

Word of caution

Retail investors should be aware of the risks of investing in highly valued IPOs

THE LISTING POP that most retail investors play for when they subscribe to an initial public offering (IPO) didn't quite work out with Lenskart. The stock listed at a discount of about 3% to the issue price of ₹402 on the National Stock Exchange, and dipped to an intra-day low of ₹355.70. The IPO had sparked quite a debate given how the shares were richly-valued at a trailing price-to-earnings (P/E) multiple of an eye-popping 238 times and a price-to-sales multiple of 8-9x. For perspective, the BSE Consumer Discretionary index trades at a P/E multiple of 45 times. Moreover, many highlighted the high offer for sale component, that is 70% of the total issue size of ₹7,278 crore, wondering why so many investors were selling shares if the company's prospects were so bright. Yet, in the midst of an IPO frenzy, the issue sailed through, subscribed over 28 times.

To be sure, the company may yet do well and give investors a good return. However, retail investors who are apparently taking a cue from institutions on whether to invest should be aware that the latter are not always buying into an IPO because they believe it's a good investment. There could be other factors at play. To begin with, the anchor investors, who are subscribing to the IPO at the same price as retail investors, may be putting in very small sums, as small as 0.1-0.2% of their assets under management. In that case, one might ask why they are going through the trouble of investing at all. As Devina Mehra, a former investment banker, explains, for anchor investors the investment bankers are free to allot shares at their discretion.

Essentially, the relationship between the bankers and the wholesale investors like mutual funds (MFs) often works on a quid pro quo basis. So, when an IPO is over-priced, investment bankers use their clout to get the MFs to buy a small amount and, in a sense, lend their names to the issue. In return for this, they are assured a good allotment in an IPO that is reasonably valued and where the MFs actually want a holding. So while it may seem like the top MFs are all scrambling to get a share of a richly-valued IPO, they are essentially subscribing to it so as not to miss out on a future allotment that they might want.

New-age technology company stocks are difficult to understand since many of the business models are completely new and the companies don't boast much of a track record in terms of financials. Many start-ups continue to report losses post-listing and probably have a long way to go before they become profitable. To that extent, it is often a leap of faith because one is not sure of how the company will deal with emerging competitors that might turn out to be even more disruptive. There is also the chance of regulatory changes—as we have seen in the fintech space. Investors have lost money in several new-age IPOs—Paytm, for instance. Others like Eternal have delivered great value. Many of them continue to report losses in one quarter or another—such as Ola Electric, Swiggy, Mobikwik, Delhivery, and Urban Company—but might go on to do well. As long as they are aware of the risks, small investors can take their chances.

● WHAT'S IN A NAME?

NEW YORKERS—AND AMERICANS—ARE RE-IMAGINING WHAT FAIRNESS LOOKS LIKE & HOW IT MIGHT BE ACHIEVED

# Mamdani: A message of hope

WHAT'S IN A name? In Zohran Mamdani's case, it is a message of hope, not least because he has scarce administrative experience and was elected to the New York state assembly as recently as 2021. Contrary to what many in the Indian media have said, he is the first African citizen and first Muslim to be elected mayor of America's largest city, New York.

His father was a Ugandan citizen of Indian origin, his mother an Indian citizen who took up US citizenship. He was born Ugandan and went to the US as one at the age of seven. His very name—Zohran Kwame Mamdani—reflects a mix of African, Indian, and Muslim origins. He now holds dual Ugandan and US citizenship. Indians should not claim him as an "Indian" because that has never been his defining citizenship. The US, after all, is a multicultural country and the only one to have viewed itself as a nation of immigrants. Many Ugandans have hailed his electoral win in New York but this is hardly reported in the Indian media. Moreover, Indians could remember his critique of Narendra Modi for thinking that only a certain kind of Indian is an Indian—to which Delhi has not replied.

That said, Mamdani represents a win against the Trump administration which is dividing Americans, cutting down social benefits, forcing a shut-down of government, and cruelly forcing some immigrants to return to dictatorships, where their survival is in question. He has challenged Donald Trump's deployment of the National Guard to clamp down on dissent.

During New York's election campaign, Trump threatened to cut federal funding to the tune of \$18 billion for New York's infrastructure projects if

ANITA INDER SINGH

Founding Professor, Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution, New Delhi



Mamdani was elected. In a U-turn of sorts, he has subsequently said he will give the city "a little".

Mamdani defines himself as democratic socialist, in a country where "socialism" has long been condemned as a dirty word, identified with everything from the former Soviet dictatorship and sky-high taxes on the rich in democracies. Promising accessibility and fairness, he has assured New Yorkers of free public transport, higher minimum wages, and expanded social services, including universal child care, city-owned grocery stores, and a rent freeze.

How will he finance such programmes? By increasing corporate tax in New York and asking the city's millionaires to pay an additional 2% in income tax to raise money. Some New York businesspeople have opposed his plans; others have supported them.

Mamdani's focus on affordability contributed to his historic win in an election that turned out local voters in the greatest numbers since 1969.

Generally, the vote for Mamdani is an anti-establishment vote and has little to do with his ethnic, cultural, or racial origins. Like Barack Obama, the first "coloured" American president, he impresses on the world that politicians

should be defined by their politico-socio-economic beliefs, programmes, and actions. Mamdani's campaign of hope and inclusion has given many voters a good taste of genuinely transformative Democratic politics—which the Clintons, Joe Biden, and Kamala Harris failed to do. The unfortunate result was the victory of Trump, who has committed many illegal acts and is destabilising the US, the world, international law, and the global economy. Mamdani's triumph at the New York level signals a desire for peaceful, not Trumpian, disruptive change.

Over time, he has challenged those Americans who dislike labels like "socialist". At a time when young Americans face downward mobility in the face of liberal capitalism, housing, education, and unaffordable health care costs, job insecurity, and stagnating wages, New York's economy no longer rewards hard work as it once did.

New Yorkers—and Americans—are now re-imagining what fairness looks like and how it might be achieved.

Like Sadiq Khan, London's Muslim mayor who has been elected a record-breaking three consecutive times, Mamdani defines himself as a politician who happens to be a Muslim. Like Khan,

he asserts that he will be mayor for all citizens of his great city. Islamophobes like Trump—and in other countries—fail to understand his refusal to be defined by his faith. The pro-Israel lobby condemns him as anti-Semitic; other Jews have supported him. Understandably, he wants to show that he has won by addressing voters' concerns, rather than deceiving them. And that his religion does not make it impossible for him to serve them.

**No smooth sailing for Mamdani**

Mamdani's relationship with Washington is likely to be the most immediate challenge.

At the local level, Mamdani must persuade Kathy Hochul, the governor of New York, to raise taxes. She is running for re-election next year and is wary of tax increases that would offend many potential voters statewide. All the more so since Mamdani succeeded with just 50.4% of the vote. That is a small majority. Trump's favoured candidate, Andrew Cuomo, won 41.6% of votes, and the Republican nominee, Curtis Silwa, 7.1%.

Sceptics opine that Mamdani's interpretation of class struggle in the context of law enforcement and public education could create problems with New York's police, who, in recent years, have been able to bring down crime.

Mamdani's team asserts that politics is about "managing a set of obstacles". They could also remember that voters elect politicians to successfully address their problems rather than to create problems that block every possible solution.

Those messages resonate worldwide. Citizens and governments of democracies will scrutinise Mamdani's record with great interest.

## Is Silicon Valley being built on Chinese AI?

NVIDIA CORP CHIEF Executive Officer Jensen Huang recently declared to the *Financial Times* that: "China is going to win the AI race." He later softened his stance, saying the US's rival was merely "nanoseconds behind", and that it's vital America comes out on top "by racing ahead and winning developers worldwide".

Huang's initial assessment is simplistic, and the motives for his negativity about the US are transparent. He has spent the past year arguing that America benefits from his company selling chips to the Chinese market despite Washington's encroaching export controls. But he is right to worry that the battle for developers may already be slipping away.

In recent weeks, a subtle shift has become increasingly apparent. Speculation has been stirring for months that low-cost, open-source Chinese AI models could lure global users away from US offerings. But now it appears they are also quietly winning over Silicon Valley.

Venture capitalist Chamath Palihapitiya recently said on his influential All-In podcast—co-hosted by White House AI czar David Sacks—that a company he works with has offloaded major workloads to Kimi K2, developed by Beijing-based Moonshot AI. The open-source model, he said, is "frankly just a ton cheaper than OpenAI and Anthropic". Shortly after, Airbnb CEO Brian Chesky admitted that he didn't integrate his travel app with OpenAI's ChatGPT because the connective tools weren't "quite ready". Airbnb's new service agent leans on more than a dozen different AI models, Chesky said. They are "relying a lot" on Alibaba Group Holding Ltd's Qwen line-up: "It's very good. It's also fast and cheap." His comments are especially notable given Chesky's close personal relationship with OpenAI CEO Sam Altman.

The list of overt acknowledgements is growing. Thinking Machines Lab, the start-up founded by OpenAI's former Chief Technology Officer Mira Murati, said in a blog-post that its latest research was inspired by the work of Alibaba's Qwen3 team.

But what might be more interesting are the more subtle ways this shift appears to be taking root. Cursor, a much-hyped AI coding leader valued at some \$10 billion, released a new version of its assistant last month. Internet conjecture has since mounted that it was built on top of a Chinese AI tool like DeepSeek, after a tech investor pointed out on X that it switched its inner monologue to Mandarin while he was using it.

Another hot US-based company, Cognition AI Inc, also valued at around \$10 billion, appears to have built its new coding agent off a base model from Ziphu AI, known internationally as Z.ai. After social media sleuths posted about their suspicions, the Beijing-based firm seemed to confirm their findings in a tweet, saying it "highlights the positive impact and value of open-source contributions to the ecosystem". Both US companies didn't immediately respond to my emailed requests for comment. But the permissive licensing nature of Chinese AI models means that they are free for companies to build products on top of.

Data from Hugging Face's platform compiled by the ATOM Project, a US coalition in support of open-source AI, confirmed that. Chinese models have overtaken the US in terms of cumulative downloads by developers. The shift happened slowly, then all at once: In early 2024, Meta Platforms Inc's Llama had 10.6 million downloads to Alibaba Qwen's meagre half a million. By last month, Qwen had 385.3 million cumulative downloads compared to Llama's 346.2 million. And derivative systems built on Qwen now account for more than 40% of new language models posted on Hugging Face, while Meta's share has fallen to 15%.

There have been geopolitical concerns about international users flocking to Chinese AI tools, specifically the potential for Communist Party ideologies to be embedded in outputs. But for developers racing to ship products, especially in the coding and software development sectors, these risks become less of a concern—especially when weighing for price and performance. Open models can also be downloaded, fine-tuned and run locally, mitigating content and data privacy anxieties.

It's premature for Huang to declare a winner. The US still has clear advantages when it comes to access to cutting-edge chips and computing power, critical components in developing advanced systems. But Beijing's low-cost and open-source push is undoubtedly attracting developers, the backbone of AI innovation.

If Washington truly wants to come out on top in the long run, it should start by asking why Silicon Valley is already switching sides.



CATHERINE THORBECKE

Bloomberg

## Fuelling growth with credit reform



SHWETA RAJPAL KOHLI

President & CEO, Startup Policy Forum

India is at an inflection point, as the country's economic growth depends on unblocking credit access for millions of small enterprises

INDIA'S ECONOMIC AMBITIONS hinge on the strength and resilience of its small businesses. Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are the backbone of India's economy, accounting for nearly 30% of the country's GDP, and employing over 110 million people. Yet, despite their scale and significance, MSMEs remain one of the most underfinanced sectors in the economy. Access to capital remains their single biggest bottleneck.

As India aspires to double its GDP and build inclusive growth, ensuring accessible, affordable credit for MSMEs is no longer just a sectoral issue—it is a national economic imperative. Today most MSMEs, especially the smallest ones, still find it difficult to borrow because they do not have enough collateral, long credit histories, or direct relationships with banks.

At a time when the government is aiming to transform India into a global manufacturing and services hub, fixing MSME credit must be a national priority. The solution lies in enabling more risk-taking, smarter partnerships to leverage innovations, and greater flow of capital into this sector.

**Bringing down cost of capital**

Today, many fintech lenders and non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) are willing to serve MSMEs, including those outside the reach of traditional banking. But they borrow at a much higher cost than banks do, particularly when offering unsecured

loans. The cost gap can be as high as 7-8 percentage points. Clearly, there is a need to open newer sources of funding like foreign capital and infusion of insurance capital into the fintech companies that prioritise lending to MSMEs. The government could bridge this by creating an incentive mechanism—similar to priority-sector funds in agriculture—that reduces capital costs for NBFCs lending to MSMEs. Public sector banks can also be encouraged to partner and co-lend with fintechs.

Currently, MSME loans are included under priority sector lending (PSL). However, younger and lower-rated NBFCs often don't qualify for PSL benefits, as public sector banks require a minimum A-family rating, excluding many innovative fintechs and NBFCs. Their participation will need an incentive structure.

**Making credit guarantees work better**

The core focus of the existing government guarantee schemes, such as the Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises, are critical for encouraging lenders to support smaller businesses and aiming towards the larger vision of financial inclusion. But their design needs urgent updating.

Today, guarantors do not easily travel with a portfolio when it is sold. Nor do they always cover co-lending arrangements. This ultimately impacts the MSME sector, preventing them from financial lending access.

Pricing norms, like rate capping and pricing caps for coverage, also differ for NBFCs versus banks, making it harder for smaller lenders to compete fairly. Aligning these rules would unlock significant new flows of guaranteed credit.

**Building better data highways**

Digital public infrastructure has been a big success for India, but MSME credit demands more. We should expand the Account Aggregator framework to cover partnerships and companies, and all bank accounts, not just individuals. Simplified online verification of goods and services tax (GST), PAN, and Udyam registrations should be made available as public application programming interface (API). Lenders and approved licensed service providers should be allowed secure, consent-based access to bureau data, KYC, and DigiLocker—without multiple bureau pulls that accidentally harm a borrower's credit score.

MSMEs currently face the burden of completing two digital KYCs despite

struggling to get one credible KYC. The process also requires physical verification of original documents, which is outdated. A streamlined single KYC, especially for sole proprietors, and allowing alternatives like bank account verification are urgently needed. A streamlined process of single KYC for business or secondary data, such as verified addresses from e-commerce platforms, can help bridge the KYC gap.

**Fighting fraud with tech**

Finally, public APIs that can instantly validate PAN-Aadhaar linkage, GST numbers, and Udyam certificates will cut fraud risk while making compliance easier for honest businesses.

**A call to action**

India is at an inflection point. Our entrepreneurial energy and digital rails have created unprecedented possibilities for small businesses. Yet, without addressing the financing friction, the MSME growth story will remain incomplete. The need to have more fintechs lending to MSMEs is now a growing one for the overall growth of Indian MSMEs. The government, regulators, and banks must now take the next big step in recognising a new category of fintech MSME lenders, and create incentive structures, modernise guarantees, embrace cash flow-based lending, and expand the pipes of data. With these reforms, MSMEs can finally receive the fuel they need to power India's economic future.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Climate crisis

Apropos of "Healing the Planet" (*FE*, November 10), the climate crisis reflects not only negligence but also a deep fracture in global governance and shared responsibility. The world urgently needs an enforceable framework that transforms commitments into measurable action, with fairness and accountability at its core. India can play a pivotal leadership role among developing nations, leveraging its growing tech and economic

capabilities to shape a cooperative model of green growth. By fostering South-South partnerships, promoting affordable renewable technologies, and championing climate finance reforms, it can help build a collective front that demands both equity and support from the developed world. The revival of multilateralism must rest on this balance, where wealthy nations uphold their historical obligations, and emerging economies, led by India, are empowered to achieve sustainable progress while meeting

their developmental aspirations. —Amarjeet Kumar, Hazaribagh

**Beyond rhetoric**

The 30th Conference of the Parties (COP30) epitomises the transition from rhetoric to tangible execution. A decade since the Paris Agreement's ratification, the chasm between ambition and actualisation has widened, while climatic adversities have intensified. Global greenhouse gas emissions remain static, undermining the 1.5°C threshold. Mitigation policies, central

to climate resilience, continue to flounder amid inadequate fiscal and technological transfers from affluent to developing nations. The unredeemed pledge of \$300 billion annually from COP29 underscores this inequity. The US retreat from negotiations has deprived both leadership and finance. India must navigate vulnerability and geopolitics to recalibrate the global climate consensus. —N Sadhasiva Reddy, Bengaluru

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Free Intelligence

A quiet technological revolution is unfolding in India. Over the past few weeks, millions of Indian mobile users have begun receiving free access to advanced artificial intelligence tools bundled with their data packs. What appears at first glance to be a wave of corporate generosity is in fact a calculated global play for the world's largest untapped AI user base.

India's unique combination of low data costs, a young digital population, and a competitive telecom market makes it irresistible to global technology firms. For them, India offers what few other markets can: scale, openness, and diversity. Nearly every new technology of the past two decades - social media, e-commerce, digital payments - has tested its mass adoption potential here. AI, it seems, is the next frontier.

The logic is simple. The more people use AI-powered chatbots, search companions, and creative assistants, the more data these systems can learn from. India's multilingual, socially diverse, and economically varied user base offers the richest possible training ground for such systems. Every query typed in a local dialect, every voice note transcribed from a regional accent, every document refined or translated by an AI tool strengthens the algorithms that underpin the global AI ecosystem.

Yet, there is a deeper layer to this experiment. By giving AI access away for free - or nearly so - global firms are betting that India's digital population can be "trained" just as effectively as their machines. Once daily life becomes intertwined with these tools, habits will form, and switching away later will feel inconvenient, even unnatural. The initial phase is about trust and dependence; the next will inevitably be about monetisation.

What seems like a gift today is, in truth, an early negotiation for tomorrow's control over digital habits and identities.

This raises uncomfortable but necessary questions about data sovereignty and user awareness. India's existing data protection framework, though progressive on paper, has yet to evolve into a fully enforceable digital rights regime. Until it does, the average citizen remains vulnerable to opaque data collection practices. The convenience of "free" AI comes with a hidden cost: the silent export of personal data that fuels corporate innovation elsewhere.

The challenge, therefore, is not to resist technological change but to govern it wisely. India cannot afford to smother innovation through overregulation, nor can it allow a digital gold rush that leaves its citizens' privacy unguarded. What is needed is a nimble, layered regulatory approach, one that encourages experimentation while insisting on transparency and accountability from AI providers.

If managed thoughtfully, India's AI moment could mirror its earlier triumphs in mobile and fintech adoption, empowering millions while contributing to global innovation. But if left unchecked, it risks turning the country into the world's largest unpaid data lab. The line between empowerment and exploitation will depend on how India chooses to draw it - now, while the technology is still free.

Crime without borders

China's sweeping crackdown on transnational scam syndicates in Southeast Asia marks a rare confluence of law enforcement, diplomacy, and domestic reassurance. Beneath the dramatic optics of televised confessions and death sentences, however, lies a deeper story about the corrosion of trust, the export of criminal enterprise, and the uneasy intersection of poverty, migration, and technology.

Over years, the border towns of northern Myanmar evolved into shadow economies powered by gambling, prostitution, and more recently, industrial-scale online fraud. Their operations thrived in the grey zone between state control and local militias, exploiting porous borders and political instability. The syndicates - many run by ethnic Chinese families - created enclaves that blurred the line between community and cartel. When cyber-scam compounds replaced casinos as their main revenue source, the cruelty became industrial: abduction, torture, and forced digital labour turned fraud into a form of human trafficking.

The Chinese government's response, combining high-profile arrests with public propaganda, serves two immediate goals. First, it projects strength to an anxious domestic audience. With youth unemployment high and public faith in law enforcement strained, showing the state's long reach into lawless territories restores a sense of control. Secondly, it reclaims moral authority abroad, countering the embarrassment of Chinese nationals running criminal empires that preyed primarily on fellow citizens. The campaign's tone is both punitive and performative, aiming to punish the guilty while reassuring those who feel abandoned. But even as China tightens its grip, the regional web of cybercrime is shifting, adapting to new safe havens where corruption, conflict, and economic despair continue to offer cover.

Yet, the crackdown also reveals Beijing's growing reliance on spectacle to reinforce legitimacy. The images of masked suspects paraded from planes and remorseful confessions on national television recall older tactics of deterrence through humiliation. They are less about judicial transparency than about national catharsis, a ritualised reaffirmation of order in the face of disorder.

Beyond the theatrics, the root causes of the scam epidemic remain largely unaddressed. The lure of fast cash, coupled with digital literacy gaps and weak border governance, ensures that these networks can resurface elsewhere. The same economic desperation that drives thousands to accept dubious overseas offers also sustains the demand for such criminal labour. Unless the structural incentives - unemployment, inequality, and the opacity of digital transactions - are tackled, the cycle will continue under new names and new leaderships.

Ultimately, China's offensive against these scam syndicates is not just a law enforcement story; it is a morality play about power, shame, and belonging. The state seeks to reassert its guardianship over its people, even those lost to the underworlds of cyberspace. But behind every televised confession lies a quieter truth: that the machinery of crime and punishment, like the scams themselves, often feeds on the same vulnerabilities it claims to cure.

Beyond the Balcony

*In congested societies, the well-being of children, elders, and women must be treated as a core civic priority. Children need safer routes to school, clean air, and accessible play areas. Elders deserve mobility, healthcare, and social inclusion - not isolation in vertical silos. Women face daily risks that demand more than token gestures; true safety requires better lighting, surveillance, responsive policing, and cultural shifts rooted in homes, schools, and workplaces*



destroyed property worth lakhs, while in October, a blaze at Divya Apartments in Ghaziabad necessitated the evacuation of 20 families. These are not isolated events but part of a disturbing pattern that underscores systemic failure.

According to data from the National Crime Records Bureau, over 7,400 people lost their lives in fire accidents in 2022, with more than half of these fatalities occurring in residential buildings. In 2019, the figure stood at 6,329 deaths from residential fires resulting in lost lives, shattered families and a collective failure to prioritise safety. Yet, despite repeated tragedies, there is little evidence of a coordinated response from either builders or local administrations.

Fire-fighting systems remain rudimentary, evacuation protocols are virtually non-existent, and disaster management plans are more theoretical than operational. Earthquake resilience is another area of concern. Most societies have not undergone structural audits to assess their ability to withstand seismic activity, and disaster preparedness remains a neglected domain.

The neglect of safety becomes even more troubling when viewed through the lens of vulnerable groups. In congested societies, the well-being of children, elders, and women must be treated as a core civic priority. Children need safe routes to school, clean air, and accessible play areas. Elders deserve mobility, healthcare, and social inclusion - not isolation in vertical silos. Women face daily risks that demand more than token gestures; true safety requires better lighting, surveillance, responsive policing, and cultural shifts rooted in homes, schools, and workplaces.

Disaster preparedness must also move beyond paperwork and drills. In dense urban settings, a fire, flood, or epidemic can escalate rapidly. We need hyper local resilience - community-led response teams, real-time alerts, and evacuation protocols tailored to each locality. Safety audits of buildings, schools, and transport hubs must become routine, not reactive.

Adding to infrastructural woes is the rising threat of urban wildlife conflicts, especially in the National Capital Region. In 2024, India recorded over 37 lakh dog bite cases, with Delhi alone reporting more

than 35,000 incidents in just the first half of 2025. These aren't isolated health concerns - they signal a deeper failure in urban governance. The volatile interface between humans and stray animals is worsened by unchecked feeding, poor sterilisation efforts, and inadequate sheltering, turning residential zones into unpredictable and unsafe spaces.

In many housing societies, irresponsible pet ownership has become a daily source of distress. Dogs are often walked without muzzles, barking aggressively and alarming children and elders. Handlers, distracted by mobile phones, neglect basic hygiene, leading to civic disorder. Though the right to keep pets is protected by law, the absence of accountability has turned it into a point of conflict.

Monkey attacks are also rising, and the unchecked feeding of stray animals - dogs, monkeys, and cats - by well-meaning, educated but misguided residents has worsened the situation, making common areas unsafe for vulnerable groups.

The quiet erosion of community life is a troubling by-product of urban living. Neighbours now coexist without connection, and the warmth of shared spaces has faded into impersonal silence. RWAs, once meant to foster collective welfare, are increasingly plagued by internal politics, opacity, and allegations of mismanagement. Financial transparency is rare, and maintenance is often outsourced to untrained staff - resulting in poor service, delayed repairs, and widespread dissatisfaction among residents.

Security and civic discipline in many housing societies remain deeply compromised. Alarm systems and internal communication networks are often absent, leaving residents vulnerable. Parking chaos is rampant - exacerbated by families owning more vehicles than necessary. To ease congestion and ensure emergency access, a cap of two cars per household must be considered.

The lack of integrated shopping areas forces reliance on quick-service personnel entering at odd hours, raising safety concerns.



S S SAXENA

*The writer is a retired Air Commodore, VSM, of the Indian Air Force*

Jakarta Post

Tracing humanity's coastal journey from Africa

The origins and migrations of modern humans around the world are a hot topic of debate. Genetic analyses have pointed to Africa as the continent from which our ancestors dispersed in the Late Pleistocene epoch, which began about 126,000 years ago. Various dispersal routes have been suggested.

As a group of scientists who have been studying human evolution, we propose in a recently published review paper that the coast of southern Africa was likely where Homo sapiens began this worldwide journey. We suggest that some people started leaving this area about 70,000 years ago, took a route along the east coast and left the continent about 50,000

to 40,000 years ago. We base this hypothesis on various kinds of evidence, including geography, climate and environment, marine food resources, genetics, trace fossils and the technical and cultural abilities of people in that region at that time.

