder (mus) (9)
- Kiln to dry herbs (5)
- Reduce to carbon (4)
- Followers, attendants (9)
- Gratuity (3)
- Surrounded by the sea (3-4)
- Native pigment (5)
- Stock-farmer in America (7)
- Palm fruit (5)

DOWN

- Computerised type producer (4,9)
- Large drinking-glasses (7)
- Discern, find out (6)
- Jack, sticker of piano (6)
- Invertebrate such as butterfly (6)
- Pungent bulb (5)
- Short-hand-typists (Am) (13)
- Small axe (7)
- Make one suffer for offence (6)
- Humorous rallery (6)
- Empty, free (6)
- Direct, aim gun (5)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- The earth was spinning, one is told (5)
- Very wicked shine may be taken out of the Open University (7)
- Send money for clock to be put back (5)
- I've first to get through the grammarian's voice (7)
- Shepherd's made a mess of the type (3)
- Getting louder, score might finish on C (9)
- It dries, as it's found in the earlier Bible part (4)
- A lady to clean the fish (4)
- The followers have note to argue about (9)
- Indicate favourite leafbud for tea (3)
- To be surrounded by water is great in potential (3,4)
- Money, some say, for yellow pigment (5)
- He farms on the large scale, making the Navy reach out (7)
- Arranges to go out with times historians use (5)

DOWN

- Computer that writes crossword rope has to be given to (4,9)
- Large glasses for Summer may be about right (7)
- Make out I've wanted to be a sleuth (6)
- Jack hasn't started the helicopter (6)
- Shepherd's made a mess of the type (3)
- Flaming rocket might have had one in tears (5)
- They take notes, her grasp of which they type out (13)
- This critical job will give one the chop (7)
- Make one suffer his mistaken play on words first (6)
- Chaff from ten perhaps in the saloon (6)
- Not having any, I've odd way of showing it (6)
- Get ready to perform with a number of coaches (5)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2778

ACROSS 1. Pandemonium 8. Larva 9. Disowns 10. Clutter 11. Poise 12. Theirs 14. Advice 18. Clamp 19. Trample 21. Pontoon 23. Trope 24. Refreshment
DOWN 1. Polecat 2. Nurture 3. Epact 4. Orders 5. Inspired 6. Mow 7. Waste 13. Reproof 15. Improve 16. Element 17. Stance 18. Capar 20. Aitch 22. Nor