The reasons for migration and the advantages of a coastal route out of Africa, compared to an inland route, are outlined in our review. This proposed route is counter to the current belief among most scientists that the Out-of-Africa migration began in eastern Africa and not southern Africa. In our review we accepted that modern humans arose in Africa during the Middle



Stone Age about 200,000 years ago and then replaced populations of hominins outside the continent between 60,000 and 40,000 years ago.

We suggested that their African origin was in the southern Cape region of what is now South Africa, and that their migration along the eastern African coastline and onto the Arabian Peninsula may have happened over a period of less than 20,000 years.

In reviewing available evidence, we focused on the possibility that our ancestors on coastal South Africa were ideally placed to colonize the world. They had an enabling culture that allowed them to survive almost anywhere.

The Pinnacle Point cave complex and

other sites in this area are a UNESCO World Heritage Site because they provide the most varied and best-preserved record known of the development of modern human behavior, reaching back as far as 162,000 years.

Food from the sea, like shellfish, set southern Cape Homo sapiens on their evolutionary path to becoming advanced modern humans. They had an advantage over those who relied solely on hunting and food gathering inland, especially during cold and dry periods on the African subcontinent.

The harnessing of bow and arrow technology was also key for their success when compared to other hominins during the same period.

Letters To The Editor | ✉ editor@thestatesman.com

Lesson for Trump

**Sir,** Zohran Mamdani's handsome win in the New York mayoral election, is as much a credit to the spirited campaign he ran focusing on local issues, as to the repudiation of Donald Trump's style of egoistic and mercurial leadership. People, especially in mayoral elections, are more concerned with issues like the cost of living, housing affordability, transportation and jobs, rather than with national visions like MAGA.

But winning the election is one thing, implementing promises is quite another. If they are not kept, the cheering crowds of today may well get disillusioned and turn into jeering mobs tomorrow. New York is called the most dynamic city in the world, being the global hub for finance, business and culture, with its diverse population of immigrants. However, most of those working in the city are forced to live far away and commute long distances to work, due to the

ridiculously high rents and cost of living. Even travel within New York by public or private transport takes too long due to the maddening traffic. Whether and how the rent freeze, improving the infrastructure and building more affordable housing units for the workers will be implemented by the mayor-elect remains to be seen. He has also pledged to increase taxes on the rich, but this needs to be done without driving them and big businesses out of the city. For Donald Trump, the verdict is a wake up call. Does he want to continue antagonising citizens with penny wise and pound foolish decisions or make a sensible mid-course correction?

Yours, etc., V. Jayaraman,  
Chennai, 7 November.

SIR confusion

**Sir,** Regarding the ECI's notification for the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls, 2026, I seek clarification about Serial

No.6 in the list of 12 documents; "Permanent Residence Certificate issued by competent state authorities". The ambiguity is whether this means a domicile certificate or a residential certificate issued by authorities like the DM/SDO/BDO. This confusion is causing uncertainty among people filling out Enumeration Forms for the SIR. Could the authorities clarify this urgently so citizens know which document to submit?

Yours, etc., Manas Mukhopadhyay,  
Chinsurah, 7 November.

Power of women

**Sir,** This is with reference to Rajdeep Pathak's article "The legacy of our national song", published today. When we celebrate the 150th year of Vande Mataram, which was written in the historical context of the Sannyasi Rebellion for the novel Anandamath, Jadunath Bandyopadhyay was asked to set a tune for the poem after it was written.



During the time of the anti-participation movement, on 7 August 1905, Vande Mataram was first used as political slogan when a procession towards the Town Hall in Calcutta was initiated. Afterwards, it became the slogan of India. Another interesting thing is that though it was composed in Sanskrit, it was written in Bengali. Actually, the lyrics of Vande Mataram showed the power of women, where the lyrics hailed the idea of worshipping mothers.

Yours, etc., Abhijit Chakraborty,  
Bally, 7 November.





Editor's  
TAKE

## Delhi chokes as citizens cry for breath

As Delhi's skyline blurs into smog, one question looms large: how many more years will the capital wait for its leaders to act?

It may shock outsiders, but for Delhiites this is an annual recurrence. The air is thick with smog, and breathing it is a daily torment. What would be declared a medical emergency in many countries has, in Delhi, become the 'new normal'. With the Air Quality Index (AQI) crossing 600 in parts of the national capital - a level classified as severe - the city has turned into a gas chamber where each breath feels like inhaling poison.

The annual cycle of smog, blame, and silence has returned - but this year something is different. Delhiites have decided to take no more. For a change, they are protesting in large numbers. They are no longer silent spectators. Over the weekend, hundreds gathered at India Gate, demanding immediate action and accountability from those in power.

The protest, led by concerned citizens and joined by an AAP leader, was not a display of political posturing but an expression of desperation. Residents held placards, coughed through masks, and spoke with a mix of anger and anguish. Their message was simple yet powerful: stop denying the crisis and start acting. As one protester put it succinctly, "No matter whose government it is, common people are dying."

The sentiment captures the essence of Delhi's tragedy - a political blame game that has bred dangerous inertia. For over a decade, Delhi's pollution crisis has worsened year after year - smog-choked skies, emergency meetings, and token gestures such as water sprinkling, the odd-even traffic scheme, or failed experiments like cloud seeding. What Delhi needs are permanent solutions, not cosmetic fixes.

The root causes - unchecked construction dust, vehicular emissions, stubble burning, and poor waste management - remain largely unaddressed. Meanwhile, data manipulation and denial only deepen the mistrust between citizens and the state.

Contrast this with global examples. Beijing, once infamous for its pollution, implemented a comprehensive clean-air policy combining industrial relocation, strict vehicle-emission norms, and large-scale public transport reform. Within five years, its PM2.5 levels fell by nearly 50 per cent. In London, the introduction of Ultra-Low Emission Zones (ULEZ) and incentives for electric vehicles brought significant improvement in air quality. Even Los Angeles, once synonymous with smog, succeeded through sustained investment in clean energy, public transport, and civic accountability.

Delhi needs similar political will - not crocodile tears. It requires a unified regional strategy that brings together Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh under a single clean-air mission. A long-term plan must address urban planning, green-cover restoration, renewable energy transition, and agricultural reform to curb stubble burning. Technology can help, but transparency and enforcement are essential.

Equally vital is civic participation. The protest at India Gate should serve as a wake-up call not only for politicians but also for citizens. Clean air is not a privilege; it is a fundamental right - and Delhi must have it.

# Bridging the gaps, making headway

The India-Israel partnership is no longer merely a diplomatic success story; it has become the testing ground for a new Asian order. Whether this alliance will make the region more secure or simply more heavily armed remains uncertain



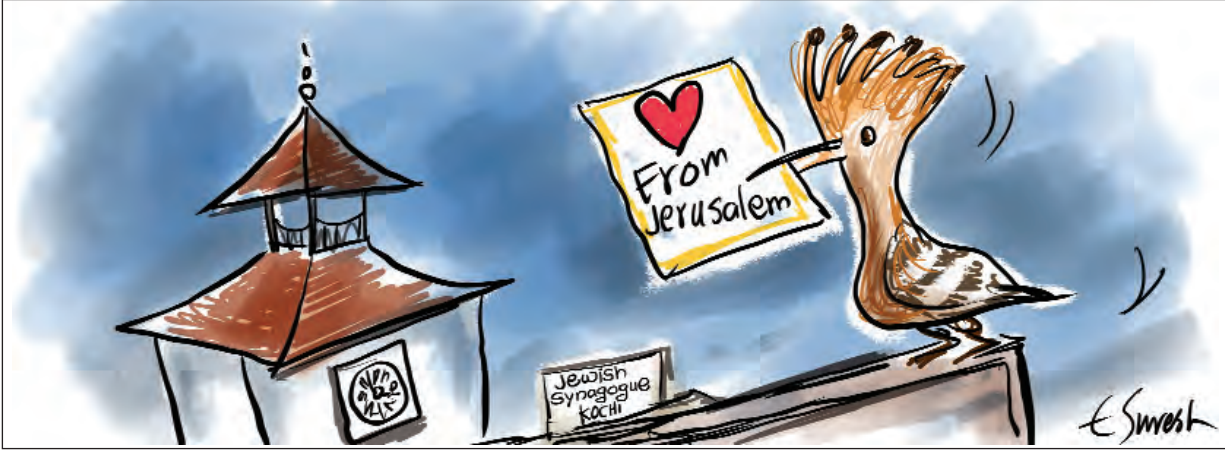
NILANTHA  
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JN Dixit, India's former National Security Adviser and one of the country's most seasoned diplomats, once wrote that the establishment of relations "with South Africa and then with Israel" was the most significant achievement of his tenure at the Ministry of External Affairs. Few comments capture so neatly the quiet shift in India's moral compass during the early 1990s. What had once been a foreign policy anchored in solidarity with the Palestinian cause and the Non-Aligned Movement was now tilting towards the emerging strategic triangle of Washington, Tel Aviv, and New Delhi. Three decades later, that tilt has hardened into one of Asia's most consequential alliances.

The historical roots of the India-Israel connection reach far deeper than the 1992 establishment of formal diplomatic ties. Jewish communities have lived in India for over two millennia. The Cochin Jews of Kerala, who trace their lineage to ancient traders arriving after the destruction of the Second Temple, built some of the oldest synagogues in the Commonwealth and enjoyed relative security unknown to Jews in most of the world. Further east, the Bene Israel settled along the Konkan coast, while smaller Baghdadi Jewish communities flourished in Kolkata and Mumbai. Even in India's far northeast, the Bnei Menashe of Manipur and Mizoram - who claim descent from one of the Lost Tribes of Israel - have, in recent decades, re-established religious and cultural links with Israel. These intertwined legacies gave both nations a foundation of shared memory long before geopolitics bound them together.

When India formally recognised Israel in 1950 but withheld full diplomatic relations, it was acting within the logic of post-colonial solidarity. Support for Palestinian self-determination was considered integral to India's moral standing in the developing world. Yet by the early 1990s, that posture had lost its strategic utility. The end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union - India's principal defence supplier - and the global turn towards liberalisation forced New Delhi to rethink. Economic reforms under Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao in 1991 coincided with a shifting global order in which Israel was becoming an indispensable partner for the United States. Establishing relations with Israel thus became not only a matter of diplomacy but also a statement of intent: India was entering the world economy and aligning with its new security architecture.

The years that followed saw a steady deepening of the defence relationship. During the 1999 Kargil conflict with Pakistan, Israel's rapid supply of surveillance drones and precision-guided munitions filled a critical gap left by other hesi-



THE UNITED STATES, WARY OF CHINA'S RISE AND KEEN TO CONTAIN RUSSIA, VIEWS INDIA AS A DEMOCRATIC COUNTERWEIGHT IN THE INDO-PACIFIC AND ISRAEL AS ITS MOST DEPENDABLE OUTPOST IN WEST ASIA.

THE EMERGING "WEST ASIAN QUAD" (I2U2) — LINKING INDIA, ISRAEL, THE UAE, AND THE US — EMBODIES A NEW ORDER WHERE HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS YIELD TO STRATEGIC AND COMMERCIAL INTERESTS

The writer is a Colombo based Columnist

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 @ilangamuwa1  
 nilanthailangamuwa

tant powers. Israeli firms soon became integral to India's military modernisation, supplying radar, missiles, and electronic warfare systems. Cooperation later extended into counter-terrorism and intelligence sharing after the 2008 Mumbai attacks, in which Jewish targets were explicitly struck. Israeli expertise in homeland security, border surveillance, and cyber technology found eager clients in India's expanding security apparatus.

The relationship, however, is not merely about weapons. It is also about ideas — about two nations that see themselves surrounded by threats and justified in adopting extraordinary measures of self-defence. Israel's militarised ethos and its narrative of technological resilience have appealed to successive Indian governments. For the Hindu nationalist right, Israel represents a model of a small but assertive nation that defends its majority identity against perceived existential enemies. What was once discreet military cooperation has thus evolved into an open political fraternity.

India's silence on Israel's controversial actions has grown louder over time. After backing a UN inquiry into Israel's conduct during the 2014 Gaza war, New Delhi abstained from a similar vote in 2021. By then, "strategic neutrality" had become a convenient cover for convergence. Israel's defence industry now ranks among India's top three suppliers, while Indian corporations such as the Adani Group have invested heavily in Israeli infrastructure, including the Haifa Port - a clear symbol of trust.

Last week, the Israel-India Joint Working Group on Defence Cooperation met in Tel Aviv, co-chaired by Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh and Israeli Defence Ministry Director-General Major-General (Res.) Amir Baram. It ended with a Memorandum of Understanding to expand industrial and technological cooperation. Though details were limited, reports indicate India will acquire medium-range

surface-to-air missiles worth about \$3.75 billion and convert six commercial aircraft into refuelling tankers for nearly \$900 million.

In New Delhi, Israel's Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar called India a "global superpower" and thanked it for promptly condemning the 7 October 2023 Hamas attacks. He noted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was among the first leaders to call Benjamin Netanyahu - a gesture Israel says it will not forget. The symbolism was clear: both now see themselves as partners in a shared fight against "terror".

This alignment carries wider implications. The United States, wary of China's rise and keen to contain Russia, views India as a democratic counterweight in the Indo-Pacific and Israel as its most dependable outpost in West Asia. The emerging "West Asian Quad" (I2U2) — linking India, Israel, the UAE, and the US — embodies a new order where human rights concerns yield to strategic and commercial interests.

Yet contradictions persist. India still depends heavily on Russian arms and energy, and avoids criticising Moscow despite its closeness to Israel and the West. This balancing act underscores New Delhi's transactional posture but also a shared worldview: both India and Israel see themselves as civilisational states entitled to secure their interests by any

means necessary. What began as cautious diplomacy in 1992 has become a test case for Asia's future alignments. The partnership is neither pure modernisation nor moral decline but a mirror to a continent where nationalism, technology, and security define power. For Israel, it brings a vast market and a non-Western ally; for India, advanced technology, intelligence, and a partner adept at survival in a turbulent region.

The distance between Tel Aviv and New Delhi has never been shorter - and the space for moral hesitation, once a hallmark of Indian diplomacy, has almost disappeared.

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# God and soul: Understanding the divine connection



AJIT KUKMAR  
BISHNOI

2ND OPINION  
THE PIONEER

There is one Supreme Being - eternal, all-powerful, and all-pervading. God is omnipotent, capable of accomplishing anything; omnipresent, existing everywhere in His subtle form; and omniscient, fully aware of the past, present, and future. As the Bhagavad *Gita* declares, "By Me, all this universe is pervaded in My unmanifest form" (9.4). He is the Creator, Controller, and Sustainer of all existence (15.1). Everything we see belongs to Him. What we call "our possessions" today did not belong to us five hundred years ago. In truth, everything is a part of God's own subtle body; we live within His vast creation.

In contrast, we souls are merely His infinitesimal parts (15.7). Our power, knowledge, and presence are severely

limited. We depend entirely on the Supreme for strength and guidance. Our physical, mental, or intellectual abilities do not make us powerful; true power lies only in divine empowerment. While God is ever awake and active, we are bound by sleep and fatigue. Our understanding is confined to a narrow present; we know nothing of our past lives and can only guess at the future. We act, but the results rest in God's hands.

This may seem unfair, yet it is a perfect design — creation could not function otherwise. Our dependency is not a weakness but a reminder of divine justice and grace. God, in His fairness, has made provisions for every shortcoming. Lord Krishna assures: "To those who worship Me with unwavering devotion, I provide what they lack and preserve what they have" (9.22). Taking shelter in God brings immense blessings. He guides the sincere seeker through intuition, dreams, or circumstances.

Prayer is not mere ritual but a channel of divine communication. Though we have free will, the fruits of our actions are dispensed by Divine Authority under the law of karma. Dharma — the eternal principle of righteousness — upholds the universe. So sacred is dharma that whenever it declines, God incarnates to restore it (4.7). Those who live by dharma and devote themselves to God become examples for others, inspiring goodness and harmony.

Every soul is unique - with distinct parents, birthplaces, timings, names, and destinies - shaped by individual karmas. Just as God is unique, so is every living being. The notion of complete duplication, even through cloning, is impossible. He has empowered me to write spiritual works and has cared for me more tenderly than a mother could. Through His mercy, I overcome challenges born of past karmas. I act, yet it is He who accomplishes. Success is His blessing, though the world attributes it to me.

Truly, God micromanages every aspect of my life. Naturally, I worry for my loved ones. When illness or hardship strikes, I pray earnestly. Yet I have learnt that change cannot be forced; with kindness and connection to God, transformation follows. The divine influence works quietly but surely. In conclusion, one must see the larger picture. Engage in *bhakti* (devotion), *yajna* (sacrifice), and *dana* (charity) to draw closer to God. Devotion can take many forms — prayer, chanting, or visiting holy places.

Sacrifice includes offering time, service, or wealth for noble causes. Charity, too, extends beyond money — sharing knowledge (vidya dana) is among the greatest gifts. When we align our lives with these divine principles, we invite God's grace, live in peace, and experience true bliss.

The writer is a spiritual teacher

## PIC TALK



Winter birds glide over the misty Narmada at dawn – a mesmerising sight in Jabalpur. PHOTO: PTI

## DIGITAL EXPERIENCE



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## AI CHATBOTS SHOW PROMISE, BUT HUMAN THERAPISTS ESSENTIAL

OpenAI, an American artificial intelligence research and deployment organisation, has recently reported that it has enhanced ChatGPT's responses, enabling the chatbot to more reliably recognise mental health issues during sensitive conversations.

AI-based tools may offer a promising supplement for addressing mental health concerns, but they cannot replace the human touch essential for emotional well-being. F AI applications may also provide inaccurate or potentially harmful advice and raise privacy concerns, underscoring the need for caution and the continued importance of the human-therapist relationship.

A recent Stanford University-led study indicates that AI therapy chatbots are

significantly less effective and, in some cases, potentially harmful compared with human therapists. The study found that licensed human therapists responded correctly to crisis scenarios in 93 per cent of cases, whereas AI bots managed fewer than 60 per cent. This highlights that mental health care requires not only clinical problem-solving but also human understanding, empathy, and the ability to navigate interpersonal relationships. Therapy is fundamentally about building trust and human connections, which AI, regardless of its sophistication, cannot fully replicate. While AI may support mental health initiatives, it should be viewed as an adjunct rather than a substitute for professional human care.

R SIVAKUMAR | CHENNAI

Please send your letter to the [info@dailypioneer.com](mailto:info@dailypioneer.com). In not more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.

### Sustainable travel for greener future

World Public Transport Day reminds the world of the environmental benefits of using shared modes of travel. Expanding public transport systems reduces pollution, traffic congestion, and energy dependence.

The concept emerged in the 2000s, as rapid urbanisation increased pollution and resource depletion. The initiative highlights the social, environmental, and economic importance of sustainable mobility.

Modern mass transit enables cities to cut carbon emissions and improve air quality, enhancing urban living standards. Encouraging walking and cycling also helps decrease car use. Building safe pedestrian and cycling infrastructure is vital for a smooth transition.

Meanwhile, adopting electric vehicles, e-bikes, and hydrogen-fuelled trains ensures very low emissions. Governments and communities must collaborate to make green commuting both practical and affordable for everyone. By promoting sustainable travel, cities can achieve cleaner air, reduced traffic, and healthier communities. World Public Transport Day highlights the importance of choosing shared transport over private vehicles to create a greener planet for future generations. Together, by embracing public transport, we can build a sustainable future.

CK SUBRAMANIAM | MUMBAI

### Kranti restores pride and justice

It was heartening to see Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav assure that Munna Singh Goud, father of Women's World Cup-winning cricketer Kranti Goud, will be reinstated in his police job. He was dismissed in 2012 following an alleged error during election duty. The announcement came during Kranti's felicitation ceremony in Bhopal, where the Chief Minister praised her for bringing glory to the nation and her home state. This moment recalls a verse by the saint-poet Tiruvalluvar: "The son's duty to his father is to make the world ask, by what austerities did he merit such a son." Kranti, as a daughter, fulfilled this virtue by bringing pride to her father and the nation alike.

Her victory represents the strength and perseverance of Indian women who continue to shatter stereotypes. Every member of India's women's cricket team deserves praise for their remarkable 2025 World Cup triumph, proving that the daughters of our motherland are exceptional, inspiring, and worthy of celebration.

Kranti's achievement shows her hard work and dedication, bringing pride to her family and the nation. It highlights the talent and determination of Indian women in sports and may inspire many young girls to follow their dreams.

AP THIRUVADHI | CHENNAI

### Advani's legacy of political integrity

Lal Krishna Advani, born on 8 November 1927 into a Sindhi Hindu Lohana family in Karachi, British India, recently turned 98. Often called the foster father of the BJP, he worked alongside Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the party's founding figure, to shape its growth. Advani led the *Ram Rath Yatra* and was even arrested in Bihar during Lalu Prasad Yadav's tenure.

Known for discipline and strong leadership, he earned the title "Iron Man" of the BJP. Despite opportunities to become Prime Minister, he deferred to Vajpayee, respecting party tradition.

In 2004, he led the party through the Lok Sabha election, which was ultimately lost. Praised by opposition leader Shashi Tharoor for his commitment, decency, and service, Advani remained loyal even when sidelined in 2014.

His integrity was evident during the Jain Hawala case, when he resigned from Parliament until cleared. Controversial remarks on Jinnah cost him the BJP presidency, yet his influence endured. The 1990 Rath Yatra and slogan "Mandir Wahin Banayenge" strengthened the Ram Janmabhoomi movement and BJP's rise. Advani's loyalty and guidance during critical times reflect his principled leadership and devotion to the party and nation.

RAMANJANEYA NAGARA | BENGALURU



# Physics Nobel Prize 2025: Quantum computing is the future

The work of three Nobel laureates marks the dawn of a new computational era — one that merges physics, technology, and imagination to push the limits of what humanity can calculate, communicate, and comprehend



BK SINGH

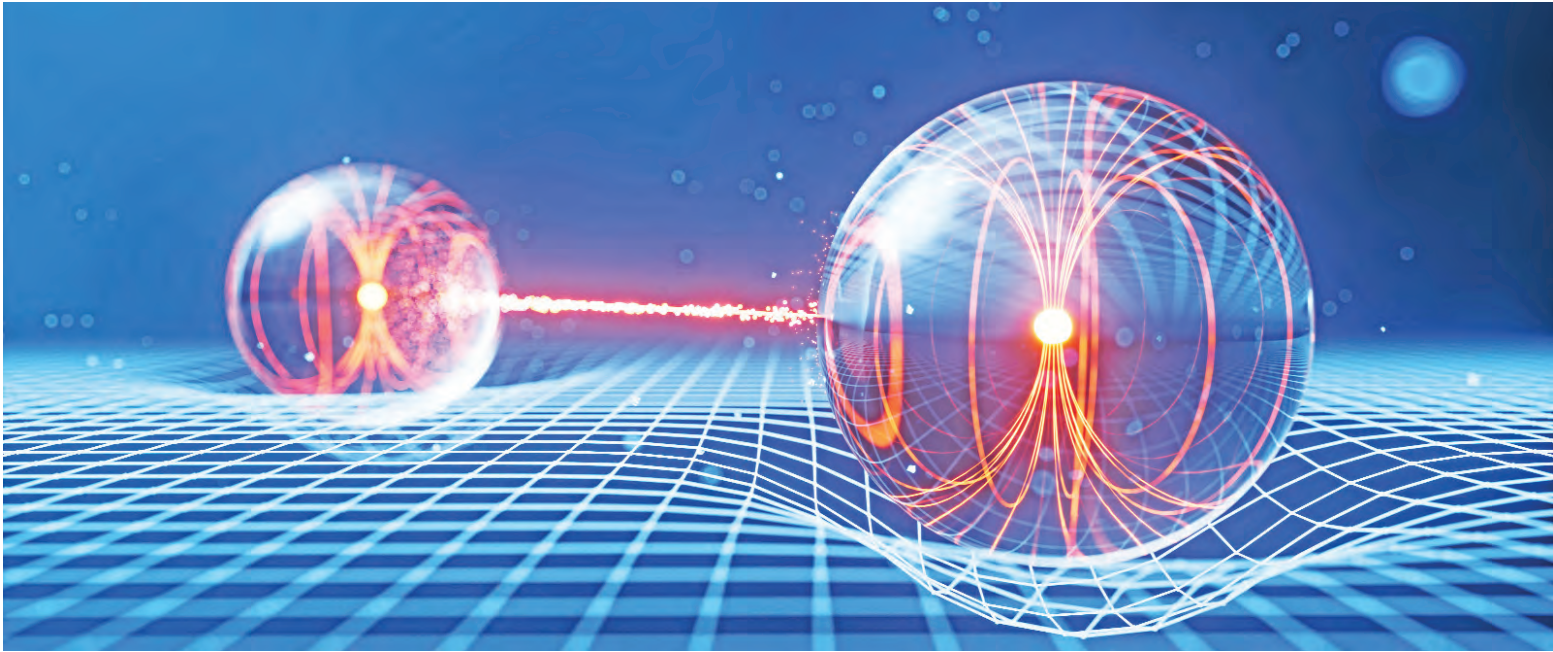
Century old Quantum Mechanics can explain how a single sub-atomic particle cross the energy barrier through tunneling, be located at multiple places simultaneously, occupies discrete energy levels and emits energy in quanta as it moves from higher energy level to lower energy level.

Three US Physics Professors; namely John Clarke, University of California Berkeley, Michel H Devoret Yale University, New Haven CT and University of California, Santa Barbara and John M Martinis University of California Santa Barabara, were awarded this year's Physics Nobel Prize. Quantum mechanics has advanced from single particle to macroscopic level, and during 1984 and 1985 these Professors have conducted experiments wherein quantum behavior has been observed at macroscopic level, where billions and trillions of Cooper particles (two electrons closed system) are involved.

The Professors had discovered macroscopic mechanical tunneling and quantized energy level in a system large enough to be kept in hand. When they made this discovery in 1984 and 1985, Martinis was a PhD candidate, Devoret was a postdoctoral fellow and Clarke was their professor and supervisor. Two of the three Laureates have links with Google. Besides his professorship Devoret, is Chief Scientist of Google Quantum AI, while Martinis headed Google's Quantum AI lab till 2020.

How Quantum Mechanics is different from Classical Mechanics? We have seen in our day today life that when a ball is thrown against a wall, it rebounds on the same side and never crosses to the other side of the wall. In sharp contrast to this, atomic particles under quantum mechanical principles cross the barrier through tunneling, located at multiple positions simultaneously and can occupy discrete energy levels.

In 1973 Physics Nobel Prize was won by Brian Josephson for discovering the flow of electric current between two superconductors separated by an insulator. This has been a very useful finding and superconductor-insulator-superconductor junction has been used in various experiments like measurement of fundamental physical constants and



GOOGLE'S QUANTUM AI TEAM HAS RECENTLY REPORTED THAT ITS 'WILLOW SUPERCONDUCTING CHIP' HAS RUN A NEW TEST AND OBTAINED 13,000 TIMES FASTER RESULT AS COMPARED TO THE RESULT FROM TOP SUPERCOMPUTER

The writer is a retired Head of Forest Force, Karnataka, and a postgraduate in Physics

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magnetic field etc. and is commonly called as Josephson junction. This set-up was utilized by Nobel Laureates in the series of experiments they conducted in 1984 and 1985 meticulously isolated the set-up from its environment and ensured that the quantum effects are not destroyed by interference. They were successful in demonstrating the flow of electron through the set-up and also found the electrons exhibiting quantum mechanical behavior.

The superconducting chip separating another superconductor by an insulator had electric current flowing without any resistance. The electrons coordinate and move together in a single wave. The voltmeter reading showing zero initially starts showing value corresponding to a discrete energy level confirming that the particle has crossed the wall (the insulator) through tunneling. Though the scientists have not been able to conclude the maximum size of the system exhibiting the quantum behavior, but the experiments conducted in 1984 and 1985 by the Nobel Laureates have confirmed that the system as large as the set-up chosen by them did show quantum behavior. The discovery led to the building of quantum-bits (qubits) — unit of information in quantum computers.

The discovery has been extensively

used in mobiles, cameras, transistors in computer microchips and optic cables etc. that are part of our lives these days. The next generation quantum technology such as quantum cryptography, quantum computers and quantum sensors are the way forward from these inventions.

These discoveries have far reaching consequences and have been providing breakthroughs in many fields of medicine, chemistry and environment etc. The quantum behavior in superconducting circuits has led to the creation of superconducting qubits, the building blocks of quantum computers and can perform intricate calculations far beyond the reach of a classical computer, marking the dawn of a new computational era. Google

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Sycamore processor, co-developed by martinis has already demonstrated quantum supremacy by solving problems faster than any existing supercomputer.

The implications extend far beyond computing. In cybersecurity, quantum technology challenges current encryption models, driving innovation in post-quantum cryptography to safeguard credentials, financial data, and national digital infrastructures. If appropriate innovations are not done, our personal data, bank accounts etc. can be hacked using quantum computers. Quantum key distri-

bution (QKD) further enhances data privacy, allowing secure communications based on unbreakable principles of Quantum Physics.

In industrial applications, quantum enhanced sensors can detect minute changes in temperature, magnetic fields or vibrations, revolutionising areas like predictive maintenance, manufacturing quality control and energy management. These sensors could form the backbone of quantum secure industrial networks, protecting critical systems from cyber threats while improving performance and efficiency. We are aware that information is stored in any normal computer as bits, which are either 0 or 1. Quantum computer uses qubits that can be understood to be behaving like a spinning coin in air with 0 and 1 at the same time. Group of qubits can become linked indicating that when we learn about the one we get to know something about the other too. The two traits are utilised in a quantum machine and bring out several possibilities in parallel.

Google's quantum AI team has recently reported that its 'Willow Superconducting chip' has run a new test and obtained 13,000 times faster result as compared to the result from top supercomputer. This test is called Quantum Echoes and can be repeated and checked using other quantum machines. Google calls it as 'ver-

ifiable quantum advantage'. Earlier quantum advantage demos produced one off random results and thus, were not verifiable. Quantum Echoes, however, measure the number called 'out of time order correlator' (OTOC), which would again emerge when another quantum computer follows the same step. Thus the number is specific irrespective of the quantum computer used. The similar output can be obtained after redoing/ rechecking and hence it is 'verifiable'.

We encounter chaos in natural processes, which is generally characterized by the high sensitivity of a system towards small perturbations. The notable examples being weather patterns, wherein a small change in initial conditions leads to different outcomes over time and population dynamics where a small shift in local population can affect the entire ecosystem. Chaos is also found in quantum systems, like dynamics of magnetisation in atomic nuclei subjected under magnetic field varying with time and flow of electrons on high temperature superconductors. Quantum computers are ideal for simulating such chaotic systems.

A quantum computer simulating OTOC signals from a physical system in nature such as molecules, whose system parameters are not fully known can be compared with OTOC signals against the real world data about the physical system and observe when they best agree. A more precise estimation of system parameter can be made as compared to any other technique. The echo number thus, can track any small disturbance spreading through the material and has tremendous scope in guiding the design of alloys, cleaner catalysts and zero-in on a chemical battery that can last longer.

The physics of Nuclear Magnetic Resonance is being extensively used in Medical Science especially in MRI. Google has shown that how Echoes paired with NMR data can act like a molecular ruler. Structural features of real molecule can be compared to find how a drug might bind to a protein making a clear scope for quick discovery of drugs. It opens the way for examining the complex quantum behavior and possibilities of breakthrough in climate technology, environment, electronics and Chemistry. Quantum precision measurement is advancing medical imaging, environmental monitoring, and even space exploration, opening new frontiers in scientific discoveries.

## India's entry into international carbon market: A defining moment for the country



SHINGLE SEBASTIAN | GOPAL K SARANGI

While the COP 30 discussions are underway to resolve some of the complex global challenges of climate change, exploiting the international carbon market as a source of climate action is also going to be a key source of climate action. India's signing of the Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) with Japan under Article 6.2 of the Paris Agreement marks a pivotal step in India's engagement with international carbon markets. Article 6.2 provides a broad, decentralised cooperative approach that allows countries to trade Internationally Transferred Mitigation Outcomes (ITMOs), thereby driving technology transfer, climate finance, and innovation. For India, the signing of Article 6.2 has turned out to be a propitious moment in driving the highly desired technology transfer and much-needed climate financing.

### A robust institutional framework is in place

India moved early to establish the institutional framework for such cooperation. On May 30, 2022, the Government of India notified the National Designated Authority for Implementation of Article 6 of the Paris Agreement (NDAIAPA), the body responsible for approving projects eligible for ITMO transactions. This was followed, on 17 February 2023, by a public announcement listing the activities India would initially consider eligible for trading under Article 6.2. Most recently, in August 2025, the NDAIAPA was amended to reflect evolved decisions under Articles 6.2 and 6.4.

The eligibility list spans green hydrogen and ammonia, sustainable aviation fuel (SAF), compressed biogas, high-efficiency industrial technologies, renewables with storage (stored component), offshore wind, solar thermal, HVDC lines linked to renewables, ocean energy, and carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS). These activities were strategically chosen to catalyse technology transfer and mobilise much-needed international finance, with an initial three-year scope and provision for revision and expansion.

However, since developing countries already have targets under their NDCs, establishing a robust institutional framework becomes crucial to ensure transparency and integrity in international transfers. Though India has created the institutional framework, the next critical phases involve strengthening processes for project

authorisation, monitoring and verification (MRV), as well as the allocation and transfer of ITMOs within agreed timelines. Establishing these mechanisms, supported by a Project Implementation Agency (PIA) and a steering committee to oversee synergies across domestic and international carbon markets, will be essential to ensure readiness for full-scale cooperation and transparent ITMO transfers under Article 6.2.

Besides, speed matters because bilateral pipelines are forming now. Global activity is narrow but deep. Hence, it is an opportune time for India to become an integral part of such evolving bilateral pipelines.

### Where do opportunities sit?

India's eligibility list under Article 6.2 opens distinct avenues for sectors positioned to deliver high-integrity, internationally transferrable mitigation outcomes (ITMOs). In clean-energy carriers, green hydrogen and green ammonia can serve as financing bridges to scale electrolyser capacity and decarbonise export-oriented value chains. Developers that align early with partner-

country measurement, reporting, and verification (MRV) standards can secure premium pricing and long-term offtake agreements. Sustainable aviation fuel and compressed biogas provide complementary routes, enabling incremental abatement beyond domestic demand by supplying ITMO-linked volumes to countries pursuing aviation decarbonisation targets. For the private sector, this framework presents early-mover advantages. Industries such as steel, cement, chemicals, and refineries can integrate best-available technologies and enter cooperative agreements that de-risk upfront capital expenditure through bilateral ITMO-linked arrangements. Renewable energy players combining storage and HVDC infrastructure can position projects for system-level emission reductions verified by international buyers. Carbon-removal ventures using CCUS technologies offer an additional frontier, where private developers securing storage-site assessments, robust monitoring plans, and long-term buyer commitments can anchor India's first wave of removal-based ITMOs from industrial clusters.

Beyond technology deployment, each cooperative agreement must be evaluated through four lenses — contribution to India's Net Zero commitment, promotion of technology transfer along with intellectual property rights, assurance of sustainable climate finance, and acceleration of local sustainable development. These priorities ensure that India's participation in international carbon markets strengthens both climate and socio-economic objectives.

### What lies ahead?

As India moves from readiness to implementation under Article 6.2, the focus must shift to

strengthening institutional processes for authorisation, registry, and ITMO transfers, while fostering technology transfer and innovation in sectors like hydrogen, CCUS, and offshore wind. With the NDAIAPA, the Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS), and the Japan MoC in place, success now depends on how effectively India mobilises regulators, industries, financiers, and project developers to turn readiness into credible international cooperation and measurable climate outcomes. The following areas require strategic policy thrusts to reap optimum benefits from the international carbon market:

- **Strengthening governance and institutional architecture:** India must operationalise a clear governance structure by constituting Project Implementation Agencies (PIAs) for each bilateral mechanism to oversee project authorisation, MRV, and ITMO transfers. The Article 6.2 registry should be embedded within the CCTS, enabling unified credit tracking and direct transfers to buyer-country registries. This system can maintain a "knowing-basis" link with the international registry for transparency while preserving national control. Countries lacking domestic registries may temporarily rely on the international platform, but India's design should prioritise sovereignty and traceability.

- **Building a pipeline of bankable projects:** The NDAIAPA should curate a strong pipeline in sectors where India holds an edge - green hydrogen, compressed biogas, offshore wind, and CCUS. Fast-tracked feasibility studies, pre-approval templates, and a dedicated facilitation cell can help developers meet buyer-country expectations and streamline MRV compliance.

- **Catalysing private-sector participation:** The private sector shoulders the key responsibility for driving implementation. Early adopters in steel, cement, refineries, fertilisers, and transport should be encouraged to form consortia with financiers and technology providers. A blended-finance or guarantee window under the CCTS can reduce risk, while clear ITMO pricing norms - via benchmarks, auctions, or bilateral formulas - will create predictability and investor confidence.
- **Expanding and deepening bilateral partnerships:** Beyond Japan, India should deepen partnerships with Switzerland, Singapore, the UAE, and South Korea to broaden market access and technology collaboration. Regular inter-ministerial coordination and proactive negotiation of new MoCs can strengthen India's position as both a supplier of high-integrity credits and a shaper of global carbon-market norms.

Sebastian is a Research Scholar at the Department of Policy and Management Studies, TERI School of Advanced Studies, New Delhi. Sarangi is an Associate Professor and Head at the TERI School of Advanced Studies, New Delhi

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## The quiet revolution on the field: Let every girl play



ISHANI SIROHI

"Start them young." The phrase echoes in playgrounds, on gym floors, and at kitchen tables where parents debate the next move for their child. But all too often, it's implicitly aimed at boys; boys in cleats, boys on courts, the boys who wear the hero's jersey. And when girls do slip into shoes and gear, the question persists: "Is sport really for me?" That quiet hesitation has cost generations of girls an experience that builds not only strength but also self-belief. The good news? That tide is finally turning.

### The Moment That Moved a Nation

When the Indian women's cricket team lifted the World Cup, the celebration wasn't just about victory; it was about rewriting perception. Among the most touching stories was that of Amanjot Kaur, whose father, a carpenter, carved her first bat by hand because they couldn't afford one. That simple act of faith became a symbol of possibility, proof that equality often begins with a parent's belief. Every such story is a quiet revolution in a society that still needs reminding that girls belong on the field too.

### A Foundation

I was fortunate — both my parents served in the Indian Army. In our household, discipline and fitness weren't optional; they were part of everyday life. That early structure became the foundation that led me to be a kettlebell sport world champion, a field most in India barely know exists. Kettlebell lifting isn't about machines or mirrors; it's about rhythm, precision, and the endurance to keep going when your body says stop. It's a test of willpower measured not in weight but in minutes of unbroken focus. Those lessons shaped me far beyond the platform. They taught me resilience, patience, and the quiet confidence that only effort can buy. That's what sport gives every girl — strength that spills into every part of her life.

### The Hidden Power of Play

Research from the Women's Sports Foundation (WSF) shows that girls who participate in sport perform better academically, report higher self-esteem, and build stronger leadership skills than those who don't. These gains go far beyond physical fitness; they're about mental agility and emotional maturity. Sport sharpens reflexes, strengthens focus, and teaches teamwork. It encourages young girls to make decisions under pressure and

to find balance between ambition and discipline. In a world obsessed with instant validation, sport offers something lasting — character. Despite progress, India still faces a wide participation gap. Studies show that girls are more likely to drop out of sport during adolescence, citing safety issues, social expectations, and lack of facilities. The Sports and Society Accelerator and Dalberg report Active Equity found that many girls are discouraged from outdoor play by age 14, while boys are urged to compete longer and harder. Bridging that divide requires more than policy; it needs a mindset shift. Schools and parents must see sport as essential education, not a luxury.

If inspiration had faces, they would look like Mary Kom and PV Sindhu. Mary Kom — mother of four, Olympic medallist, and six-time world champion — has shown that motherhood and mastery can coexist. Sindhu's grace and ferocity on the badminton court redefined what Indian femininity in sport looks like. They didn't just win medals; they won mindshare. They made it possible for young girls to imagine a life where sport isn't a rebellion — it's a right. Across cities and towns, a new generation of Indian women is redefining what it means to be an athlete. They are engineers who run marathons, teachers who box before school, and professionals who lift weights after work. They are the hybrid athletes, balancing work, family, and sport without apology. This generation isn't waiting for perfect conditions. They're creating their own spaces, founding local clubs, and mentoring the next line of girls who will one day take their place. They represent the India that's coming - fast, fearless, and inclusive.

### Why It Must Begin Early

Every child is born with potential, but it's what we nurture early that shapes it. When girls play sport young, they learn to trust their bodies, to compete, to lead, and to fail gracefully. They discover that strength isn't masculine — it's universal. Sport teaches equality long before society does. On the field, a good pass or a strong finish earns respect, not gendered judgement. That's how you build confident women and balanced men — by letting every child play without bias.

### The Final Whistle

India has proved its daughters can lift, run, punch, swim, and shine on the world stage. Now the responsibility lies with us — parents, educators, and policymakers — to give them that start earlier, stronger, and freer. Every time a girl steps onto a field, she does more than play. She shifts the narrative, inspires others, and when girls play, they win twice: once in sport, and once in life.

The author is a Kettlebell World Champion and an advocate for women in sport

 ishanisirohi

 @dailypioneer

 dailypioneer



OUR VIEW



# The dip in EV sales share needn't yet cause worry

It may be premature to say if the GST rate moves will cause a shift away from EVs. Scope for incentives is slim. Performance and infrastructure gaps must be filled to increase adoption

Automobile sales have been robust in October, reducing the inventory levels with automobile dealers from nearly two months' stock to 53-55 days, according to the Federation of Automobile Dealers' Association of India (FADA). This positive turn, however, had a flip side: the share of electric vehicles (EVs) in overall sales slumped. For electric two-wheelers, it fell to 4.56% last month from 8.09% in September, while for electric four-wheelers, it dipped to 3.24% from 5.12%, FADA data reported by *Mint* showed. Considering India's efforts to fast-track EV adoption, this comes as a disappointment. The next few months would be important to determine if there is any sustained shift in market preference away from EVs. For now, such a conclusion would be premature. That said, the playing field does seem to have tilted slightly in favour of internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles. The reduction in GST rates on many ICE vehicles from 28% to 18% even as the GST rate on EVs was left unchanged at 5% has made the latter less attractive. Then there is the regional skew in the October upsurge in automobile sales—rural sales grew three times faster than the urban figures in the case of passenger vehicles and nearly double the urban growth rate for two-wheelers. Commercial charging stations are few and far between in rural areas, as are service centres for EV repair. But rural India has enough retail outlets for conventional fuel vehicles and repair shops for them. This could be a reason for rural buyers preferring ICE vehicles over EVs.

Also, there's been a big increase in the sales of smaller cars and entry-level two wheelers, on which GST has been lowered. This may be

explained by their low upfront costs as opposed to EVs, whose lower running costs take years to justify the higher initial price. So, it is understandable for first-time buyers to opt for conventional vehicles. Given efforts to drive EV sales, though, policymakers and industry may have to think of ways to make them more appealing to consumers. The GST on them is already low, leaving little scope to do more fiscally. In any case, incentives and subsidies tend to distort markets and must be used only as a temporary measure. Technological advances are crucial to address consumer anxieties about the performance of EVs and their range. Charging infrastructure has expanded but it is still far from enough to assure stress-free driving across the length and breadth of the country. The government has a role to play in helping put up the charging infrastructure. More importantly, India needs an ecosystem for the development of batteries, which are perhaps the most critical piece of input in an EV. This is hard in the wake of unreliable supplies of critical components from China, although a recent improvement in relations should help improve prospects. One aspect less talked about is the ability of the power grid to take the increased load in the event of an EV proliferation. Charging large numbers of EVs all at once places considerable additional load. Strengthening the grid, therefore, is critical, but this is a work-in-progress.

Overall, the market environment has turned a bit more attractive for ICE vehicles. Ultimately, consumers want longer-driving and more affordable electric vehicles. Unless they get that, efforts to wean them away from ICE vehicles may continue on a slow lane. The government and industry both need to work on it.

KRISHNA SRINIVASAN  
& ARUNABHA GHOSH

  
are, respectively, director, Asia & Pacific department, IMF; and founder-CEO, Council on Energy, Environment and Water, and special envoy for COP30 representing South Asia.

Climate change poses a fundamental threat to Asia's macroeconomic and financial stability, warranting urgent government action for sustainable energy and resilience building. Asia contributes two-thirds of global growth and accounts for over half of the global greenhouse gas emissions largely due to its heavy reliance on coal. But it lacks adaptive capacity, including resilient infrastructure, early warning systems and social as well as financial safety nets to respond to climate change effects.

Climate-related shocks threaten economic growth and stability, exacerbated by development pressures, rising debt and decarbonisation challenges amid geopolitical fragmentation, making it a macro-critical challenge. For instance, analysis by the Council of Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) finds that 75% of India's districts are extreme climate hotspots (vulnerable to cyclones, floods and droughts).

The solution lies in sustainable energy

transition with adaptive capacity building. Pursuing energy independence and net-zero goals can enhance financial stability and alleviate balance-of-payment vulnerabilities. It is a growth-imperative for Asia.

As major markets including the EU, Japan and Canada restrict non-green products, transitioning to sustainable energy becomes vital for maintaining market access, with failure risking exports. Embracing cheaper renewables and advancing clean tech across value chains will boost Asia's energy security and reduce economic volatility.

Seizing this opportunity hinges on massive climate finance. Asia's emerging markets and developing economies (EMDEs) face a staggering annual gap of at least \$800 billion (IMF, 2024). The private sector must cover 80-90% of the investment needs, but many EMDEs face structural barriers. These include sub-investment grade credit ratings, limited domestic capital market development, inconsistent climate disclosure standards and insufficient risk assessment capacity. Innovative de-risking instruments like guarantees, blended finance and credit enhancement structures can unlock private sector investment.

A regional stakeholder dialogue held by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Niti

Aayog and CEEW this year revealed a key finding: there is growing private and venture capital willingness to fund innovative green projects. Policymakers representing major investors, policymakers and thought leaders across Southeast Asia, China and India concluded that "the train has left the station" and the energy transition is now irreversible.

**Breaking barriers—Price signals and effective regulation:** Conference participants emphasised that catalysing climate finance through proper pricing mechanisms is essential. There is a broad consensus on eliminating counter-productive policies such as explicit fossil fuel subsidies, which total \$1.3 trillion globally. Also, expanding carbon pricing would create a level playing field to attract investment into low-carbon technologies. Emissions trading systems could also be used to overcome any political-economy concerns.

To further promote private climate finance, central banks and financial supervisors could promote transparent climate dis-

closures and incorporate climate-related financial risks into prudential frameworks. Integrating digital leadership with decarbonisation and resilience building, through climate finance information platforms and digital registries, is key to scaling reforms in emerging markets.

**Technology and structural transformation for resilience:** Asia is leading the development of clean technology and driving an affordable green transition through enhanced energy efficiency and investment. Deploying existing technologies can deliver over 80% of the emissions reduction needed by 2030, according to the International Energy Agency. Asia can also use trade, green foreign direct investment and scaled research and development for decarbonization while boosting productivity and environmental performance.

But accelerating clean technology adoption requires structural transformation beyond climate financing. Policymakers need to turn renewable capacity into a rela-

ble supply source while addressing skill shortages, technology scale-up constraints, inadequate storage and grid infrastructure. CEEW finds India can meet its 2030 power demand with about 876 gigawatts (GW) of total capacity, including 600GW from non-fossil sources, supported by expanded storage and transmission infrastructure.

Asian policymakers note the importance of predictability in renewables, energy security, managing stranded assets and labour redeployment during the energy transition. For India, success demands coordinated action by the central and state governments.

The fruits of India's ambition are already showing. A decade ago, utility-scale solar power cost ₹5 per unit. Now, transparent auctions have cut tariffs to ₹2-2.5, and solar-plus-storage now delivers round-the-clock power at ₹2.7/kWh—cheaper than new coal.

Asia is critical to the global green transition. The transition is equally critical for Asia's growth. Underinvestment in climate resilience threatens both environmental and economic goals. Coherent policies will shape Asia's future. Climate action safeguards the environment and macroeconomic stability that drives Asia's role as the engine of global growth.

*These are the authors' personal views.*

THEIR VIEW

# States need a 'clean' slate to get their abundance of laws in order

This framework to review old laws is a must to maintain a statute book aligned with latest needs



ADITYA SINHA  
is a public policy professional.

principal Acts, 187 amending Acts and 8 ordinances dating back to 1949 were repealed. The rest were harmonised and digitised. What made the exercise instructive was its method, exhaustive listing, departmental justification, legal vetting, consolidation and publication.

If other states wish to replicate this, a coherent framework will be needed. One way to conceptualise this is through the acronym C.L.E.A.N. i.e. Catalogue, Legal Audit, Eliminate, Align and New Governance.

The first step, *Catalogue*, is the creation of a verified and digitised repository of all state legislation, principal, amending and subordinate. This requires collecting and authenticating every statute since the state's formation, retrieving missing or unpublished texts from government presses or legislative archives, and assigning each statute a unique identifier. The result should be a State Statute Register, a comprehensive, machine-readable database that is publicly accessible. A state can't meaningfully reform what it cannot trace.

The second step, *Legal Audit*, is a substantive review. Each administrative department must undertake a structured examination of the statutes it administers. This should distinguish between three categories. (1) Repeal: Laws that are obsolete, superseded, redundant or unenforced. (2) Consolidate: Laws that are overlapping and can be merged into a unified statute. (3) Modernise: Laws that are relevant but require linguistic or procedural reform.

A simple doctrinal test can guide this audit. The Purpose Test asks whether the law continues to serve a legitimate public objective. The Constitutional Test examines if it remains consistent with subsequent judicial interpretation and constitutional amendments. The Efficacy Test checks whether the institutional machinery for implementation still exists and functions effectively. The Enforceability Test asks a more fundamental question: can the state credibly enforce the law with the administrative

and financial capacity available? A statute that cannot be enforced in practice erodes respect for law in principle. The Overlap Test determines whether the field has since been occupied by central or newer state legislation. Finally, the Burden Test assesses whether the compliance and enforcement costs are proportionate to the regulatory purpose. Only those statutes that satisfy these tests should remain on the statute book.

The third step, *Eliminate*, translates audit findings into legislative action. Once obsolete laws are identified, they must be formally repealed through a Repealing and Amending Bill. The process must also encompass subordinate legislation, rules, orders and notifications that exist without operative Acts. Public consultation, ideally through a repeal portal, can strengthen legitimacy and invite expert participation.

The fourth step, *Align*, concerns harmonisation. Surviving statutes often contain inconsistent definitions, duplicative provisions and procedural contradictions. Alignment helps rationalise and standardise legislative drafting across sectors. The process may include consolidation (merging multiple related laws into one), creation of uniform definitions and simplification of legal language. Drafting reforms should follow the principles of clarity, accessibility and linguistic precision.

The fifth step, *New Governance*, implies institutionalisation. Law reform should not depend on political mood or bureaucratic initiative. It must be embedded in the governance architecture. States should establish a permanent Law Reform and Simplification Commission to review all laws every five years. It should identify conflicts and redundancies. Over time, rationalisation must become a continuous, self-correcting process.

A sound legal order requires the discipline to forget. Laws that outlive their purpose burden governance and erode legitimacy. Renewal, not accumulation, is the measure of legislative maturity.



GUEST VIEW

# A green energy transition is critical for Asia's growth

















## New horizons

Developing countries must take the lead in addressing the climate crisis

The 30th edition of the Conference of Parties (COP) has begun in Brazil’s Belém. Coming 10 years after the historic Paris Agreement, when all signatory members of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) committed to a common goal of keeping temperatures below 2°C and “as far as possible below 1.5°C”, this would have been an ideal platform to take stock of the achievements so far and ramp up ambition. Instead, there is a visible sense of disarray. The United States has, yet again, withdrawn from the Paris Agreement (though not the UNFCCC) and from 2017, this break seems decisively more hostile. Wielding threats on tariffs and brinkmanship, the U.S. Administration seems actively committed to derail steps toward emission cuts, newer ways to fund adaptation and adopting clean technology. For instance, it has played a major role in recent months in scuttling a resolution by members of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) into transitioning the shipping industry away from fossil fuel use. Following Bill Gates’s shift from being a vocal advocate of curbing emissions to one who no longer sees climate change as an existential threat, Mr. Trump announced it as a “vindication” of his position. There is a case that the U.S.’s isolationist policy is of diminishing relevance in an era when global investments in clean energy outpace fossil fuel investment and that businesses globally have seen the writing on the wall. But as the IMO example states, the U.S.’s abilities as a destabilising force remain formidable. That must be at the back of negotiators’ minds when they began the 12-day deliberative sprint.

This COP is one of ‘implementation’, as the Brazil Presidency has emphasised. While the world’s collective action is far short of what the Paris goals require, there is palpable optimism that the tenor of discussions from now on will visibly shift toward ironing out financial mechanisms for adaptation, preserving forests and strengthening carbon credit markets. It is likely that there will be a renewed discussion on how to make the United Nations’ multilateral process more effective at delivering decisive outcomes and, perhaps, a debate on the creation of a ‘climate council’, as Brazil proposed earlier this year. All of this promises fresh energy and verve to a process that has come to be seen as ineffective in addressing the climate crisis. However, this is also an opportunity for the large developing economies – India, China, Brazil, and South Africa in particular – to stake claim to leadership. This might require a greater display of ambition and recalibration of past positions, particularly on financial contributions. Sans fireworks, India must begin an internal dialogue to place itself favourably for this nebulous future.

## In free fall

Sudan’s hopes for a return to democracy look dim

Sudan is no stranger to violence by paramilitary forces. Yet, the rape, pillage and mass killings carried out by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in El-Fasher, after their capture of the city in the Darfur region in late October, were shocking even by Sudan’s grim standards. The RSF, a predominantly Arab militia, known for its brutality against Sudan’s African communities, unleashed a wave of atrocities, including a massacre at a maternity hospital. The RSF now controls five of Darfur’s capitals, tightening its grip over the famine-stricken region. In a chilling demonstration of impunity, RSF militants posted footage of some of their crimes on social media. Born from the Arab supremacist Janjaweed militia in the early 2000s, the group had faced accusations of ethnic cleansing and genocide against non-Arab communities in Darfur. It laid siege to El-Fasher, the Sudanese army’s last major stronghold in Darfur, 18 months ago, a blockade that triggered a famine in the region. More than 12 million people have been displaced since Sudan’s civil war broke out in April 2023, and tens of thousands killed. According to UN experts, the country is now facing the world’s worst humanitarian crisis. While both the army and the RSF have been accused of war crimes, the atrocities by the paramilitary force have increasingly been described as genocidal.

When the regime of dictator Omar al-Bashir fell in 2019, many hoped that Sudan was on the cusp of a new dawn. But hopes for a democratic transition were short lived as the military and the RSF jointly staged a coup in 2021. Mr. Bashir had raised the RSF out of the ranks of the Janjaweed and treated the group as his personal army. He used it to neutralise domestic opposition and as a parallel structure to the military. Yet, when the roots of the Bashir regime were shaken by public protests in 2019, the RSF turned against him. But once the military consolidated power in 2021 and insisted that the RSF integrate with the regular army, the alliance between the army and the RSF fell apart, plunging Sudan into civil war. Today, the military government, backed by Egypt, controls most of Sudan, while the RSF, supported by the UAE, dominates Darfur. Earlier this year, the army pushed the RSF out of Khartoum, the capital. But the fall of El-Fasher confirms that the militia remains entrenched in its stronghold. If the fighting continues, Sudan risks more death, destruction, and even a state collapse. The atrocities in El-Fasher should serve as a wake-up call for the international community. The war must be brought to an end. For that, the backers of both the military and the militia should press for talks instead of sending more weapons into Sudan.

A decade after the Paris Agreement, the climate crisis has only intensified. South Asia bears the brunt as monsoon floods, landslides and heatwaves. These shocks unfold amid a fractured global order – multilateralism under strain, climate pledges weakened, and trade protectionism rising. The withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement, yet again, has tested the credibility of global processes. Yet no single actor, however powerful, can halt collective action. Others must and are stepping forward.

Small island-states, emerging economies and coalitions of the willing have taken the lead. Increasingly, this mantle is passing to South Asia, home to nearly two billion people facing an extraordinary diversity of climate risks. Inaction is not an option.

There have been wide consultations (as COP30 Special Envoy for South Asia) with government and civil society representatives across Bhutan, Nepal, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. We have listened to localised concerns, recognised many areas of convergence for messages that negotiators are taking to COP30 in Brazil, and identified several opportunities for regional climate cooperation.

### South Asia’s concerns and priorities

We realised that South Asia’s response is pragmatic and collaborative: regional coalitions, investment in renewable energy, climate-resilient agriculture and integration of climate adaptation into development planning. Its climate leadership may be emergent, but it is driven by necessity, experience and the moral imperative to protect its people and signal to the world that action cannot wait. The discussions yielded five concerns and priorities of South Asian countries.

First, implementation remains the Achilles heel of climate action. The gap between what is promised in action and finance, and what is delivered, is glaring. Whether it is in implementing the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) or delivering finance, the challenge remains. So far, only 65 countries have submitted enhanced NDCs. Further, a recent study by the Council on Energy, Environment, and Water (CEEW) revealed that out of the 203 initiatives assessed (launched since 2015), approximately 5% of the initiatives have achieved their stated goals. This underscores the need for the Global South to harness regional cooperation to create impactful and targeted initiatives.

Climate pledges require robust governance, including a clear plan and timeline for reporting progress. Willing countries can, first, strengthen a regional forum to build a common stance and advance shared action that can be recognised at platforms such as the G-20, the The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), and BRICS. Moreover, ensure governance structures are inclusive, giving voice to the underrepresented, such as subnational governments, local



Arunabha Ghosh

is Special Envoy to COP30 representing South Asia, and the CEO, Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)



Jhalak Aggarwal

is Programme Associate, Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW)

There is a need for mutual clarity, mutual cooperation and mutual implementation on climate action, as consultations across South Asia – a region that is bearing the brunt of the climate crisis – show

communities and women. Also, strengthen regional cooperation by sharing knowledge, aligning priorities and scaling technology solutions across borders. Initiatives such as India’s Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) and Nepal’s Sagarmatha Sambaad focused on mountain vulnerabilities, show how focused partnerships can advance both national and regional goals.

Second, climate adaptation must stand shoulder-to-shoulder with emission mitigation. According to the ADB, South Asia could experience an increase in days exceeding 35°C – from around 100 to approximately 200 annually – by 2100. The region-specific economic and non-economic impacts are diverse – Nepal’s glacial lake outburst flood, coastal threats in the Maldives, India facing sweltering heatwaves, and Sri Lanka’s emerging drylands and water stress.

### The support that is needed

What is required is adequate technical, institutional and financial support to develop and implement plans domestically. Mainstreaming locally-led adaptation practices can also complement scientific innovation and strengthen local ownership. Internationally, deliberations must proceed to reach consensus on fundamental, simple, and non-burdensome indicators under the Global Goal on Adaptation. These indicators must be multi-dimensional and adaptable for use at regional and national levels, focusing on tracking progress rather than penalising countries with limited capacity.

Third, ambitious action must begin by investing in trust. The past is marred by delayed finances, broken promises and diluted commitments from developed countries. The current geopolitics is not conducive to an ambitious climate outcome. Further, an easy exit from a climate agreement not only leads to increased emissions but also undermines trust in the process. Analysis by the CEEW shows that developed countries are not on track to meet their 2030 NDC target. Hence, developed countries must fulfil their existing pledges and build momentum with ambitious NDCs aligned with 1.5°C, reinstating faith in multilateralism.

Fourth, deliver climate finance that is predictable (sustainable funding), adequate (meets the needs and balanced with mitigation), fairly distributed and accessible (easy, low-transaction cost access with priority for vulnerable countries), and non-debt inducing (grants and highly concessional financing instruments).

For this, the Baku to Belém Roadmap to 1.3T (\$1.3 trillion) must be underpinned by clear pathways: who delivers, how much, by when, and with what accountability. Without clarity, the \$300 billion adaptation target by 2035 is meaningless. South Asian countries, particularly the Least Developed Countries, must call for a tripling of adaptation finance with operational clarity. And, South Asia’s needs are urgent.

# Celebrating a sage king, a celebration of India-Bhutan ties



Gautam Bambawale

is a former Indian Ambassador to Bhutan and is currently Trustee of the Pune International Centre

Jigme Singye Wangchuck, who turns 70 today, has helped nurture both the modernisation of the mountain kingdom and its relations with India

life came from its north and not from the other direction. It was Jigme Singye Wangchuck who got India’s Border Roads Organisation to build, operate and maintain the road network of his country. Today, Bhutanese firms are capable of doing this on their own and have rightly been tasked with this. Again, it was Jigme Singye Wangchuck who saw the potential of generating electricity from Bhutan’s rivers and supplying it to India, thereby enabling a steady revenue stream for his nation, which in turn has lifted incomes there.

### Hydropower diplomacy

Hydropower cooperation between India and Bhutan has, over the years, developed into one of the strongest and most significant pillars of the relationship between the two countries. Therefore, it is apt, symbolic of this friendship and significant in itself, that the Punatsangchhu II hydroelectric project will be formally inaugurated by Mr. Modi and K5 during the trip. The 1,020 MW project has been generating electricity for some months now, helping Bhutan in further raising its economic profile.

The Punatsangchhu II project, like many of its predecessors, was constructed as a cooperative venture between the Government of India and the Royal Government of Bhutan, with India providing the initial capital for it – this is paid off by the project from the income stream generated by the sale of electricity to India at rates which are competitive but adjusted every few years to reflect current realities.

This model has worked well till now but it has been decided that in future, the two countries must tap other sources of capital for such hydropower projects. Now that private capital is

readily available in adequate quantity, future projects are to be done by private firms of India in collaboration with Bhutanese companies. Significantly, Tata Power and Adani Power have readily taken up a few of the projects on offer in Bhutan.

India continues to provide development assistance to Bhutan beyond hydropower whether it is for community development projects or larger schemes that range from infrastructure development to upgrading older institutions and even monasteries.

### Issues of national security

K5 continues to seek his father’s – K4’s – advice on matters of national security. Whether it pertains to the territorial integrity of Bhutan or to the operational readiness of the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA), K4 is always consulted by his son. K4 has a deep understanding of not merely India and how its democracy functions but also about Communist China, what motivates and drives that nation and the implications it has for Bhutan-China relations.

India will always be grateful to K4 for having personally led Operation All Clear in December 2003 where the RBA drove out several hundred cadres of Indian insurgent groups that had taken shelter in the jungles of Bhutan just across Assam and West Bengal. On India’s side of the border, the Indian Army was able to easily arrest these Indian insurgent groups and proceed against them as in the law.

Thus, November 11 is not merely the birthday celebration of a sage and wise former King of Bhutan. Mr. Modi’s presence at these events in Thimphu also makes it a celebration of India-Bhutan friendship and cooperation.

The views expressed are personal

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Credibility and trust

The recent resignations of BBC’s leadership following the ‘mis-editing’ of a speech by U.S. President Donald Trump underscore a core truth: news agencies are not only conveyors of facts but also the custodians of trust. Correspondents and editors must adhere to the core principles of accuracy, context and impartiality. When these are compromised — as when

snippets are splice-edited to mislead — the consequence is not just embarrassment but also the erosion of institutional integrity. The lesson for all media is this: ethical lapses ripple outward, undermining democracy’s information infrastructure and public confidence alike (‘World’ page – Panel, November 10).

Gopalaswamy J., Chennai

### Shroud of air pollution

At this time of the year, Delhi, once again, finds itself caught in the throes of severe air pollution. It is distressing to see the citizens of Delhi suffer year after year from toxic air, despite the capital being home to the nation’s top political leadership. For over a decade, the issue has been discussed and debated, yet real action remains missing. Smog

control towers, often non-functional, have done little to clean the air. This reflects poorly on governance. The continued neglect of such a public health crisis shows the lack of sincerity and responsibility among politicians and officials. Politicians need to make public welfare the guiding principle of politics and governance, rising above narrow interests to serve

the larger public good.

V. Nagarajan, Chennai

### Pets and pests

I write this letter as a 90-year-old retired veterinarian. The entire discourse about stray dogs and pets reminds me of the adage, “to be unable to see the wood for the trees”. The issue is not about pets but about pests. The significant difference in the numbers of

stray dogs, from some thousands in 2018 to a lakh or more now, reveals the inefficacy of the present strategy. Human health and safety should be the priorities — there must be the culling of pests and the encouragement of only pets.

Dr. T.N. Varadharajan, Chennai

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



# Iraqi elections: An opportunity for India

The current obsession with the Bihar election on November 11 notwithstanding, India also needs to focus on another election taking place on the same day, 4,000 kilometres away, in Iraq.

**Features and significance**  
While some systemic features of the sixth Iraqi parliamentary election are relatively easy to comprehend, others may make even hardened Bihar pollsters blink. There are 7,744 candidates for 329 seats with 32 parties and a large number of independents in the election based on proportional representation. Nearly 40% of candidates are below 40 years of age. In an otherwise patriarchal society, close to a third of the candidates are women, leveraging a quarter of seats reserved for them. The results might trigger months of horse-trading among the three sectarian groups, broadly based on Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish parties, before a majority coalition emerges. The incumbent Prime Minister, Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, projects himself as a “Sushasan Babu”, claiming to have completed over 2,582 long-delayed projects in his three-year rule. He has added a million new jobs to the already bloated bureaucracy. His detractors accuse him of being pro-American. The polity and electioneering are characterised by corruption, disbursal of freebies and rampant kleptocracy institutionalised by a disingenuous “Muhasasa” system that reserves nearly a thousand lucrative positions for the winning coalition. These flaws and the violent suppression of youth protests in 2019-20 have engendered popular apathy. Only 21 million of the 30 million eligible voters have registered, and less than 40% of the latter are likely to vote, resulting in nearly three-fourths absenteeism. Nevertheless, the biometric voter I-cards are reportedly changing hands for around a hundred dollars. Thanks to numerous militias running amok, guns,



**Mahesh Sachdev**  
Retired Indian Ambassador specialising in the Arab world and oil issues

India could leverage Iraq's post-election stability to revive bilateral synergy

goons and ethno-sectarianism are more abundant than in Bihar's badlands. Kurdish separatism, lingering Islamic State and al-Qaeda terrorism, and Iranian patronage of several Iraqi Shia militias are additional complications. Further, the election boycott call by populist Shia leader Moqtada al-Sadr, whose party got the highest number of seats in the previous election, would leave the field to the ruling Shia Coordination Framework. While Mr. al-Sudani is widely expected to continue, the fractured Iraqi polity has resulted in a new Prime Minister after every past election. Nevertheless, after the tumultuous legacy of the Saddam era repression, wars, terrorism and sectarian strife, holding elections at regular intervals marks Iraq's return to imperfect democratic normalcy. Second, the coming parliamentary elections have regional and even global significance in view of Iraq's geostrategic importance and status as OPEC's second-largest producer. During the past two decades of turmoil, the divided country has been an arena where the animosity between the U.S. and Iran played out. In case a decisive election results in stable governance, Iraq can resume its unencumbered sovereignty. It has already negotiated a withdrawal of the U.S.-led multinational force by September 2026, deployed since the 2003 invasion to oust Saddam Hussein. Iran is determined to maintain its stranglehold on Shia militias in Iraq, as well as use Iraq as a market and conduit for busting the U.S. sanctions. But Tehran has been significantly weakened by Israeli military actions over the past two years, which have attenuated Iranian military might, curbed its nuclear and missile capabilities, and decimated its regional proxies. The Trump administration's “maximum pressure” policies and “Snapback” of the UN sanctions have also hamstrung Iranian economy. Pro-Iran Iraqi militias have largely eschewed military

actions against the U.S. and Israel. A strong, nationalist elected government in Baghdad could take advantage of a weakened Iran to begin the delicate but crucial process of disarming the heavily armed militias by either co-opting them into regular armed forces or metamorphosing them into political parties. Similarly, Kurds leveraged the disarray in Baghdad to deepen their longstanding quest for autonomy through the ‘Kurdistan Regional Government’. As Baghdad gets its political and security act in place, this process might get reversed. The Iraqi oil and gas sector has remained largely unaffected by political and security flux, Iraq has been producing around 4.5 mbpd and exporting nearly 3.6 mbpd, with China and India being the top two customers in 2024. It claims 5.5 mbpd production capacity and has signed multiple agreements with Chinese, American, and other Western oil and gas majors to ramp up production to 7 mbps by 2029. Reducing gas flaring is a priority to utilise it as a fuel for power generation. **India-Iraq ties** India had close ties with Iraq during the 1980s, with nearly \$10 billion worth of construction projects and oil exploration blocks. In 2024-25, total bilateral trade was \$33.35 billion, making Iraq our eighth largest trade partner, albeit with a balance of 9:1 in Iraq's favour due to our dependence on crude. As Russian oil supplies recede, Iraq is likely to resume its role as India's largest crude supplier, further tilting the trade imbalance. Once the electoral dust settles, India should rebalance its bilateral ties by prioritising highest level re-engagement. Apart from reviving the socio-economic complementarity, such synergy would ameliorate the emerging power vacuum in the northern Gulf. It would also show that the ties between our two democracies are not transactional, but based on mutual interests and shared values.

# Dealing with a dogged problem

With 9 lakh dogs, Kerala will find it impossible to implement the Court's directive

## STATE OF PLAY

**K.S. Sudhi**  
sudhi.ks@thehindu.co.in

With about 9 lakh street dogs, Kerala is going to find it nearly impossible to comply with the Supreme Court's latest order directing States to relocate these animals from public spaces to dog pounds. Last week, the Court directed local bodies across the country to remove “every stray dog found within the premises of an educational institution, hospital, sports complex, bus stand/depot, or railway station and to shift such animal/s to a designated shelter, after due sterilisation and vaccination, in accordance with the Animal Birth Control (ABC) Rules, 2023”. The Court also said that the “stray dogs so picked up shall not be released back to the same location from which they were picked up.” This is a clear departure from the Animal Birth Control Rules, 2023 that lay down a ‘capture-sterilise-vaccinate-return’ policy.

**Challenges**  
While the order may appear sound from a public health and safety standpoint, it risks going unimplemented. There are immense infrastructural and human resource demands that this exercise entails. Stray dogs coexist with humans in public places where food is available. The removal of one pack from an area will not solve the issue, as the vacuum will be quickly filled by another group of dogs. In addition, there are also behavioural aspects of street dogs to be considered. Often compassionately called community dogs, they offer companionship to many people, which explains why there are so many prot-



ests against the order. Neither are there enough animal handlers to catch street dogs nor are there qualified veterinary surgeons, as specified in the Rules. Kerala received particular attention in the three-member Bench's order, which cited media reports of stray dog bites across the State, including the case of a Class 3 student being bitten at a government lower primary school in Panamaram, Wayanad. The judgment also mentioned reports of dog bite incidents that took place at Ernakulam General Hospital, the KSRTC bus stand at Kottayam, and the railway station at Kannur. Despite this challenge, every move to set up public service facilities – whether septage and waste treatment plants, mobile towers, or ABC centres for dogs – has been greeted with stiff public resistance in Kerala. In such a scenario, it would be a real challenge for civic bodies to find secure and isolated places to set up dog pounds, considering the scarcity of suitable land and public opposition to such units. It would also be difficult for local bodies to establish ABC centres to carry out surgical procedures, as specified in the Rules. The problem is not limited to Kerala. No local body in the country may be able to meet the expense for keeping and feeding the dogs in these centres on its own. The order,

which requires that dogs rounded up from public spaces not be returned after surgery, has effectively shifted their custody from the streets to the local authorities. The huge expense required for setting up animal shelters and surgical centres, capturing and immunising animals, procuring vehicles for transporting animals, and running the centres could also hinder the efforts of civic bodies in their fight against rabies and dog bites. Without sufficient human and financial resources at their disposal, civic bodies cannot be expected to enthusiastically come forward to take up the challenge. The order has also put brakes on the Kerala government's recent initiative to sterilise and vaccinate street dogs and return them to their original locations, as specified in the ABC Rules.

**Problem with compliance**  
The Court has cautioned that any reported non-compliance with its orders would be viewed seriously. It said that “penalties/consequences including but not limited to the initiation of suo moto contempt proceedings” would be imposed on erring officials. However, there are numerous practical problems in implementing the order, which means that the instructions of the Court risk being inadvertently flouted by the civic bodies. While admitting that incidents of dog bites are on the rise and rabies-related deaths are being regularly reported from the States, a workable approach to tackle the menace could have been adopted. Removing dogs from public places to dog pounds is easier said than done in Kerala, which has a population density that is thrice the national average.

# Capital owners gain, workers lose: the widening wealth gap

Between 1990 and 2024, the capital share of national income increased in 56% of countries

## DATA POINT

### The Hindu Data Team

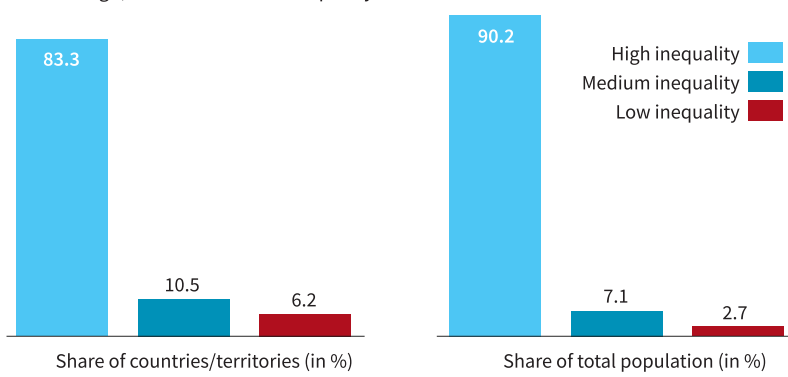
According to the Global Inequality Report, 83% of countries experience high income inequality, representing 90% of the world's population (**Chart 1**). A high level of income inequality corresponds to a Gini coefficient above 0.4. A Gini coefficient of 0 indicates perfect equality, while a value of 1 represents perfect inequality. One of the main reasons a large share of the global population continues to live in highly unequal countries is the rising share of national income accruing to capital (through profits, rents, and dividends) compared to labour (through wages and salaries). Between 1990 and 2024, the capital share of national income increased in 56% of countries, covering 74% of the world's population. **Chart 2** shows the capital and labour share of the national income, globally. Capital ownership itself is highly unequal. An estimated 85% of the world's population derives no income from capital. **Chart 3** shows the share of the population living in households with less than \$100 in annual capital income per person. In India, 97% of the population falls within this category. Even labour income is highly unequal. Between 2019 and 2024, average global CEO pay increased by 50%, while average worker's pay rose by less than 1%. Because of this unequal accumulation of wealth, private wealth has far outpaced public wealth. As a result, several governments face significant net debts (**Chart 4**). Such economic inequality also leads to social inequality within and across nations. For instance, in the U.S., African American women are more than twice as likely to die in pregnancy or childbirth than white women, or women in Kerala in India (**Chart 5**).

## Workers fall behind

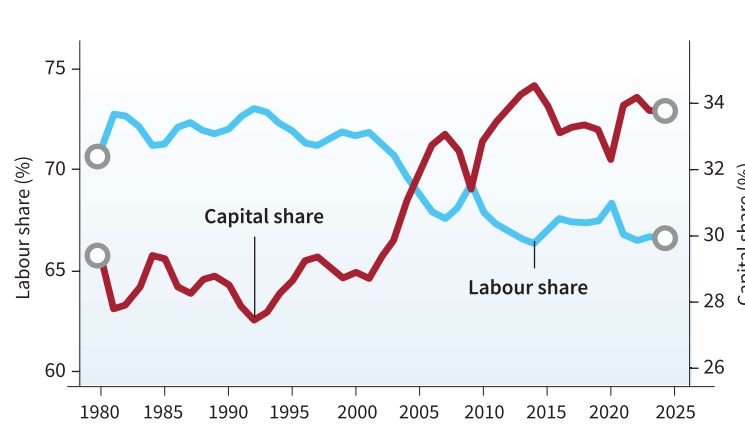
Data for the charts were sourced from the G20 Extraordinary Committee of Independent Experts on Global Inequality report



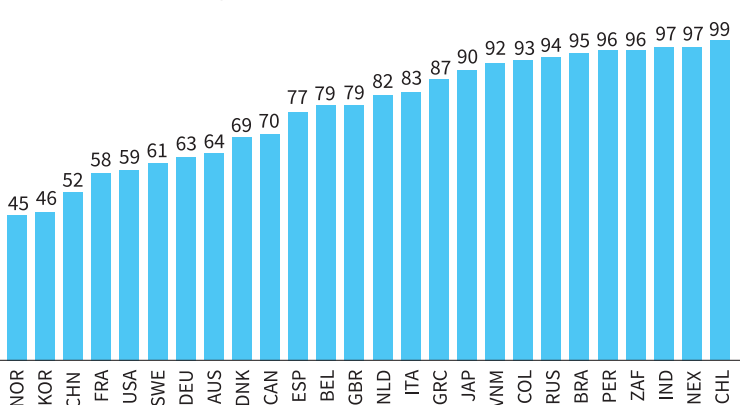
**Chart 1:** High, medium and low inequality countries



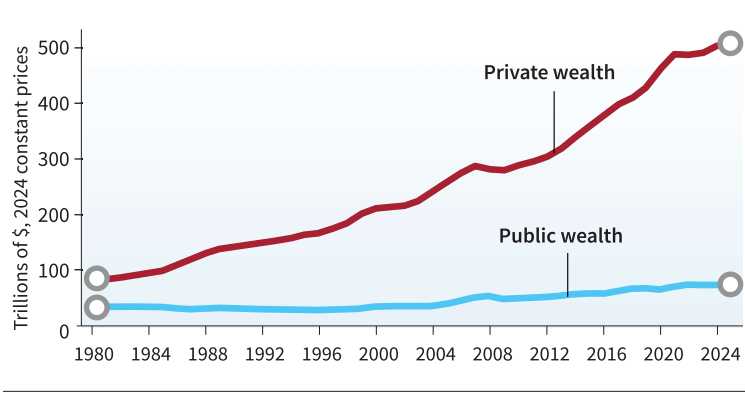
**Chart 2:** Capital and labour share of national income, 1980-2024



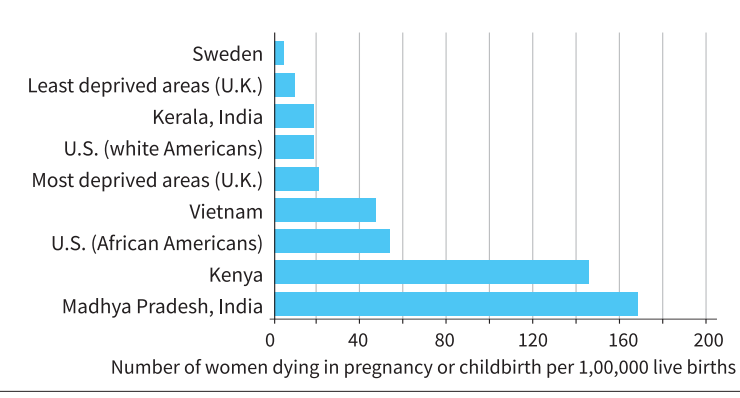
**Chart 3:** Percentage of population living in households with less than \$100 in capital income (including private pensions) per person, annually



**Chart 4:** Public and private wealth, 1980-2024



**Chart 5:** Maternal mortality across racial, regional, and economic groups



## FROM THE ARCHIVES

### The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO NOVEMBER 11, 1975

## Angola becomes free

Luanda, Nov. 10: Portugal to-day proclaimed Angola independent from midnight to-night, and said it was leaving the war-torn territory without any sense of guilt. The declaration, made here by the Portuguese High Commissioner, Admiral Leonel Cardoso, several hours before midnight, omitted to recognise any of the three warring liberation movements of the territory's new rulers. “In the name of the President of the Portuguese Republic, I solemnly proclaim – with effect from zero hours on November 11 – the independence of Angola and its full sovereignty vested in the Angolan people”, Admiral Cardoso told a press conference. The handing over of power was made in the form of a declaration to newsmen since the three factions have failed to unite. Eleventh hour efforts by Portugal and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to set up a government of national unity including all three movements fell through over the weekend. The three groups are the Angolan's People's Liberation Movement (MPLA), National Liberation Front (FNLA), and Union for Total Independence (UNITA). The Portuguese flag was ceremoniously lowered for the last time in Angola at 15-30 (local time) to-day at the High Commissioner's palace and nearby San Pedro fortress. Immediately afterwards Portuguese troops still stationed in the town marched to the naval base, led by the High Commissioner, to sail to Portugal. Troops of the Angolan People's Liberation Movement (MPLA) immediately took over at the palace and the fortress. Angola becomes the 47th independent state in Africa amidst a major and unprecedented civil war for control of the nation of 5.8 million people.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO NOVEMBER 11, 1925

## Rare stamps

London, Nov. 10: A rare collection of stamps found by an accident weeks ago while a quantity of rubbish was being turned out of the attic in a house in Mayfair has been auctioned and realised five thousand four hundred sterling. A complete mint sheet of 120 of 1858 Ceylon half penny lilac fetched six hundred and fifty and another sheet slightly paler with two stamps cut out realised five hundred and thirty sterling.



# Text & Context

THE HINDU

## NEWS IN NUMBERS

**The damage caused by Cyclone Montha in Andhra Pradesh**

**6,384** In ₹ crore. The Andhra Pradesh government revised the estimate of damage caused by Cyclone Montha to ₹6,384 crore and sought an immediate relief of ₹900 crore after a central team visited the State to assess the loss. PTI

**Investment to develop small modular nuclear reactors in Sweden**

**400** In million Swedish crowns. A group of Swedish industrial companies has signed a deal with utility Vattenfall to invest 400 million Swedish crowns to develop small modular nuclear reactors in Sweden. Vattenfall's plan is to build reactors at its Ringhals plant. REUTERS

**Persons killed in clashes between rival factions in Nigeria**

**200** Fighting between Boko Haram and rival militants from the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) group broke out in Dagon Chiku on the shores of Lake Chad, in the latest bout of infighting for territorial control fuelled by ideological rifts. AFP

**Number of people killed in migrant shipwreck in Malaysia**

**13** Authorities in Malaysia and Thailand have recovered at least 13 bodies as they search for survivors after a boat carrying migrants capsized. Officials said the boat was carrying about 70 migrants, many believed to be from the Rohingya community trying to reach Malaysia. AFP

**Number of persons displaced due to Typhoon Fung-wong**

**1.4** In million. Typhoon Fung-wong blew out of the northwestern Philippines after setting off floods and landslides, and killing at least four people. The country is still dealing with the devastation wrought by Typhoon Kalmaegi. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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# What is the role of a pay commission?

How have public sector compensation systems evolved over decades? When was the first Central Pay Commission constituted? What are the different terms of reference? What are international practices? How can the government attract and retain talent?

## EXPLAINER

Rangarajan R.

### The story so far:

The Central government has constituted the 8th Central Pay Commission (CPC) with retired Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai as the Chairperson. It also consists of Professor Pulak Ghosh, faculty at IIM Bangalore, as a part-time member and Pankaj Jain IAS, Secretary to the government of India, as member-secretary. It will submit its report within 18 months.

### What is a pay commission?

Pay commissions are set up in India by an executive order based on a Cabinet decision. The role of the CPC is to go into various issues of salary structures, retirement benefits and other service conditions of Central government employees, including defence personnel, and make suitable recommendations on the changes required. The first CPC was set up in 1946.

### What are its terms of reference?

The Terms of Reference (TOR) of the pay commissions are finalised by the Union Cabinet. The TOR of the 8th CPC requires it to consider certain factors while making its recommendations. They include economic conditions of the country and the need for fiscal prudence; need to ensure adequate resources for developmental expenditure and welfare measures; unfunded cost of non-contributory pension schemes; impact of recommendations on State government finances that usually adopt the recommendations of the CPC; and the prevailing emolument structure and working conditions available for central public sector undertakings and private sector employees.

### What are the international practices?

Globally, till the 1970s, the compensation

Table1: Comparison of public sector employment and expenditure

Country	Public sector wage bill (% of GDP)	Public sector wage bill (% of total expenditure)	Public sector employment (% of total employment)
India	5.48	17.70	8.5
U.S.	9.50	20.58	12.9
U.K.	10.20	20.29	29.0
France	13.37	21.43	31.5
Germany	8.51	16.46	22.4
Brazil	10.65	24.92	12.5

Source: World Bank – World Bureaucracy Indicators - 2022



system for the public sector was aimed at achieving equity by benchmarking them with similar roles in the private employment market. In the 1980s, efficiency replaced equity as the key principle in determining compensation. Starting with the 1990s, performance and incentives became the key principle while balancing them with affordability. At present, public sector compensation systems are evolving to recruit and retain individuals with appropriate competencies and skills, while attempting to contain the total cost to the public exchequer.

As per global standards the key characteristics of fair compensation in the public sector are clear philosophy, ability to attract talent, internal equity, external

competitiveness and clarity. In India while internal equity is given adequate weightage, external competitiveness lags behind when it comes to compensation for top positions.

It is interesting to note some comparative data for large democracies on certain parameters of public sector employment summarised in Table 1. It can be observed that while the general perception in our country is that public sector employment and wages are gargantuan with limited efficiency, it is lesser in almost all parameters when compared to other major democracies.

### What next?

There are certain key aspects of the TOR that require attention. First, the TOR

requires the CPC to compare the pay structure of the public sector with the private sector. This has been addressed even in earlier pay commissions. Entry level posts in the public sector have significantly higher salaries than their private counterparts while it is the opposite for higher posts and specialist roles. The compression ratio, that is, the ratio of lowest to highest salaries in the Central government has been fixed at 1:12.5 in the seventh CPC. Privileges and perks coupled with job security is a significant intangible that makes up for lower salary packages in top government posts. However, this needs to be revisited with respect to certain top posts and specialist roles in order to attract and retain talent. Second, intangibles like learning and development, training, and work environment including flexible working and health promotion are not part of the TOR. It may be expected that the Commission will address these issues in its final report.

Finally, the 8th CPC has been mandated to consider economic conditions, need to ensure adequate resources for welfare, and unfunded cost of non-contributory pension schemes. The pension bill for the year 2025-26 is estimated at ₹2.76 lakh crore out of the total revenue expenditure of ₹39.44 lakh crore of the central government. The impact of non-contributory pension schemes on the government exchequer needs to be borne in mind while making recommendations. However, welfare measures are political decisions that keep evolving. New schemes are announced by the Centre from time to time. Considering these factors, a commission with members from the judiciary, academia and bureaucracy may not be equipped to assess the impact. There may also be a case for broad basing the commission with finance and human resource professionals to bring in diverse opinions.

Rangarajan R is a former IAS officer and author of 'Courseware on Polity Simplified.' He currently trains at Officers IAS academy. Views expressed are personal.

## THE GIST

Pay commissions are set up in India by an executive order based on a Cabinet decision.

At present, public sector compensation systems are evolving to recruit and retain individuals with appropriate competencies and skills, while attempting to contain the total cost to the public exchequer.

First, the TOR requires the CPC to compare the pay structure of the public sector with the private sector.

# Why access to knowledge is crucial for innovation

How will restricting free flow of information hamper innovation and growth in economies?

Rahul Menon

The current Nobel Prize in Economics has been given to three economists – Joel Mokyr, Philippe Aghion, and Peter Howitt – who have studied the role of technological change and creative destruction in economic growth. While the work of the latter two would be more readily recognisable to the modern economist, Mokyr adopts a historical lens to study the relationship between knowledge, ideas and economic growth.

### What was Mokyr's model?

Mokyr's model makes a distinction between two kinds of knowledge: propositional and prescriptive. The former is knowledge about scientific phenomena and principles, while the latter concerns knowledge about techniques. Economic growth occurs with an increase in both kinds of knowledge,

where societies possess not just scientific or theoretical knowledge, but also the knowledge of techniques to put them into use. What is important to understand is that it is not enough for society to merely possess knowledge; what matters is that a majority of members are able to access this knowledge, and that social norms promote the sharing of knowledge and free exchange of ideas. Technological progress is not merely an economic process, but a social and cultural outcome regulating the spread and sharing of knowledge amongst society.

Mokyr tells us the importance not just of generating new ideas, but of sharing and communicating these ideas. Free markets do not automatically guarantee growth, and state intervention does not ensure negative growth prospects. Instead, anything that restricts the free flow of information directly hampers innovation and growth. In that respect, one can point to certain social institutions

in India that have hampered growth – such as caste – while being aware of the potentially negative effects of job polarisation and automation in restricting the spread of knowledge amongst theorists and practitioners.

### Does the caste system stop growth?

The social institution of caste in India has ensured that knowledge was the preserve of an elite minority, with violence being used to restrict access. Following Independence, policy proposals such as reservations have been introduced to rectify this balance. However, access to high quality education still remains out of reach for many, while the slow retreat of the public sector ensures quality education once again remains the preserve of the elite.

Mokyr's work shows us the dangers of not ensuring universal access to quality knowledge. What matters is not just the extent of knowledge accumulated by a

society, but whether enough individuals have access to it in order to use it to tinker, experiment, and devise new techniques to introduce economic innovations. The existence of knowledge but with no meaningful access to it is as good as a society that possesses no knowledge at all. The extreme fragmentation of caste implies that not only is education restricted, but rigid conventions that ensure communities do not meaningfully interact further restricts innovations.

In this regard, one can see the importance of breaking down caste barriers, and improving educational access as well as ensuring quality education for all. This is of relevance given the slow retreat of the state in education and the rise in private universities. Much of the population may be unable to access quality education owing to high fees and lack of reservations in private universities.

### What about automation?

Current labour markets have been thrown into disarray and profound uncertainty with the introduction of automation driven by AI.

The threat of job displacement is serious, but there is another, deeper question: what happens to the sharing of practical knowledge about capital and techniques when fewer individuals have access to it? Automation brings with it the

problem of job polarisation, where much of routine work is performed by machines and/or AI, with humans in either highly skilled tasks or performing service occupations, such as in restaurants. This could potentially reduce the share of workforce who actually have knowledge of modern techniques. The transmission of knowledge about techniques of production requires long periods of familiarising oneself with the methods of operation, through personal contact, training and hands-on experience. Automation can have significant productivity effects, and might even prove to raise growth over time. But what happens to the sharing of knowledge of techniques if much of the labour force does not even have access to these new techniques?

If inaccessible education and restrictive social institutions keep propositional knowledge restricted, and job polarisation and automation ensure prescriptive knowledge is out to reach, economy-wide innovation is bound to suffer. The transformation of knowledge into innovations and growth depends on the cultural and social norms determining the costs of access to knowledge. Democratisation of education, far from being inimical to economic efficiency, is actually an important condition to ensure faster growth.

Rahul Menon is associate professor at O.P.Jindal Global University.



## S BG-BGE



◆ *The Indian* **EXPRESS**

~ FOUNDED BY ~

RAMNATH GOENKA

◆ IN 1932 ◆

BECAUSE THE TRUTH  
INVOLVES US ALL

## Protest for clean air was seen, now must be heard

ONSUNDAY, THE national capital awoke to a sepia cityscape, its skyline erased under a pall of toxic air. The Air Quality Index (AQI) breached 400 in several areas -- "severe" yet unfortunately routine for this time of the year. Later in the evening, however, something unusual happened. Hundreds of citizens braved the smog to show up at India Gate -- parents clutching their children, students with handmade banners, elderly citizens, masked and resolute, demanding clean air. In a city where the acrid smog has smothered what was once a beloved season, the gathering was a much-needed act of affirmation -- that people will no longer be passive sufferers and that clean air is not charity from the state but a right of the citizen.

For years, India's political class has treated air pollution as a seasonal inconvenience at best and fodder for a partisan and polarising politics at worst. Blame has floated from the city-state to the Centre, farmers to industries, from motorists to Opposition governments in adjoining states, a fog of evasion thicker than the smog itself. Citizens, too, have been complicit in their inertia and resignation. The India Gate protest indicates a possible and potential rupture in that paralysis. It reframes pollution not just as an administrative lapse but also as a political betrayal, and clean air as a non-negotiable right. This new civic grammar starts with the recognition that clean air cannot remain the privilege of the wealthy with access to air purifiers or the means to escape Delhi's wintery haze for mountain retreats, that the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) must commit to sustainable, workable solutions, that it is the most fundamental of equalities -- the breath that unites the rich and the poor, the young and the old.

Other nations have shown what sustained public pressure can achieve. Beijing faced a similar crisis a decade ago. Yet pressure from citizens, relentless monitoring, and political will turned the tide. There are, of course, differences between China and India -- in this country, policy must navigate diverse and often conflicting interests. But other countries have also shown the way -- like North Macedonia, a year ago, where huge popular protests against air pollution led to a clean-up plan that is being implemented. Here, if the India Gate protest is to be more than a symbolic moment, it must ensure that pollution is afforded the same urgency, and put to the same accountability test, at least in the political framing, that is reserved for inflation, corruption or unemployment. The battle for clean air cannot be left to policy papers and court orders alone. Only when citizens refuse to inhale institutional apathy, will Delhi, and India, reclaim the air they deserve to breathe.

## On stray dogs, SC undoes its fine balance

NEARLY THREE MONTHS after recalibrating its August 11 order on the removal of stray dogs to designated shelters and allowing the animals to be returned to their original locations after being sterilised and vaccinated (unless found to be aggressive or infected with rabies), the Supreme Court last week appeared to once again harden its position on the issue. Noting that dog bites continue to be reported "with alarming frequency", the Court ordered that stray dogs be removed "forthwith" from the premises of educational institutions, hospitals, sports complexes, bus stands and railway stations and kept in shelters after being sterilised and vaccinated. This abrupt reversal, especially on the question of releasing stray dogs back into the areas from where they were picked up, breaks from the balanced approach of the August 22 order and threatens to reignite passions on a deeply polarising issue.

Certainly, the menace posed by stray dogs, especially to children, the elderly and working class population, cannot be dismissed. According to government records, 37 lakh dog bite cases were recorded across the country in 2024. At the same time, it must be recognised that lakhs of stray dogs cannot be removed from their present homes simply by decree -- and certainly not within eight weeks as directed by the Court in the latest order. The SC is right when it points out that "administrative apathy" and "systemic failure" lie at the heart of India's stray dog problem. But housing such a large number of dogs in "designated shelters", besides stray cattle and other animals, as ordered by the Court, also calls for funds and infrastructure at a scale that most local bodies in the country simply do not possess at present.

A complex web of causes has led to the explosion in the stray dog population, including regular feeding and care by animal lovers, unmanaged solid waste and irresponsible pet owners who allow their dogs to interbreed with "streeties". These must be factored in for any solution to be effective -- as must the need for a considered debate that does not pit the claims of public health against a more scientific and humane approach.

## Is your password PASSWORD?

IS YOUR PASSWORD something along the lines of Zpg76lMq13qKfy@!/? Congratulations. If you're not used to selecting "strong" passwords and reposing your trust in password managers, things may be a little more confusing. Let's say you like to use your grandmother's name. But some sites want you to add numbers -- fine, take a date of birth, a few digits of a phone number. Then comes the next level of difficulty: Special characters. Throw in an exclamation mark here, an ampersand there -- by this point, grandma's name looks a bit like a robot's -- and you're sorted. Until it's time to remember which of the umpteen permutations and combinations you used for a particular login. Try a few possibilities, hit "forgot password" and wait for the reset link.

In the face of such frustrations, it's hard not to feel a little sympathy for whoever set the password for the server managing the Louvre museum's CCTV systems as "LOUVRE". This was reportedly discovered by a cybersecurity audit in 2014, and has now been highlighted by reports in the wake of last month's heist. Similarly, software managed by the security company Thales had the password "THALES". Simple, and easy to remember for the unfortunate human who has to store a 19th-century novel's worth of passwords in their head.

It's not clear if the password was still "LOUVRE" 11 years later, as claimed by some reports. If so, it would have been a suitably comedic detail in a cinematic caper. The heist has sparked serious concerns about gaps in the museum's security infrastructure, which could take years to plug -- some upgrades recommended in 2015 may not be completed until 2032. In the meantime, a reminder: The easiest password to remember is "password".

# India-Bhutan story offers lessons for managing asymmetric relationships



**RAJA MANDALA**

BY C RAJA MOHAN

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA Modi's visit to Bhutan today underlines the quiet resilience of one of India's most successful partnerships -- an enduring bond that thrives despite vast asymmetry in size and the significant changes in the regional environment. Amid the perennial gloom about Delhi's regional diplomacy, the India-Bhutan story stands out as a reminder that mutually respectful and productive neighbourhood ties are possible. It is a moment of optimism for Indian diplomacy.

The visit comes as the Himalayan kingdom pursues economic diversification and a wider international profile. It reaffirms India's commitment to Bhutan's security and development, and its continuing confidence in India as its principal partner. The exposition of the Buddha relics from Prahwa in Bhutan this week is a vivid example of the enduring and deep spiritual ties between Delhi and Thimphu.

Beyond the ceremonial warmth and the unveiling of new projects, Modi's two-day trip invites reflection on how this exceptional relationship evolved, how it was modernised in 2007, and what lessons it offers for India's wider neighbourhood diplomacy.

The framework of modern India-Bhutan relations was laid in the 1949 Treaty of Friendship, which reflected the geopolitical realities of the time. Independent India had inherited the British colonial structure of protectorates and buffer states tied to the

Raj. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru essentially continued that approach when he signed security treaties with the three Himalayan states -- Bhutan, Nepal, and Sikkim -- during 1949-50.

Under the 1949 treaty, Bhutan agreed to be "guided by India" in the conduct of its external affairs, while India promised not to interfere in the internal affairs of Bhutan. This framework, however, became increasingly unsustainable amid the rise of nationalism in the Himalayan states, the weakening of India's relative power, and the inevitable intrusion of other global powers -- the United States, the Soviet Union, and China.

The protectorate model collapsed eventually: Nepal disregarded many treaty provisions, and Delhi incorporated Sikkim into the Indian Union. Bhutan, however, managed the transition with remarkable suppleness. It steadily expanded its strategic autonomy without locking itself into persistent confrontation with Delhi, as Nepal did, or being absorbed by India, like Sikkim.

The maturity of leadership in both capitals and their recognition of the shared strategic stakes ensured broad political stability. India helped Bhutan build its administrative institutions, train its armed forces, and develop its economy. Hydropower cooperation, launched in the 1960s, became the central pillar of Bhutan's growth and the symbol of a mutually beneficial economic partnership. Delhi, in turn, learnt to resist the temptation to deal with Thimphu with a heavy hand.

During this visit, Modi will join celebrations marking the 70th birthday of Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the fourth King of Bhutan -- His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo, or K-4 -- who deserves much of the credit for stabilising the relationship amid profound regional change during his long reign from 1972 to 2006. His abdication in 2006 and the trans-

**The end of the Cold War, Bhutan's democratic turn, and its growing international engagement demanded a relationship grounded in sovereign equality**

formation of the hereditary monarchy into a constitutional one ushered in Bhutan's democratic transition. His son, King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, the K-5, now presides over Bhutanese democracy.

Delhi, for its part, recognised the need to recalibrate ties to match Bhutan's domestic evolution and changing global conditions. The end of the Cold War, Bhutan's democratic turn, and its growing international engagement demanded a relationship grounded in sovereign equality.

The landmark revision of the 1949 treaty in 2007 provided that new basis. The most consequential change was the deletion of the clause requiring Bhutan to be "guided" by India in foreign affairs. The new text instead affirmed "mutual respect for each other's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity". They also agreed not to let their territories be used against the other.

This shift acknowledged Bhutan's pursuit of an independent foreign policy while retaining close security and developmental cooperation with India. It was an act of strategic confidence by Delhi and of political wisdom by Thimphu. Yet the 2007 treaty did not lessen the need for India to continually tend this partnership amid shifting regional and global dynamics -- none more consequential than China's rise as a Himalayan and global power.

Like all India's neighbours, Bhutan is navigating a strategic landscape transformed by China's ascent. Sharing a long and disputed border with China and occupying a sensitive location in the eastern Himalayas, Bhutan faces unique challenges. Thimphu has no formal diplomatic ties with Beijing, but the two sides hold regular consultations to resolve their boundary dispute. The Doklam plateau -- the scene of the 2017 India-China standoff -- remains a critical flashpoint.

● **WORDLY WISE**  
Kingdoms rise and fall. Just don't burn the paintings in the Louvre, that's all.

— *Anne Rice*

Bhutan's approach has been cautious and deliberate: it seeks a peaceful boundary settlement while ensuring that no external power compromises its sovereignty or India's vital security interests.

At the same time, Bhutan has broadened its diplomatic and economic horizons. It has cultivated partnerships with Japan, South Korea, and several European nations, and is expanding its presence in multilateral forums. Yet, even as Thimphu diversifies, it has deepened ties with Delhi -- through new hydropower projects, cross-border railway links, digital initiatives, and educational cooperation.

India's experience with Bhutan offers valuable lessons for managing asymmetric relationships -- an enduring challenge in South Asia, where size disparities are vast. The essence of the Bhutan model lies in emphasising sovereign equality while sustaining a special partnership. Delhi's restraint and respect for Bhutan's choices, combined with Thimphu's pragmatism and trust, have made this relationship uniquely durable.

In a region often defined by mistrust and imbalance, India's relationship with Bhutan shows that asymmetry need not produce antagonism. The first lesson is that sustained development cooperation -- rooted in transparency and local priorities -- builds enduring goodwill. The second is that security cooperation works best when it is mutually beneficial rather than imposed. Third, resolving disputes where possible and managing them sensibly when they can't be critical to avoid the poisoning of bilateral relations. And finally, strengthening the shared culture provides depth to bilateral relations.

*The writer is a contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express and visiting research professor at the Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore*

## With fewer doctors becoming specialists, a crisis looms



**SIVABALAN ELANGOVAN**

A POSTGRADUATE COUNSELLING for NEET begins, I am repeatedly approached by young medical graduates with the same question: "Which specialty should I choose?". I've noticed a change in their preferences. They no longer ask which branch saves the most lives or offers the greatest career growth. Instead, they ask: "Which course gives me less work, fewer litigations, and a peaceful life?"

Decades ago, most MBBS graduates were from modest backgrounds and their motivation was to build a career, serve society, and grow professionally. Today, many are from relatively secure circumstances. Their priorities are peace of mind and work-life balance. This change did not occur suddenly.

In 2019, India introduced the Competency-Based Medical Education (CBME) curriculum to produce more skilled, patient-ready doctors. The intention was noble; the impact mixed. CBME made learning structured but increasingly mechanical. Students tick boxes in logbooks, complete checklists and meet competencies, undergo frequent assessments and heavy documentation but lose the freedom to explore. The goal shifts from learning medicine to clearing exams. With overwhelming content, cognitive fatigue sets in. Curiosity fades.

Meanwhile, India's health system has shifted. The rise of corporate hospitals has reduced opportunities for independent practice. Earlier, a young specialist could open a clinic, build trust and grow. Today, that path is narrow. Corporate hospitals offer minimal room for individuality or entrepreneurship. Doctors feel like employees, not professionals shaping their careers. Ambition dulls.

Mental health weighs heavily on specialty choices. Suicide rates among doctors are higher than in the general population. Juniors watch seniors exhausted after 36-hour duties. They see strained families. The message they internalise is simple: Do not take on too much. Do not go into branches that demand your whole life. So when it comes to super-specialties, many step back. Why spend years in training for

more duty hours, more risk, and little reward? Super-specialty courses like DM and MCh are demand years of hard work and commitment. But when completed, the pay does not match the effort.

A surgical gastroenterologist or cardiothoracic surgeon may perform challenging life-saving surgery every day. Yet, in the government system, their salary equals that of a doctor in primary health care. There is no recognition for the extra years, the higher skill, the constant stress.

In a recent super-specialty counselling in Tamil Nadu, more than half the seats went vacant. Government doctors in particular were reluctant. Government hospitals face a growing shortage of specialists. The poor, who rely on public hospitals, will suffer most. This is a silent public health crisis.

It is easy to accuse young doctors of lacking ambition, but that is simplistic. They are not seeking luxury; they are seeking sanity. Their reluctance is not weakness but a rational response to the system that offers little reward for sacrifice.

The old guard says, "We worked harder. We faced worse. Why not you?" But the context is different. The earlier generations saw hope. They opened clinics, built hospitals, and rose on their own terms. That path is closed. The corporate model has taken it away. Now, the choice is between



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— *Haaretz, Israel*



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# We need to move from a caste census with a capital C to one with a small c



**DESHKAAL**  
BY YOGENDRA YADAV

WHEN THE Narendra Modi government surprised everyone by announcing the caste census, there was a mood of triumph in the social justice camp. Whatever the government's political calculations, the much-awaited and long-postponed caste census was finally happening. We were at the cusp of the next big step in India's unsteady march towards eliminating caste inequalities. Or so we thought.

Two new books invite us to be cautious. Unlike the earlier media polemics, all heat and little light, Trina Vithayathil's *Counting Caste* and Anand Teltumbde's *The Caste Con* are products of serious scholarship and reflection. Both authors share a commitment to social justice and to the annihilation of caste. Yet they offer strikingly different takes on the subject. This rare coincidence, the arrival of two fine books on a semi-technical subject like caste enumeration, promises to open up a fruitful discussion on the coming caste census exercise and deepen conversations on social justice.

Teltumbde is a well-known and highly respected voice, never afraid of swimming against the tide, among the scholars and activists who take the Ambedkarite perspective on the annihilation of caste seriously. While supporting affirmative action, he has insisted on supplementing reservation with universal education and health and connecting affirmative action to the transformative project of radical equality.

Usually, the debate on the caste census follows a predictable line: Advocates of social justice endorse the caste census, while its opponents are overt or covert defenders of caste privilege. Teltumbde breaks this mould. For him, the Modi government's declaration of caste enumeration in the next Census is a ploy to divide and rule and the recent liberal consensus around the caste census is a con. A mere head count of various *jatis* would only underline caste identity, encourage the



ILLUSTRATION: C.R SASIKUMAR

demand for sub-classification of reservation quotas, prevent a larger coalition of those at the receiving end of the unequal social order and pave the way for undermining caste-sensitive affirmative action.

Teltumbde succeeds in provoking, but not in convincing. While he offers a strong counter to a simple-minded idea that the caste census is just a head count of all the *jatis* and the naive belief that it is the panacea for social inequality, he does not take on the more nuanced version of the caste census. The real point, as per scholars like Satish Deshpande, is that the caste census goes beyond just a head-count of "lower" castes. Enumeration of caste in the census is the beginning of the unmasking of privileges of the "upper" castes, as it would offer data on the educational, occupational and economic profile of each caste group. A caste census is not sufficient by itself, but it is a necessary step towards understanding the structure of inequality and designing policies and politics to dismantle it.

The real question, therefore, is

The real question is not whether but how — how exactly should caste enumeration be carried out so it does not remain a token gesture or become a tool to perpetuate caste privileges?

not whether but how — how exactly should caste enumeration be carried out so it does not remain a token gesture or become a tool to perpetuate caste privileges? Teltumbde alerts us to questions about the nature of data, framework of analysis, mechanism for policy translation and the underlying political agenda of the caste census.

This is where Vithayathil's monograph comes in. The first book by this young scholar, *Counting Caste* is undoubtedly the first authoritative book on caste enumeration in the census. The product of a decade of meticulous scholarly research, the book traces the history of counting caste, from the time census operations began in British India in 1871, to the many failed attempts at counting caste in post-Independence India. The most valuable part of the book is the exhaustive story of how a parliamentary cross-party consensus in favour of the caste census in 2011 was first diverted into a Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) under the UPA government and then firmly buried by the NDA.

# Clean air is not a privilege. Right to life begins with right to breathe



**BHAVREEN KANDHARI**

WHO organised this?" someone asked at India Gate yesterday, as hundreds of parents, citizens and youth stood together in the thick November air. The truth was — no one did. There was no banner, no political flag, no NGO logo fluttering in the haze. It was the most spontaneous kind of protest; one born of exhaustion, anxiety, and love. Parents came because their children could not breathe. Journalists came because they felt the same pain. Citizens came because the silence of the state had become unbearable. What united them was not ideology, but the common experience of living in a city where every breath feels uncertain — where children, elders, and even the healthiest among us are slowly losing a fight we never chose.

Over the past few weeks, Delhi's air has again turned poisonous. Official numbers describe it as "very poor", but we all know the language of denial. The monitors flash missing data points; average readings stay just low enough to avoid triggering stricter Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) levels. It feels almost deliberate — as if keeping the numbers down can somehow keep the anger down. But parents and citizens can see the haze with their eyes and feel it in their lungs. You cannot manipulate the air you breathe.

This has become the story of Delhi — a city where we measure our mornings by the Air Quality Index and our evenings by the colour of the sky. Each winter, authorities announce "emergency" measures; smog guns, road sprinkling, artificial rain experiments. The rituals repeat, the crisis deepens. The illusion of improvement has replaced the courage of real action.

At India Gate, the frustration was palpable, but so was a sense of moral clarity. This is not just an environmental crisis — it is a public health emergency. Yet, health continues to be the missing pillar in our pollution response. Where are the advisories from the health ministry? If the air is as harmful as a virus outbreak, why is it not treated like one?

Every paediatrician in this city will tell us that respiratory illnesses are now endemic. What parents at India Gate demanded was not radical — it was rational. They called for an Independent Air Quality and Public Health Commission: Autonomous, expert-led, and answerable to Parliament, not political cycles. A body that sets and enforces clean air standards, monitors transparently, and communicates honestly. They demanded real-time, audited data, open to citizens and researchers alike — because when data disappears, accountability disappears with it. They urged the creation of a national health

advisory system, led by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in coordination with the Central Pollution Control Board. Alerts should reach citizens via SMS, television, radio, digital boards, schools, hospitals, buses, and trains. We need an app — a public alert platform, an "Aarogya Setu for Air" — to guide citizens in real time: When to mask, when to keep children indoors, how to protect the elderly. And above all, they demanded accountability for public funds. Every rupee spent in the name of clean air must be traceable, audited, and tied to real outcomes — not to self-congratulatory reports or photo opportunities.

But what unfolded later in the day was disheartening. As dusk fell, the same citizens who came peacefully were met with detentions and police aggression. Such actions erode trust — not just in the enforcing authorities, but in the state itself. This is not just counterproductive — it is corrosive.

Clean air should not depend on wind direction, luck, or data gaps. It should be guaranteed by design — through governance that is transparent, health-centred, and continuous. Parents should not have to choose between sending their children to school and protecting their lungs. Clean air is not a privilege or a plea; it is the first vaccine every child deserves.

What began at India Gate without an organiser may yet become something larger — a movement grounded in love, guided by evidence, and fuelled by courage. When parents stand for the air their children breathe, they are not breaking peace; they are defending it. The right to life begins with the right to breathe.

The writer is an advocate for clean air and environmental rights

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Years of neglect

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Bihar needs new development strategies, not revdis' (*IE*, November 10). The authors have aptly tried to cover Bihar's malaise. Despite producing hundreds of political and social stalwarts, bureaucrats, academics and entrepreneurs, Bihar is yet to reclaim its position of pride because it has been forced to suffer a conscious political neglect. It has the potential; what it badly requires is sincere stewardship for at least 10 years.

*Niraj K Pathak, Greater Noida*

### Fragile recovery

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Consumption recovers but that isn't enough' (*IE*, November 10). The uptick in consumer spending offers some relief to a sluggish economy, yet it remains a fragile recovery built on seasonal factors rather than structural strength. True revival demands sustained job creation, higher rural incomes, and renewed private investment. The government must focus on improving business confidence through policy stability and faster project execution, while also addressing unemployment to boost purchasing power.

*A Myilsami, Coimbatore*

### Not mere handouts

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Cash transfers are valuable, they are not a substitute for jobs' (*IE*, November 10). It rightly highlights the utility of cash transfers in Bihar and beyond. Experience shows that rural women from lower socio-economic strata tend to use such funds judiciously, unlike men. Direct transfers empower women to make choices that improve household welfare, education, and health. The further promise of Rs 2 lakh for successful entrepreneurs is likely to motivate them to take calculated risks and engage in productive ventures, fostering economic independence. Such schemes, therefore, are not mere handouts but investments in social and economic development, serving the general good while nurturing entrepreneurship among women.

*Harsh Pawaria, Rohtak*



**SYED AKBARUDDIN**

BENEATH THE CHOREOGRAPHY of the Xi-Trump meeting in Busan, President Xi Jinping proposed a bigger idea than tariff swaps: The establishment of a World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organisation (WAICO), a multilateral body to shape the rules of the AI age. The Chinese AI governance bid, building on an idea flagged by Premier Li Qiang in July, may shape the century.

WAICO is the latest link in a chain of frameworks designed to rewrite multilateralism in China's syntax. Over the past four years, China has launched the global development, security, civilisation, and AI governance initiatives. Each positions Beijing as a rule-maker rather than a rule-taker. The Global AI Governance Initiative, announced in 2023, was the conceptual rehearsal; WAICO is its institutional sequel.

Diplomacy, like software, has layers of code. The proposed headquarters is Shanghai. When finance was globalised and trade liberalised, the West wrote the rules at Bretton Woods and housed the referees in Geneva. Now, Beijing seeks both the rulebook and the referee under its roof. WAICO's action plan proposes a technology-sharing platform and an algorithmic compensation fund financed by global AI revenues. These are progressive ideas. But who controls the fund? Who decides which algo-

When finance was globalised and trade liberalised, the West wrote the rules at Bretton Woods and housed the referees in Geneva. Now, Beijing seeks both the rulebook and the referee

# Beijing's WAICO push will shape new global AI order

rithms are safe, fair, or exportable? Without transparent oversight and checks, noble aims harden into monopolies of influence.

A rare success in multilateral cooperation this year has been the UN's AI track. In August, the UNGA agreed to establish an Independent International Scientific Panel on AI and a Global Dialogue on AI Governance. China presents WAICO as a complement to these efforts. Western capitals view it differently. Washington opposes any forum where digital rules are set on Chinese terms. Brussels will hedge for interoperability through the UN but guard its regulatory primacy.

For the Global South, it promises long-denied access to technology, funding, and training. India should recognise the appeal, but respond with caution. It should engage without endorsing. Three filters apply. One, transparency over geography. If the offices are located in Shanghai, governance must sit with the world through open budgets, rotating leadership, balanced staffing, and independent audits. Two, interoperability over ideology. India's digital public infrastructure proves that openness and sovereignty can coexist. That example should inform any global template. Three, access over allegiance. The contest is about chips, cloud, compute power. Anybody that gates access defines development.

The proposal should be assessed against hard questions. Who qualifies for membership? Who pays? How will privacy, surveillance, and open-source norms be balanced? What happens if WAICO rules clash with domestic laws? Until these are answered, enthusiasm is premature. India could suggest terms: A firewall between governance and industrial policy so that standards do not become a backdoor for market capture; compute access quotas for developing countries, delivered through a transparent registry; and a grievance process that allows member states, firms, and civil society to appeal.

India also needs to look beyond formal institutions. Networks of regional hubs, flexible partnerships among governments and research institutions, and adaptive coalitions can offer a more plural, resilient model. These avoid rigid architectures that replicate geopolitical hierarchies. It is better to ask hard questions early than live with others' rules. The world does need a forum for AI governance. Will WAICO serve that need?

The algorithms of power are being written and their authorship matters. Once defaults are set they are hard to rewrite. In diplomacy, as in coding, what you fail to debug early becomes the system later.

The writer is former permanent representative of India to the United Nations, and dean, Kautilya School of Public Policy, Hyderabad



**OLIMITA ROY**

LIVING ALONE has always carried a certain mystique, the freedom to decorate without compromise, to eat cereal for dinner, to come and go on your own terms, to put something down and find it right where you left it. But freedom has a price, and in 2025 that price is rising. Singles around the world are increasingly feeling the pinch of what has been dubbed the "singles tax," the extra cost associated with living solo in cities that were not built for one.

In the United States, a widely-cited analysis found that solo renters pay on

average more than US \$7,000 a year in what some call the "singles tax". In New York City, the premium can reach \$20,100 annually. In India, singles often pay an additional \$1,800 to \$3,600 per year compared to couples. Across continents, living alone carries a structural financial penalty, a tangible reminder that independence comes at a price.

The cost of living alone does not stop at rent. Utilities accumulate in quiet, almost imperceptible increments: The electricity for a single apartment, the water, the internet subscription you insist you cannot do without. Alone, they somehow feel amplified. Further, shopping for one means smaller packages, higher per-unit costs, more frequent trips, and even food delivery

comes with fees and minimums, a quiet reminder that convenience cannot erase the premium the city charges. The numbers are small in isolation, but they accumulate month after month.

The same arithmetic extends to social life. A dinner out, a movie, and a gym class each cost more when you are alone. Couples can split bills, share subscriptions,

Across continents, living alone carries a structural financial penalty, a tangible reminder that independence comes at a price

or simply stay in and call it a night, while singles are expected to go out, be seen, and keep up with the city's social rhythm. Even routine outings can add up to thousands of rupees more each month.

As cities grow more expensive, this arithmetic begins to shape how people live. Many young professionals move in with partners earlier than planned, simply to afford a slightly larger apartment. Weeks later, some find themselves navigating breakups around shared leases and furniture. Flatmates bring their own brand of quiet absurdity, each silently tallying the other's minor infractions like the tap left running, the coffee jar left empty, the laundry that never quite makes it into the basket. Economical, yes, but also a small

theatre of compromise.

All of this feels sharper because adulthood itself has stretched. People are staying single longer, marrying later, or not at all. What was once a brief phase of independence has become a lasting way of life. The bills and groceries, once minor inconveniences, accumulate into a quiet tax on time and solitude. Yet the rewards are undeniable. There is sovereignty in choosing what to eat, how to spend a Sunday, or when to turn off the lights. These small triumphs of self-determination make the costs bearable. Freedom may be expensive, but it offers the rare, stubborn joy of living entirely on your own terms, with full control of the AC.

The writer is consultant, Aon



Vadodara





SCIENCE

How James Watson helped unravel the double helix



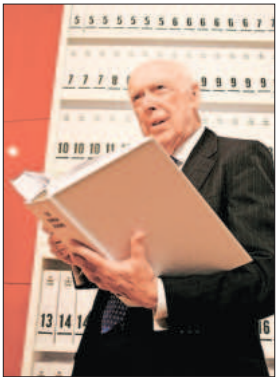
AMITABH SINHA

FEW BIOLOGISTS have acquired the kind of celebrity status that James Watson and Francis Crick did. Their discovery of the double helical structure of the DNA molecule in 1953 is considered one of the biggest breakthroughs in Science, which not only enhanced understanding of how life replicates itself, but also profoundly impacted fields ranging from health to agriculture. So much so that the figure of the twisted ladder structure of the DNA has become a shorthand to represent Science itself. Last week, Watson died at 97.

Early success

Born in the US, Watson was less than 25 years old when he partnered with Crick to unveil the structure of the DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid). The Nobel Prize-winning discovery revealed how individual traits are passed on from one generation to another, and is often placed alongside the development of quantum theory and the theory of gravitation as the greatest scientific accomplishments of the 20th century. While those theories uncovered the workings of the universe, the DNA discovery was about looking inwards. DNA is a large molecule containing the genetic information of an individual. This information, encoded in the genes, determines all the individual characteristics of the organism — from physical appearance to internal biology. During reproduction, these genes are replicated and transmitted to the offspring, sometimes with small changes that lead to genetic diversity and drive evolution.

The chemical existence of DNA was discovered in 1869 by the Swiss chemist Friedrich Miescher. Decades later, it was learnt that chromosomes, made of DNA and some proteins, were associated with inheritance. By the 1940s, scientists figured out that it was DNA, and not the proteins inside the chromosomes that carried genetic information. But scientists still did not know how DNA was able to store genetic information or how it was passed on. Thus, its structure had to be deciphered.



James Watson died on Thursday. He was 97. THE NYT

The breakthrough

In 1952, Watson and Crick experimented with three-dimensional wooden models to fit into a structure that matched the information provided by other scientists.

Clues came through chemical analysis and images obtained from X-ray crystallography methods. Under British chemist Rosalind Franklin's supervision, her student Raymond Gosling took a historic X-ray photograph (called Photo 51), which showed the double-helix structure of DNA. Watson and Crick saw this photo and some of her unpublished data, which served as the basis of their DNA model. While Franklin was not awarded the Nobel, Crick said after she died in 1958 that her contribution was critical. The final Watson-Crick wooden model had two long strands, each with a series of four nitrogen-containing compounds — Adenine (A), Thymine (T), Cytosine (C) and Guanine (G) — held in a chain by some sugar and phosphate compounds. The Adenine on one strand is always opposite the Thymine on the other, while the Cytosine is paired opposite Guanine. The two parallel strands were shaped in a twisted ladder of sorts, to account for stability, compactness and other features revealed in earlier experiments.

The double helix was a rather unintuitive and unique structure for a molecule, but it made sense with all the evidence. "It was quite a moment. We felt sure that this was it. Anything that simple, that elegant just had to be right. What got us most excited was the complementarity of the base sequences (nitrogen-based compounds A, T, C and G) along the two chains. If you knew the sequence — the order of bases — along one chain, you automatically knew the sequence along the other," Watson wrote in his book DNA: The Story of Genetic Revolution.

Molecular biologist J Gowrishankar, former director of IISER Mohali, said the most beautiful aspect of the structure was that it clearly showed how the genetic information could be replicated accurately and passed on. "The two strands could get separated, and the information on each one was enough to build a separate second strand for itself. It just made it so easy to understand how the replication of genetic information occurs, and how those are passed on," he said.

The impact

The discovery of the DNA structure sparked a flurry of new research, birthing fields like molecular biology, biotechnology, gene modification and editing. Scientists have uncovered how changes in the process of copying genetic information result in some diseases and disorders, and have found fixes through tools like CRISPR. It has had transformational impacts on agriculture, health and industry. Genetic analysis has become a common tool with applications in tracing heredity, forensics and crime, and deciphering the very origin and evolution of organisms.

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POLICY

What govt's AI guidelines mean for tech regulation

Soumyarendra Barik  
New Delhi, November 10

THE MINISTRY of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has unveiled governance guidelines for Artificial Intelligence (AI), which could serve as a blueprint for how India regulates the technology, balancing innovation with accountability and growth with safety.

The government had earlier signalled that it may not tighten the regulatory noose on AI just yet, as it believes the technology could help flourish an innovation economy in the country. As such, the guidelines recommend an India-specific risk assessment framework, a national AI incident database, and the use of voluntary frameworks and techno-legal measures, such as embedding privacy or fairness rules directly into system design.

The guidelines do, however, flag the need to carry out effective "content authentication", as synthetically generated images, videos and audio flood the Internet. Here, the government has already proposed legal amendments to a key legislation, which would require companies like YouTube and Instagram to add visible labels to AI-generated content.

The launch of the guidelines comes ahead of the India–AI Impact Summit 2026, which will be the first-ever global AI summit hosted in the Global South.

Prof Ajay Kumar Sood, Principal Scientific Advisor to the Government of India, said at the launch, "The guiding principle that defines the spirit of the framework is... 'Do No Harm'. We focus on creating sandboxes for innovation and on ensuring risk mitigation within a flexible, adaptive system."

What the guidelines say

The report's key recommendations are organised around six pillars: infrastructure, capacity building, policy & regulation, risk mitigation, accountability, and institutions.

**INFRASTRUCTURE:** The report calls for expanding access to data and compute resources, including subsidised graphics processing units (GPUs) and India-specific datasets through platforms like AIKosh. It urges integration of AI with Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) such as Aadhaar and Unified Payments Interface (UPI). It also urges the government to incentivise private investment and adoption by MSMEs, with tax rebates and AI-linked loans.

**REGULATION:** India's approach will be agile and sector-specific, applying existing laws (like the IT Act and the Digital Personal Data Protection Act) while plugging gaps

THE ACTION PLAN



GETTYIMAGES

**EMPOWER THE** India AI mission, ministries, sectoral regulators and state governments to increase AI adoption, through initiatives on infrastructure development and increasing access to data and computing resources

level of risk, and whether due diligence was observed

**INTEGRATE AI** with Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) to promote scalability, interoperability and inclusivity

**ADOPT A** graded liability system based on the function performed,

**CONDUCT SAFETY** testing and evaluations

through targeted amendments. The report rules out an immediate need for a standalone AI law, but calls for updates on classification, liability, and copyright, including consideration of a "text and data mining" exception. It also urges frameworks for content authentication to counter deepfakes and for international cooperation on AI standards.

S Krishnan, Secretary, MeitY, said at the launch, "Our focus remains on using existing legislation wherever possible. At the heart of it all is human centricity, ensuring AI serves humanity and benefits people's lives while addressing potential harms."

**RISK MITIGATION:** As stated earlier, the report proposes an India-specific risk assessment framework to reflect local realities, along with the use of voluntary frameworks and techno-legal measures.

**ACCOUNTABILITY:** A graded liability regime is proposed, with responsibility tied to function and risk level. Organisations must adopt grievance redressal systems, transparency reporting, and self-certification mechanisms.

**INSTITUTIONS:** The framework envisions a whole-of-government approach,

Key Points

While there is a belief that AI should have little regulatory burden, there are concerns about data privacy and inference risks.

There is no consensus on what should be done when AI systems are used by government officials.

led by an AI Governance Group (AIGG), supported by a Technology & Policy Expert Committee (TPEC), and technically backed by the AI Safety Institute (AISi).

**CAPACITY BUILDING:** The guidelines emphasise AI literacy and training for citizens, public servants, and law enforcement. They recommend scaling up existing skilling programs to bridge gaps in smaller cities and enhance technical capacity across government institutions.

How guidelines were prepared

The guidelines were drafted by a high-level committee consisting of policy experts under the chairmanship of Prof. Balaraman Ravindran, IIT Madras.

According to Abhishek Singh, Additional Secretary, MeitY, and CEO IndiaAI, "The committee went through extensive deliberations and prepared a draft report, which was opened for public consultation. The inputs received is a clear sign of strong engagement across sectors. As AI continues to evolve rapidly, a second committee was formed to review these inputs and refine the final guidelines."

ENVIRONMENT

New fund to protect tropical forests & why it's being criticised

Alind Chauhan  
New Delhi, November 10

IN A bid to conserve the world's tropical forests, a new fund was launched at a high-level event on the sidelines of the COP30 climate summit in Belém, Brazil last week.

Known as the Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF), the fund aims to raise and invest \$125 billion, channelling returns to developing countries that conserve their forests. While Brazil has hailed the fund as an "unprecedented initiative" that can transform conservation, several experts have raised concerns about how TFFF will work in practice.

What is the TFFF?

The TFFF is an investment fund designed as a permanent, self-financing vehicle through which net returns will be awarded to up to 74 developing countries with tropical forests for keeping their existing old-growth forests intact.

The fund will look to raise \$25 billion from wealthy governments and philanthropists, and an additional \$100 billion in private investment. Then, the amount will be invested into a mixed portfolio of investments, including public and corporate market bonds, with annual returns used as a reward to tropical forest nations for conserving their forests.

Payments will be based on satellite remote sensing data that track forest canopy cover annually in a low-cost and transparent manner. So far, Brazil has announced a \$1 billion contribution; Colombia has pitched in with \$250 million; Indonesia is contributing \$1 billion; the Netherlands \$5 million; Norway \$3 billion over a decade; and Portugal 1 million euros.

Why has the TFFF been launched?

Economically, dead forests are more valuable than standing ones. For instance, the benefits of standing forests, such as temperature reduction and wildlife habi-

Key takeaways

● Economically, dead forests are often more valuable than standing ones. By incentivising preservation, TFFF seeks to change that.

● Critics say, however, that the fund is too vulnerable to volatility in financial markets, and further dilutes the legal obligation of developed countries for climate action.

tat, are taken for granted. Meanwhile, clearing of forests to make way for farmland is often financially incentivised. This is one of the primary causes of deforestation.

The TFFF tackles this head on. The idea is to pay for the conservation of the world's major tropical forests, which provide a range of ecosystem services, including carbon storage, so as to ensure that the value they bring as standing forests is more than what they would bring if they were to be cut down.

Marina Silva, Brazil's Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, during the launch event, said, "For the first time, we have a global mechanism that recognises the value of forest ecosystem services and offers permanent incentives for their preservation."

What are the concerns?

One of the biggest concerns with the TFFF is that it is too vulnerable to the volatility of financial markets. This is because it plans to invest in bonds in developing na-

Red flags over officials' use of AI

Even as the government looks to encourage AI with little regulatory burden, there are internal red flags over data privacy and inference risks, especially when such systems are being used by key government officials.

What happens when a government officer uploads an internal note to an AI chatbot for a quick summary? When a police department asks an AI assistant to optimise CCTVs across a city? Or when a policymaker uses a conversational model to draft an inter-ministerial brief? Can the AI system analyse such prompts at scale, identify the user, infer their role, draw patterns across queries and predict strategic intent?

These questions are being debated in sections of the Union government, *The Indian Express* had earlier reported, amid growing concern about the rapid proliferation of generative AI (GenAI) platforms in India, especially those run by foreign firms, often bundled as free services with telecom subscriptions.

Two broad areas are under discussion. First, whether queries made by top functionaries — bureaucrats, policy advisers, scientists, corporate leaders and influential academics — could be mapped to identify priorities, timelines, or weaknesses.

Second, whether anonymised mass usage data from millions of Indian users could help global firms. One issue, sources said, is whether to "protect" official systems from foreign AI services.

Proposed AI content labelling

As per the draft amendments to the IT Rules, released last month, social media platforms would have to get users to declare whether the uploaded content is synthetically generated; deploy "reasonable and appropriate technical measures", including automated tools or other suitable mechanisms, to verify the accuracy of such declaration; and, where such declaration or technical verification confirms that the content is synthetically generated, ensure that this information is clearly and prominently displayed with an appropriate label or notice.

If they fail to comply, the platforms may lose the legal immunity they enjoy from third-party content, meaning that the responsibility of such platforms shall extend to taking reasonable and proportionate technical measures to verify the correctness of user declarations and to ensure that no synthetically generated information is published without such declaration or label.

2 THINGS TO KNOW

All about Booker Prize, the most prestigious award for fiction books

By the time you read this, the winner of the Booker Prize, the world's most prestigious award for a single work of fiction, would have been announced.

Founded in the UK in 1969, the Booker Prize aimed to stimulate the reading and discussion of contemporary fiction. The publishers Tom Maschler and Graham C Greene, who came up with the idea for it, found a backer in Booker McConnell, a conglomerate with a significant long-term presence in Guyana.

The inaugural Booker Prize was awarded to P H Newby for his novel *Something to Answer For*. Since then, the life of the prize has far exceeded what its founders had imagined.



Authors shortlisted for the Booker Prize in London on Sunday. AP

The BBC first televised the prize ceremony in 1976. In 2014, the prize was opened up to all writers of all nationalities, provided the books were written in English and published in the UK or Ireland. (Previously, it was only open for writers from Commonwealth countries).

CULTURE

In 2005, Booker instituted another category of awards for translated fiction, now the International Booker Prize. Banu Mushtaq's *Heart Lamp*, translated from Kannada by Deepa Bhasthi, bagged this year's prize. Last month, the Booker Foundation announced a new award, the Children's Booker Prize, for children's fiction. This will be awarded in 2026.

ENS

In US conservative camp: Who are Groypers, and what are their beliefs?

PODCASTER and former TV host Tucker Carlson recently posted an interview with political activist Nick Fuentes, giving him over two hours to air his views, which are well outside the American mainstream even for some of the most provocative conservatives. As some have disavowed Fuentes, a single word keeps appearing: Groyper.

Simply, Groypers are supporters of Fuentes. His organisation, the America First Foundation, says on its website that it denounces "immoral ideologies like zionism, nihilism, and liberal multiculturalism" which, it says, "embedded themselves within our society and have undermined our nation's sovereignty." Fuentes also opposes feminism.

Katherine Dee, who writes about



Fuentes is seen as a more radical conservative. THE NYT


internet culture, said that fealty to Fuentes is the Groypers' defining feature. "I think that Nick Fuentes is among the best examples of 'politics as fandom' that exists," said Dee.

His detractors also use the term to refer to fans of Fuentes, but with a strongly pejorative connotation.

Just where the name came from is unclear. "I am not sure if it has any meaning beyond sounding like a funny name for this funny creature," offered Don Caldwell, editor of Know Your Meme. That "funny creature" is a cousin of Pepe the Frog, a somewhat crudely drawn amphibian not originally intended to be a political symbol, but which was adopted by far-right users in 2014. Groyper was a related frog, created by Pepe enthusiasts.

THE NYT





**A thought for today**

How many times have you been on the freeway and had someone fly by you at 100mph, then end up two cars ahead of you at the off ramp? What's the point?

MARK HARMON

# Capital Questions

After the Delhi car blast, govt's priority should be to make people feel safe

If the deadly blast outside Red Fort yesterday evening turns out to have a terrorist's hand behind it, it will be the bloodiest such act in India's capital in over 17 years. At the time of writing, we don't know the cause, and whether there was a motive. But we have seen the devastation – burnt and mangled shells of cars and rickshaws – and we are still counting bodies. The reported toll rose from one, when the reports started coming in shortly after 7pm, to eight, then ten and, by some accounts, thirteen. There will be clarity on the human loss by daybreak. It's reassuring to see police and special investigative agencies on the ground, and PM and home minister monitoring developments.

The truth will be known, but because this matter concerns the capital – the world is watching – we would like to get to the bottom of it at the earliest. Was it a terror strike? That's the question



uppermost on every mind. First reports said it might have been a CNG tank explosion in a car. Tragic, but reassuring due to the absence of malafide intent. However, late night, when the ownership of the car had been ascertained, the terror angle seemed to gain heft. That the blast followed

close on the heels of the arrest of doctors with alleged terror links feeds the apprehension.

This involved a joint operation between Faridabad and Jammu and Kashmir police, where around 350 kg of explosives were also found. The case needs urgent answering even apart from the Delhi blast. Undoubtedly, nobody needs these answers more than govt and its security agencies, to keep all of us safe. But quelling people's fears is equally important, because that has a bearing on the national mood and commerce.

There was a 30-year period from the 1980s to the 2000s when terror, if not striking Delhi, was never far from it. But in the period of quiet since the 2008 serial blasts, a whole generation has grown up without knowing terror. Govt must do everything to ensure they remain unacquainted with it. If Monday evening's blast was a premeditated act, the guilty must be brought to book speedily. This govt has always talked tough on security – it must ensure that terror doesn't take root in the capital again.

# No Deterrent, All Detergent

The Tirupati fake ghee case is a scary tale of how 'milk' suppliers cream public

That a cheat in Uttarakhand passed off a synthetic concoction as ghee to one of India's most venerated temples in Andhra for five years is more than a mere adulteration crisis. It's a breakdown of social contract. When the Tirupati laddoo 'contamination' came to light last year, official statements stated the 'ghee' had failed Tirupati's own checks. Now it appears the supplier was allegedly so corrupt he re-supplied the same product with tweaks via another fraud dairy in Tirupati itself. Food inspector FSSAI has been investigating alongside the CBI team.

Yet, it is FSSAI itself that must be held to account for being oblivious to such an extensive high-profile fraud that has continued for so long. Milk and ghee adulteration has been on FSSAI's radar for at least 20 years. Five nationwide surveys on milk and milk products have been carried out since its 2011 survey, all revealing a broken unorganised sector. Even in 2019 it said "Your milk is largely safe". Results from the 2023 survey were not made public. But we know contamination is widespread using urea and detergents, heavy metals, pesticide residue and so on.

Question is what is being done about it? Cases of fake milk and milk products could fill a month's newspaper. The 'strict action' FSSAI keeps promising is but a news snippet. How long after every crackdown on fake ghee, paneer and khoya etc do the very same units swing right back into action, unperturbed, the crackdown but a blip in their criminal activity. The Tirupati fraud is a scary case where there is no milk in the mix at all. Ghee is all chemicals – 68L kilos worth ₹250cr. What were food inspectors in Uttarakhand and Andhra doing? Truth is, there is no real deterrent. One wonders, really, if we at all know what in the name of milk are we feeding children.

# Apology accepted

But all too often, none is forthcoming

Anil Abraham

I walked back from the park with a posse of neighbourhood ladies, all giggling and talking to me simultaneously like the panelists on a news hour debate. Kamala was at the gate glaring at me for the cardinal sin of being popular. So I followed the trend and issued an official apology. I had been doing this ever since I was married – but apparently it's now a viral trend. Every brand from Skoda to Volkswagen and from Vadilal to Ambuja Cements is apologising for being irresistible.

We were just discussing politics, I explained sincerely. Can I help it if I'm up-to-date with the latest news? After their morning coffee, the ladies like me to spill the tea. We discussed Zohran Mamdani becoming mayor and added our own Mississippi Masala to the mix. Mrs Natarajan remembered that she once shopped for saris with Mira Nair and planned a Monsoon Wedding for her daughter. Babita Bhabhi wanted someone to explain the term Democratic Socialist to her. We were completely clueless and instead chose to change the topic deftly and discuss his wife instead. Deflect, distract and deny – those are the strategies used by most politicians nowadays.

Nobody is clearing the air about the pollution in Delhi. No official or unofficial apology. Instead we try to skew the numbers by spraying water or attempting cloud seeding. We distract from the real issue by threatening to remove street dogs from public places like bus stands and railway stations. Nobody is apologising for rail accidents or potholes on the road. We do not apologise for our women sportspersons being trolled or groped – we distract with controversies about the number of missing stanzas in Vande Mataram that celebrate the divine feminine force. We do not apologise for body shaming a young actress by asking her weight at a press conference, but we celebrate the fact that India's market for anti-obesity drugs is expanding. We do not apologise for Seema, Sweety or Saraswati – instead we spend time wondering how a Brazilian model could have painted a sorry picture of an electoral process in a democracy.

Kamala was not impressed with my official apology that took no responsibility for being an incorrigible flirt. Am I the only one apologising sincerely for the sorry state of affairs in the world? Apology accepted or must I stand for elections?

MORE THE FACTS

LESS THE FRICTION

THE TIMES OF INDIA  
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2025

# Bihar & Its Migration Model

65% of households have a migrant. Their remittances are 50% of a household's income. Outmigration tripled Bihar's rural wages, ended exploitative relations. Manufacturing employs just 5%. And it's impossible for the state to create enough jobs for its growing youth population. In 2025, 12.8L completed secondary school. Also 27% of the population is below 15

Alakh N Sharma



Political parties call for a halt to out-migration every assembly election. Much debate follows. All of it oblivious to Bihar's historical development experience and reality. Migration from Bihar dates to colonial times, when the British sent peasants and workers as indentured labour to Fiji, Mauritius and Caribbean countries. Many Biharis also moved to Calcutta and Assam's tea gardens.

After Independence, data on migration remained inadequate to reflect different types of population movements. Census and National Sample Surveys poorly captured its magnitude, especially short-term and seasonal flows. Therefore, it was unsurprising that people were shocked by the sheer massive numbers of migrants – mostly from central and eastern India – who headed back as Covid lockdowns kicked in.

Institute for Human Development has been collecting migration data from 36 representative villages in Bihar, 12 in-depth, through several rounds of longitudinal surveys since the late 1990s up to 2016-17, building on previous data from 1981. Migration is far more layered an issue than what passes off in political discourse. Five points.

**Why migrate** | Outmigration from Bihar earlier was largely driven by poverty, often described as a "push factor". With Green Revolution in northwestern India, short-term/seasonal migration rose in the 1980s. In 1981, only about 10-15% of rural households were migrant households – with at least one migrant – and most were short-term and seasonal, synchronised with peak and lean agricultural periods in Bihar and destination states. This has changed significantly in both scale and nature.

- Share of households with at least one migrant rose from 36% in 1998-99 to 60% in 2009-10, to about 65% in 2017.

- The nature of migration has shifted from short-term to long-term duration (8 months or more).

- Proportion of short-term migrants fell sharply from 72% of total migrants in 1998-99 to 26% in 2009-10, and further to 20% in 2017.

**Who migrates** | In the 1980s, mostly poorer groups and classes moved out. By 2017, all

castes and classes were migrating. Rates were highest among Muslims, followed by upper castes – usually for longer terms. Migration increased with education – highest among graduates and above, lowest among the illiterate. Both 'push' and 'pull' factors played a part.

Overwhelmingly male-dominated with women just 5% of migrants in 2016, men traditionally leave family behind in villages, making these 'split' households. Migrants view the city as a place to earn; their real homes remain the village, to which they return for festivals etc.

**Reality check** | Given this, putting a stop to migration must be viewed within Bihar's larger development landscape as India's most densely populated state with lowest per capita income.

- Average landholding is barely an acre. So, farming is unsustainable for most. Even so, 54% of Bihar's workforce is engaged in agriculture, compared with 46% nationally.

- Manufacturing sector's employment share is just 5%, compared with 11% for India.

- A very small organised manufacturing & service sector with just above 5% employment – against 17% nationally – Bihar's economy cannot generate adequate jobs for educated & skilled workers.

- Per PLFS, between 2017-18 and 2023-24, employment growth in Bihar was confined mainly to agriculture and construction – both distress-driven subsistence sectors. No job creation occurred in the organised sector that typically offers better quality employment.

Meanwhile, in 2025 alone, 12.8L young people had completed secondary education. The state economy cannot absorb even half of those expected to join the labour market. Many will be forced to migrate.

**Remittance runs homes** | Most migrants save as much as they can after meeting basic expenses, send the money home. In 2017, average annual remittance per migrant household was ₹48,662. Migrant remittances accounted for over 28% of total village income, and about half of the total income of migrant households.

These transfers played a major role in improving food security, better



Uday Deb

## BIHAR 2025

# COP In Cop Out Time

Climate meet in Brazil is taking place as govts and corporations are retreating from mitigation pledges. This would be disastrous and create a poorer & dangerous world. Developing nations must act for their own sake

Chandra Bhushan



The 30th UN Climate Change Conference in Belem, Brazil, is taking place against the backdrop of a major pushback against climate action. US has withdrawn from the Paris Agreement. EU has diluted its 2040 climate target. Some of the world's largest banks – JP Morgan, Bank of America, and Morgan Stanley – have walked away from their net-zero alliances. Even Bill Gates, a champion of climate innovation, now argues that the world should prioritise health and development over climate goals – ignoring that prosperity and public health depend on a stable climate.

But let us ask a simple question: *Is the world really doing so much on climate that we need a pause?* A decade after the signing of the Paris Agreement, it's time for a reality check.

Since the signing of the Paris Agreement in 2015, govts have announced countless new pledges, policies, and net-zero roadmaps. Yet, greenhouse gas (GHG) data tell a very different story.

Each year since 2010, UNEP's *Emissions Gap Report* has projected where global emissions are heading under different scenarios. In 2015, UNEP projected that under the *current policies* scenario – which estimates emissions based on existing measures taken by countries – global emissions in 2030 would reach 60 gigatonnes (Gt) of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent. However, to stay within the 2°C pathway, emissions would need to be 42 Gt by 2030, leaving an 18 Gt gap.

Report also projected that if countries meet their pledges under their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), emissions could drop to 54-56 Gt, depending on whether they meet their conditional pledges (dependent

on finance and technology support from developed countries) or unconditional pledges (to be achieved from their own resources).

A decade later, the numbers have barely shifted. The 2025 report estimates that emissions under *current policies* will be 58 Gt in 2030, leaving a 16 Gt gap. Even if countries meet their Paris pledges, emissions would still be 51-53 Gt, leaving a gap of 9-11 Gt. In short, the world has spent a decade pledging and re-pledging, only to move the needle by a few gigatonnes.

But the reality is emissions are growing faster than projected. In 2015, global GHG emissions stood at 51.5 Gt. By 2024, it had already reached 57.7 Gt – very close to the projected emissions for 2030 under the *current policies* scenario. This rapid growth in emissions is making the Paris targets much harder to meet.

Meeting the 2°C target now requires global emissions to peak immediately and then fall by about 4% every year until 2050. For the 1.5°C goal, the required annual decline is 7.3%. Such reductions have never been achieved outside major economic collapses or pandemics. During the 2020 Covid lockdowns, for example, global emissions fell by 5.4%, only to rebound the following year.

In essence, to meet the Paris targets, the world would have to achieve a permanent, voluntary, global "Covid-level" drop a year for next 25 years – without crashing economies or livelihoods. That's the scale of transformation now required. And it explains why some political and corporate leaders are quietly retreating from ambition.

But retreat is not an option. Failure to close the emissions gap will be catastrophic – not the end of civilisation,

but a poorer, healthier, and more dangerous world. Vast regions will become unlivable; food systems will strain; and economies will stagger under the weight of disasters and displacement. History warns about what happens when climate change outpaces adaptation. The end of the Indus Valley civilisation did not end humanity in South Asia – but it certainly depopulated vast regions.

Today, even as science demands urgent action, political and corporate will is eroding. Global elites are, in effect, normalising failure – claiming the climate agenda has gone "too far, too fast". But this narrative is not just defeatist – it is false. The world has barely begun to act. Despite all the pledges, global energy use remains 80% fossil-fuel-based. The share of renewables, though rising, is expanding too slowly to offset surging demand. The problem, therefore, is not too much climate action – it is the chronic lack of it.

As the world gathers in Belem, the task is not to lower ambition but to restore credibility. It is time to build a *Coalition of the Willing* – a group of nations committed to implementation, not rhetoric. Emerging economies like India, which will soon hold the Brics presidency, must lead this effort.

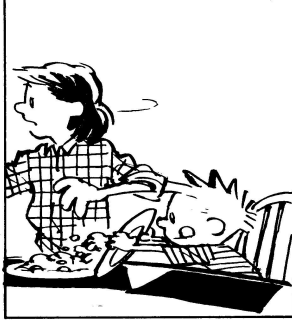
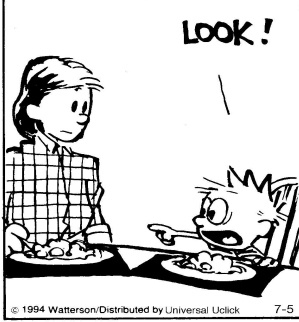
For developing countries, climate action is not a moral burden – it is an opportunity to drive green growth, ensure energy independence, create millions of new jobs, and protect citizens from escalating climate risks. Their interests and survival are aligned.

Ten years after Paris, the world stands at a dangerous crossroads. Yet this is not the time to despair – it is the time to fight back.

The writer is an environmentalist



# Calvin & Hobbes



# Stop Letting Algorithms Control Your Mind

Pratiksha Apurv

What would happen if all the smartphones on the planet were shut down for 24 hours? What would that day feel like – no voice calls, messages, or access to social media platforms? Would life become better, or more complex?

At a time when medical experts are warning about the mental health impact of smartphones and when 'technostress' is being recognised as a real condition, these questions, though hypothetical, raise important concerns about our holistic well-being. If all smartphones across the globe were to go offline for 24 hours, many among the world's 5.76bn active users would face anxiety. How did we come to this point?

While scientists and nations have made astonishing technological advancements, we've largely forgotten to nurture our inner world. Since the late 1700s, the

world has witnessed four Industrial Revolutions, but it is yet to undergo a spiritual revolution. Today, our entire life is driven by algorithms. We have failed to strike a fine balance between the outer and the inner dimensions of our existence.

Our ancestors prayed in Yajurveda: "Atmane me varco da varcase pavasva" – O inner divinity, grant me the radiance and strength of self-realisation.

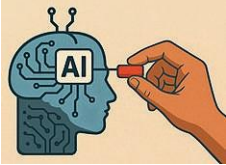
Our sages urged us to journey inward and complete our lives with awareness. But humanity seems to have chosen the outward path. We've acquired vast knowledge and developed countless tools for progress and convenience. While innovation has improved our quality of life, it has also led to a neglect of our inner world. We have created AI, but instead of controlling it, we have allowed algorithms to control us. In the Bhagwad Gita, Krishna tells

Arjuna: "Uddhared atmanatmanam natmanam avasadayet; Atmaiva hyatmano bandhur atmaiva ripur atmanah." Elevate yourself through the power of your mind. The mind is both the friend and the enemy of the self. Today, Krishna's words have taken on new relevance. Our brilliant minds have unleashed extraordinary technologies, but these tools are also becoming enemies of the self.

Many scientists have noted that AI is eroding cognitive abilities and stifling human creativity. Many experts view AI as an existential threat.

However, the outcome depends entirely on us – on how we choose to use technology. While AI is an external invention, the awareness with which we live is an inner discipline. Basically, the world needs people who have the fragrance of both Einstein and Buddha. Thirty-seven years ago, a disciple had asked spiritual master

# Sacredspace



Once we start trusting algorithms more than our own feelings, we hand over authority not just over our decisions, but over our humanity.

Yuval Noah Harari









## Don't bet on the court

India should assume that US trade policy is here to stay

The United States (US) Supreme Court has fast-tracked its hearing in a case challenging President Donald Trump's authority to level sweeping tariffs on America's trade partners. In general, the Court hears cases over a lengthy period and announces judgments in the summer. But this one, it appears, might be concluded sooner than that. The most recent series of verbal arguments last week did not appear to be going well for the lawyers defending the executive's right to set tariffs under an authorisation, dating back to 1977, that says that emergency trade measures do not have to be referred to the legislature. Constitutionally, the right to set tariffs — and all taxes — is retained by the United States Congress, but Mr Trump has used the decades-old emergency authorisation to effectively overturn America's longstanding trade policy.

For various and disparate reasons, a majority of the nine judges on the Supreme Court Bench seem to be sceptical of this action — including many crucial conservative ones appointed by Mr Trump himself. Certainly, the President himself appears a little rattled. On Sunday, he took to his social network, Truth Social, to condemn critics of his tariff policy as “fools” who did not recognise that the US was now “the richest, most respected country in the world, with almost no inflation, and a record stock market price”. He added that “businesses are pouring into the USA only because of tariffs”, and questioned whether his own lawyers had told the Supreme Court this.

This internal dispute within the US is of obvious interest to the rest of the world, particularly those countries whose economies have been overset by higher than expected tariffs. It is no secret that some of them, including European ones, would be glad to have the powers to tariff and impose unequal trade relations taken out of the President's hands and returned to Congress, which at least might be capable of being lobbied and persuaded. India, however, occupies a special position in this discussion — as the country that has had the highest rate of tariffs imposed on it, and as one that has not been able to come to a firm conclusion to negotiations on a trade agreement that allows those tariff rates to be reduced or circumvented. There will be a temptation to delay settling a final deal until the Supreme Court decides. This is in the hope that any agreement will be rendered unnecessary by American judges. And if some agreement is in fact reached, it will be similarly tempting to imagine that a judicial decision that goes against the White House will allow for a return to the status quo ante in trade relations.

But any such hope is likely to be belied. The fact is that judges anywhere are loath to go against the political tide, as expressed by voters through an electoral mandate. And if they do, in this case, they will run up against an executive perfectly capable of side-stepping and even ignoring a court order. Even if Mr Trump is told not to use his emergency powers, he is not likely to give up on his quest to impose trade restrictions on those countries that he believes are exploiting US generosity — of which, he has made amply clear, he considers India a particularly egregious example. There are other, probably legal, routes for him to pursue this effort — Section 301 of the Trade Act is just one legal clause that India has been exposed to in the past, but there are others. This may not be a battle that the judges will win, and New Delhi should not bet on them doing so.

## In the AI game

Maya1 shows useful tools can be developed cheaply

The launch of Maya1, a new model of converting text into speech (called “text to speech”, or TTS) based on artificial intelligence (AI), indicates a paradigm shift in such services. The model has been built by two 23-year-olds in Bengaluru and it is ranked second among open-weight voice AIs (where the user can tweak the AI model's weightings) and 20th globally on quality benchmarks. The model displays a few technical breakthroughs and it was developed on a shoestring. Most TTS models, like the ones from Google, ElevenLabs, or OpenAI, rely on libraries of recorded voices. Maya1 allows users to design voices to custom specification by using natural-language prompts such as “calm, elderly male schoolteacher with an American accent” rather than relying on fixed-voice libraries.

It supports over 20 controllable speaking styles, including natural patterns like hesitation, excitement, and warmth. Maya1's dataset offers users the option to insert over 20 emotion tags such as laugh, sigh, whisper, anger, and giggle. The model changes speech patterns accordingly. All this can be composed, allowing a switch of tone mid-sentence and a natural, emotional speaking style. Equally important, Maya1 does this without discernible lags, scanning text and speaking with less than 100ms (millisecond) latency. This makes it indistinguishable from human speech since the TTS model reads text at the same speeds as educated humans.

This versatility makes it ideal for a wide range of use cases. When it comes to podcasts, audiobooks, and video content, Maya1 can narrate long-form content with an emotional range, using different voices for different personalities. It can work similarly for video-game characters with emotional delivery. It can also be used as an AI voice assistant for accessibility tasks to aid users who need visual assistance, and for customer services since it is low-latency and offers responsive interaction. Maya1 would be described technically as a three-billion-parameter decoder-only transformer, finetuned from a Llama base. It's available under the Apache 2.0 licence, and it's free to download, tweak, and deploy for commercial use. Given the moderate hardware requirements, it can run locally on a device with a single graphic-processing unit so there is no Cloud dependency, allowing it to be easily deployed in rural and low-bandwidth settings.

Maya Research, a startup, developed its TTS system at minimal cost, using only free Cloud credits from Amazon Web Services and Google Cloud. There was no backing of venture capital, no data centre. The team spent eight months collecting speech in rural India, paying people to record real conversation. Right now, the model works only in English, but Maya Research is training what it claims will be a 10-15 times larger Indic speech dataset than what exists online. This upgraded version is targeted for release by June next year. Maya Research is, therefore, betting that in future, AI will be spoken, not typed, and by doing this in India, the voice layer will be stored locally and the models built on domestic accents and everyday sounds. This could be a big boost for India, since, despite the plethora of rich local languages, research into “speech AI” is sparse and public datasets like Bhashini are limited in scope. Maya1 demonstrates that innovative voice AI algorithms can be developed cheaply with high production quality, and emotion-rich, real-time deployment. It could inspire many new projects.

# Tata storm blows over?

Behind the latest tussle in the group lies not poor governance, but the dominant shareholder calling the shots, and it is legal

ILLUSTRATION: AJAYA KUMAR MOHANTY



The Tata group has been in the news again for the wrong reasons. A fight has broken out between a Tata family scion, Noel Tata, and a few individuals in positions of authority in the group.

The boards of two important trusts of the Tata family — the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust and Sir Ratan Tata Trust (Tata Trusts) — are said to be riven by differences between a group led by Noel Tata and another group in which Mehli Mistry, a relative of Noel Tata's, is prominent. Now, we learn that Mehli Mistry, until recently a member of the boards of the Tata Trusts, will not pursue his fight with Mr Tata. In all likelihood, the storm has blown over.

Mr Mistry had taken comfort in a board resolution passed by Tata Trusts in October 2024 that stated that all board members at the Trusts would be renewed for life when their term came up for renewal. Accordingly, the term of Venu Srinivasan, a trustee and Noel Tata confidant, was renewed in the third week of October.

Alas, when Mr Mistry's term came up for renewal, the Noel Tata faction withheld its consent. Mr Srinivasan stayed on but Mr Mistry was out. Mr Mistry subsequently entered a caveat in the matter with the Charities Commissioner. He has since written a letter that suggests he has thrown in the towel.

Many commentators were agast at the in-fighting and fretted about the grave implications for the fortunes of the Tata companies. Had they closely watched the outcome of the earlier battle between Ratan Tata and Cyrus Mistry, then executive chairman of Tata Sons, they need not have worried.

The battle between Ratan Tata and Cyrus Mistry lasted five years but did not come in the way of the

performance of the Tata group companies. Likewise, the Tata group performance is still less likely to be disrupted by the present battle between Noel Tata and a few individuals. The battle makes for great drama in the media, though.

There is much hand-wringing over the functioning of Tata Trusts, their relationship with Tata Sons, the role of the board of Tata Sons, the role of the boards at the Tata group companies and so on. Some commentators say that the Tata group today falls short of the governance standards one would expect of such a highly respected group.

Critics of the Tata group need to read the judgment of the honourable Supreme Court in 2021 in the dispute between the Tata group and Cyrus Mistry, who was ousted as executive chairman of Tata Sons. The Court declared, in emphatic terms, that in the matters raised by Cyrus Mistry, the Tata group was fully compliant with the law. Not only that, the group had unilaterally met norms of governance that it was not legally required to meet.

The Tata family exercises control over the sprawling conglomerate through various trusts, notably the two mentioned above. The Tata Trusts have two-thirds of the shares in Tata Sons, which is the holding company for a large number of companies in the Tata fold, both listed and unlisted.

The Tata Trusts nominees have “affirmative voting rights” at Tata Sons, that is, no decision can be taken by the board of Tata Sons without their approval. The other directors on the board (at present said to be numbering five, including three independent directors) cannot outvote the two Tata Trusts nominees. Critics see this as contrary to the



FINGER ON THE PULSE  
T T RAM MOHAN

# Climate finance is within reach

The United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30) has convened in Belem, Brazil. Apart from discussions on scientific and technical issues, much of the debate is expected to be focused on the resources needed for mitigation and adaptation. Though estimates of such financing costs have fallen over time, most still remain very large, implying the need for large financial transfers from advanced to emerging market and developing economies (EMDEs).

Recent studies have estimated climate finance requirements of EMDEs at \$1-4 trillion per year up to 2030, which is seen as daunting, leading to even less action than might have been possible. Also, these estimates rely on top-down approaches and are difficult to parse for a better understanding of sectoral and regional details.

Our study “Climate Finance Needs of Nine G20 EMEs: Well Within Reach” estimates the climate finance requirements of the nine G20 EMEs — Argentina, Brazil, China, Indonesia, India, Mexico, the Russian Federation, South Africa and Türkiye — till 2030. Our estimates are granular and address the incremental investment needed for mitigating climate change over and above the investment required in the business-as-usual scenario (BAU).

The study finds that the nine EMEs will require incremental climate finance of \$2.2 trillion for four sectors (power, road transport, steel and cement) between 2022 and 2030, averaging \$255 billion annually, equivalent to 0.6 per cent of the combined gross domestic product (GDP) of these nine economies — a figure that appears to be in the feasible range. Assuming that the costs of mitigating the remaining 50 per cent of emissions from the sectors

not covered in the study is consistent with these estimates, the total annual cost would still be just over half a trillion dollars.

Much of the discussion on climate mitigation has focused on the needs of the energy transition. In contrast, our study finds that the largest chunk of climate finance of \$1.2 trillion (52 per cent of the total requirement) is needed for the steel sector, followed by road transport (\$460 billion) and cement (\$450 billion).

Steel and cement are hard-to-abate sectors and they require largely the use of carbon capture and storage (CCS), which is expensive to deploy, but is the only feasible technology option available at this stage. Hence, they require the largest chunk of the total climate finance estimated.

The power sector is estimated to need only about \$150 billion, including \$28 billion for storage (pumped and battery storage), but excluding additional grid costs. Our estimates are lower than all other estimates because, first, our study has accounted for saving in capital expenditure on BAU fossil-fuel based sources of power, which no other study has reckoned, and, second, capital cost of renewable energy has declined precipitously due to the rising scale of production, research and development and technological breakthroughs. Thus, in contrast to the common narrative, energy transition needs the least amount of climate finance of all the four sectors in all the nine economies.

Climate finance for the road transport sector is estimated at (–)\$5 billion for transitioning from internal combustion engine vehicles to electric vehicles. This is largely because vehicle sales in China are projected to decline by 15 per cent between 2022 and 2030.



RAKESH MOHAN & JANAK RAJ

# Fifty shades of tangerine



NEHA BHATT

In a world divided between right and wrong, right and left, where centrism is seen as too neutral a ground, journalist and author Namita Devidayal's new memoir stands apart in negotiating a fair ground for itself. It tells the story of an unexpected journey into Hindu philosophy during a period of personal turmoil. Spurred by a chance encounter with a practitioner of Hindu spirituality in Rishikesh when melancholy had begun to set in during her 40s, Ms Devidayal found

herself at an inflection point.

As her carefully curated life in Mumbai was coming apart, her marriage dissolving, everything she had worked to build — from Bombay to Princeton, back to the cozy comforts of Mumbai life — seemed to lose its sheen. Existential questions began to surface, and she found answers buried in Hindu scriptures. She started connecting the dots between experiences in her childhood, early adulthood, as a wife, mother, friend, journalist and musician. On her 50th birthday, quite in contrast to how her life had unfolded in the years before, she found herself on the banks of the Ganga, spending time in an ashram, “paying heed to this unusual stream of knowledge that flowed down through the centuries like the river.” She was, in her words, attempting to draw the map of her life.

“Hinduism may be fifty shades and

more of tangerine, but I gradually started discovering that there is an underlying metaphysical idea that underscores the unity of all beings,” she writes. Time and again, Ms Devidayal wondered why she found herself drawn to a path so different from her rational, modern, individual-focused, Ivy-League-educated belief system. As she probed, she found imprints of Hindu philosophy sprinkled through her life, without consciously consuming it as such. The opposing forces of the rational and philosophical parts of her life were, in fact, more connected than they first appeared. At first, the ideas she encounters seemed audacious, but Ms Devidayal is something of a free spirit. As she pored over the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita in the manner of an “accidental pilgrim”, letting them seep in gradually, each lesson added layers to the way she viewed herself and the world.

Ideas of universal truth, the search for the self, and the meaning of life can often sound lofty — or even clichéd. Yet Ms Devidayal is acutely aware that her explorations have raised eyebrows and sparked curious suspicion among puzzled friends and family. Which is what makes her book different from others on this subject: She grounds her book in that tension and the changing political climate during which her transformation unfolds.

Even as she introduces her son to the epics, the *Hanuman Chalisa*, and tabla lessons, in order to stay in touch with cultural traditions, “...a ruthless version of Hindutva had started becoming the background score in our country... Many of us started feeling a sense of unease over anything Hindu. How had such a profoundly sophisticated religion unleashed so much hatred?... The world was being

split into reductive binaries: Those who rejected religion were liberal and those who expressed their faith, right-wing.”

The shadow of Ms Devidayal's earlier nonfiction works — both remarkable for their quiet beauty and nuanced engagement with Hindustani classical music that I thoroughly enjoyed reading — falls on this book as well. Her curiosity and sensitivity once again bring a distinct interiority to her writing. In the memoir *The Music Room*, she wrote exquisitely about being shaped by her reclusive guru's world of music as a young girl and finding solace in it as an adult. Her second book, *The Sixth String Ustad Vilayat Khan*, was an immersive and affecting portrait of a musician marked by brilliance and darkness.

In *Tangerine*, Ms Devidayal turns her gaze to an unfamiliar landscape, one she



Tangerine: How to Read the Upanishads Without Giving Up Coffee  
by Namita Devidayal  
Published by Westland  
224 pages ₹599

spirit of corporate governance; on a board, should not the majority view prevail?

Well, the Supreme Court didn't think so. It observed that affirmative voting rights are “a global norm” and that a “shareholder or a group of shareholders who constitute a majority, can always seek to be in the driving seat by reserving affirmative voting rights.” It also noted that, by reason of having 66 per cent of shares in Tata Sons, the two Trusts could have packed the board of Tata Sons with their own directors. They chose to limit their nominees to one-third of the board strength.

Tata Trusts also chose to appoint independent directors at Tata Sons even though Tata Sons is not a listed company and is not obliged to have any independent directors on its board. Contrary to what the critics say, Tata Sons is, in technical terms, ahead of the governance curve.

No doubt, the motivation for having independent directors at Tata Sons was to get the benefit of the views of experts independent of the Tata group. But these views, it must be understood, are only advisory in nature. As the Supreme Court noted, at any general meeting of Tata Sons, the Tata Trusts would command the majority of votes. There is thus no question of the board of Tata Sons taking a decision that the principal shareholders, Tata Trusts, would not approve of. The Article that provides affirmative voting rights to the nominees of Tata Trusts on the board of Tata Sons merely codifies this reality.

In most family-managed industrial groups, the head of the group or his family member typically chairs the boards of the group companies. The industrial group would be the majority shareholder or the dominant shareholder in the group companies. All decisions of the group's boards would require the family's approval. In listed companies, only one-third of the board would comprise independent directors. There is no question of independent directors overriding the wishes of the family.

The Tatas have far too many companies in their group and too few family members. They have thus adopted a structure that gives the Tata family the final say in all matters without the members of the Tata family having to chair the boards of group companies or even be a director. The group companies are controlled by Tata Sons and Tata Sons is controlled by Tata Trusts. It is delusional to suppose that matters have been left to the various boards.

He who rules the Tata Trusts rules the Tata group. And it is Noel Tata who, as chairman, today rules the Tata Trusts. Mehli Mistry has been shown the door at Tata Trusts. One should not be surprised if the same happens to other members of his group.

Over time, the boards of the Tata Trusts will have members that Mr Tata is more comfortable with. Peace will return. Many like to think the Tatas are different. Well, the Tatas are different in the particular manner in which the family controls the group. However, as in other family-managed businesses, it is the dominant shareholder who calls the shots. And that, as the Supreme Court has averred, is legal.

ttrammohan28@gmail.com

The reviewer is a freelance journalist and author who reports on public health, gender, policy, and culture



*A major turning point came in 1992 with the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, which created elected local governments (panchayats and municipalities) and mandated one-third of their seats for women.*

# 'LARGEST MINORITY' DEBATE: THE WOMEN'S QUOTA; DELIMITATION DELAY THAT STARTED IN 1917

TDG NETWORK  
NEW DELHI

On November 10, 2025, India's Supreme Court grappled with an urgent question of democracy. A petition by politician Jaya Thakur implored the Court to enforce the Women's Reservation Act, a recent constitutional amendment guaranteeing one-third of legislative seats to women, immediately—rather than waiting years for a new census and redistricting exercise. Hearing the plea, Justice B.V. Nagarathna, the only woman on the bench, posed a pointed query: "Who is the largest minority in this country? It is the woman... almost 48%. This is about the political equality of women." Her remark captured the irony that women, despite being roughly half the population, remain sorely under-represented in India's halls of power. The Court issued notice to the government on the matter, underscoring what the moment truly represents: a culmination of over a century of struggle for women's political representation, now colliding with the procedural brakes built into law.

## EARLY STRUGGLES AND INDEPENDENCE (1917-1950)

Women's political rights in colonial India were hard-won. A suffrage movement had emerged in the 1910s, but British reforms were cautious. The 1919 Government of India Act allowed provincial legislatures to decide whether educated or property-owning women could vote. Between 1919 and 1929, all British provinces and most princely states gradually enfranchised women—the first was Madras City in 1919—but often under strict qualifications. By 1935, these piecemeal steps still meant that only about 2.5% of Indian women were eligible to vote. Women joined the nationalist movement and demanded full equality, even proposing quotas in some debates,

but the immediate goal remained independence.

When the Constituent Assembly was elected in 1946, it included 15 women out of 389 members. These pioneering legislators—among them social reformers like Sarojini Naidu, Durgabai Deshmukh, and Vijayalakshmi Pandit—worked to embed equality in the new republic. One of their first acts was to enshrine universal adult suffrage in the Constitution, eliminating previous gender, property or literacy tests. In effect, when the Constitution took effect on 26 January 1950, women had the same political rights as men for the first time. (In the first Lok Sabha elections of 1951-52, about 5% of MPs were women—a modest number, but everyone now had the vote.)

## LOCAL QUOTAS: THE 73RD AND 74TH AMENDMENTS

A major turning point came in 1992 with the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, which created elected local governments (panchayats and municipalities) and mandated one-third of their seats for women. This was hailed as the world's largest enfranchisement of women at a stroke. By the 2010s, roughly 800,000-900,000 women were serving in village and town councils—nearly one-third of the country's 2.9 million local representatives. The practical impact was striking. Studies of India's "reservations for women" in village councils (since the early 1990s) show that having women in leadership changed outcomes and attitudes. Communities with reserved seats saw more investment in projects favoured by women (such as water, sanitation, and schools), higher spending on education and health, and even increased reporting of domestic crimes—all without harming village productivity. Citizens' views of women leaders became more positive, and girls' school attendance and aspirations for leadership rose.

*Despite the local success, the national legislature remained stubbornly male-dominated. Beginning in 1996, Parliament saw repeated attempts to introduce a one-third quota for women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies.*

In short, the local quotas proved that women's participation increased responsiveness to female citizens and rebalanced public priorities. India's experience encouraged global interest: many countries cited these successes when designing their own gender quotas (e.g. in Rwanda or Uganda, women's reserved seats have been equally transformative).

## NATIONAL QUOTA BILLS (1996-2022)

Despite the local success, the national legislature remained stubbornly male-dominated. Beginning in 1996, Parliament saw repeated attempts to introduce a one-third quota for women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies. These so-called Women's Reservation Bill was brought forward in 1996 (as the 81st Amendment) and reintroduced in 1998 and 1999. In each case, the proposal passed in one house but lapsed as a new election was called; none became law. A new effort came in 2008 (the 108th Amendment); that time the Rajya Sabha approved it, but the Lok Sabha dissolved before passage. A further attempt in 2010 likewise passed the upper house only. In total, six such bills were introduced over two decades, yet none crossed the finish line. The failures owed much to political stalemate: smaller parties demanded sub-quotas for disadvantaged castes and communities as a condition, and consensus was elusive. Meanwhile, female representation in Parliament crept upward only slowly—from about 5% in 1952 to roughly 14-15% by the 2010s—far below the quo-

ta's target. Women lawmakers and activists privately dubbed the stalled bill "our Albatross", reflecting nearly three decades of frustration.

## THE 2023 AMENDMENT LAW

All that changed in September 2023. In a historic special session, Parliament passed the Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, (2023) (popularly called the *Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam*). The two houses acted in quick succession: on September 20 the Lok Sabha approved the bill by an overwhelming margin (454 votes in favor, 2 against), and on September 21 the Rajya Sabha passed it unanimously. President Droupadi Murmu gave her assent on September 28, 2023, and the law was published the same day. In effect, the amendment reserves one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha and all state legislative assemblies (and the Delhi Assembly) for women. This includes seats already reserved for Scheduled Castes and Tribes—in other words, women from those groups get one-third of the SC/ST quotas as well. The reservation is set for an initial period of 15 years, after which Parliament may extend or review it.

Crucially, however, the Act embeds a delay mechanism. It states that the women's reservation "shall come into effect after an exercise of delimitation is undertaken for this purpose, after the first census taken after the commencement of" the law, "have been published". In plain terms, the quota will only be operational after the next Census and the subsequent redrawing of constitu-



A group of women local-government leaders meets a parliamentary official in New Delhi in 2011, illustrating the growth of women's participation in panchayats and municipal bodies after the 73rd/74th amendments.

ency boundaries. This condition was not accidental. For decades, amendments have frozen the number and distribution of parliamentary seats (to avoid penalizing states that controlled population growth). The framers of the women's reservation law apparently chose to honor that freeze: rather than increasing seats immediately, the law waits until a new census (the 2021 count, now delayed to about 2026) allows fresh delimitation. In practice, then, the 33% quota will likely take effect only after the forthcoming delimitation (which experts estimate could be based on the 2031 census). Until that happens, legislative elections proceed as before—with 78 of 542 MPs (15%) women in the 17th Lok Sabha.

The new Act's provisions were summarized in Parliament and the media as follows: one-third of the 543 Lok Sabha seats (about 181 seats) will be reserved for women, and a corresponding one-third of assembly seats in each state. These seats will rotate by area after each future delimitation exercise. The law also reaffirmed that SC/ST quotas continue (embedded within the women's seats) and that the reservation is time-bound. Many legislators noted that previous party leaders (e.g. the late Rajiv Gandhi) had championed such a quota for decades, making its passage a historic moment. Political strategists and advocates celebrated the achievement but immediately questioned the implementation timetable. If literally enforced, the delay clause means the 2024 general election was held without the new quota, and likely even the 2029 election will precede the reservation.

LESSONS FROM THE PANCHAYATS - AND THE WORLD  
If there is any doubt about women's ability to lead, one need only look at India's

panchayats (village councils) and city municipalities over the last 30 years. The 33% reservation at the local level, introduced in the early 1990s, has arguably done more to politically empower Indian women than any other measure. Women who had been confined to domestic roles stepped into public life as village heads and ward councillors, often bringing a fresh perspective to governance. Over time, many states found the initial one-third quota inadequate and raised it to 50%. As of today, 21 states and 2 Union Territories have half of all local body seats reserved for women. Some states, like Bihar and Odisha, took the lead in this expansion—Bihar was the first state (in 2006) to approve 50% reservation for women in panchayats. The result? In several areas, women's representation didn't stop at the quota minimum but exceeded it. For instance, Karnataka reportedly saw women winning even some unreserved seats, taking their share above 50% in certain local councils. This suggests that exposure and experience create their own momentum—once women became visible leaders, voters grew more accustomed to electing them even in open contests.

The local government experience also became a training ground, producing a new cadre of seasoned female politicians. Many women who got their start as village sarpanch or town councillor in the 1990s and 2000s have since contested for state assemblies or even Parliament. In Indian politics, a feeder pipeline matters—and for decades, that pipeline for women was thin. The panchayat quota helped widen it significantly. Studies by economists and political scientists have documented several positive outcomes of women-led local councils: more investment in public goods like drinking water facilities and

schools (reflecting women leaders' priorities matching community needs), and a gradual shift in social attitudes as villages witnessed women handling traditionally male-dominated arenas like land disputes or budgeting. To be fair, not every story is rosy—there have been cases where husbands or male relatives act as shadow operators for the elected women (the "pradhan-pati" phenomenon, referring to husbands of women village heads). In the initial years, many women lacked education or confidence and faced ridicule or resistance. Yet, over time, those issues have been mitigated. Surveys show a majority of female local representatives now feel capable and assertive in their roles, and the "proxy husband" syndrome has diminished as women incumbents gain experience. Crucially, fears that female-led councils would underperform were proven wrong; if anything, some measures of service delivery and accountability improved. These lessons from the grassroots bolster the legitimacy of extending reservations to higher legislatures.

Looking abroad, India's debate occurs in a wider context of experiments to enhance women's political voice. Dozens of countries have adopted some form of gender quotas—either reserving seats in legislatures or mandating that parties field a certain percentage of women candidates. Over 130 countries today have either constitutional, electoral, or party quotas for women. The outcomes have often been striking. In addition to Rwanda's world-leading female majority in Parliament, countries like Cuba and Nicaragua have above 50% women in their national assemblies. Many European and Latin American countries implemented "candidate quotas" (e.g. Argentina, France,

Mexico), which required that women comprise 30-50% of each party's slate. These have steadily pushed representation upward. One insightful comparison is between countries that enacted quotas and those that didn't: those with quotas saw women's representation rise faster and to higher levels on average. Even our South Asian neighbours experimented—Nepal used a reserved seats system and today women are about 34% of its Parliament, while Bangladesh reserves 50 seats (15%) for women in its legislature (though Bangladesh's arrangement is a bit different, with reserved members chosen via proportional representation). Pakistan also reserves 17% of its National Assembly seats for women. India, despite having a proud history of women leaders at the very top (from Indira Gandhi to many powerful chief ministers), lagged in aggregate representation. By 2022, India ranked a lowly 148th in the world for the percentage of women in the national legislature, trailing not just Western democracies but many developing countries as well.

This global perspective added pressure and also provided models to emulate. It showed that concerns about women being unable to handle constituency politics or voters not accepting women candidates are largely unfounded. Given the opportunity, women can and do win—as evidenced by increasing successes once quotas level the playing field. It also underlined that political will is key. In many countries, quota laws were passed when the political leadership (typically dominated by men) finally agreed to cede space. In India's case, that political will coalesced in 2023 after decades. But having made the promise, the question remains: will the delay in fulfilling it sap its power?



Adivasi women have always been at the forefront when it came to organized mass programs on their part. The rally called by the adivasis at Chakadoba village in Medinipur district of West Bengal (2009), India saw massive participation by women who came with traditional weapons.



A group of Indian women marches under an "India" banner during the Women's Coronation Procession in London. This public-domain photograph captures their participation in an international suffrage demonstration more than a decade before the passage of the 1930 Representation of the People Act.



The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Vande Mataram row

National song sullied by political duel

THE 150th anniversary of our national song, Vande Mataram, is a momentous occasion for the entire country. It's an opportunity to honour this soul-stirring composition, which is a testament to national unity and has inspired several generations of freedom fighters as well as nation-builders. On such an occasion, political leaders should have risen above party lines and come together for the year-long celebrations. Unfortunately, an unsavoury verbal duel has erupted over this song, laying bare the distressing fault lines.

It's lamentable that raking up the past has become par for the course in India, that is Bharat. Claiming that key verses of Vande Mataram were removed in 1937, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Friday that the damage done to the song had sown the seeds of Partition. He was alluding to the Congress Working Committee's resolution that adopted only the first two stanzas, dropping others that contained salutations to Goddess Durga. The Congress has countered his argument by saying that it was Rabindranath Tagore who suggested to Jawaharlal Nehru that these two stanzas be adopted. Adding fuel to the fire, Samajwadi Party MLA Abu Asim Azmi has said that no one can be forced to recite the song, while UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has urged people to be wary of a conspiracy to create "new Jinnahs". These communal barbs are undermining the spirit of Vande Mataram, which had roused the nation to unitedly fight the colonial rulers.

Viksit Bharat will remain a distant dream as long as the political class remains preoccupied with the past and fails to focus on the future. The national song can serve as a guiding light to build a strong and prosperous India, provided that it is insulated from petty one-upmanship. This glowing tribute to our motherland belongs to every Indian, regardless of his or her political and religious loyalties. It must now act as a bulwark against the divisive forces which threaten to impede the nation's progress.

PU unrest

Draw lesson from farm laws, hold talks

PANJAB University (PU) has long been regarded as a beacon of higher education, shaped by a participatory governance model that balanced autonomy with accountability. The Senate and Syndicate, envisaged under the Panjab University Act of 1947, have given faculty, alumni and students a voice in decision-making. This legacy must not be casually set aside. The Centre's proposal to restructure PU's governance and increase its administrative oversight has stirred unease across the campus and beyond. What could have been a constructive exercise has instead taken on emotional and political dimensions, leading to protests and unrest. Much of the resistance stems not from opposition to reform itself, but from the perception that decisions are being taken without consultation with stakeholders.

The situation evokes memories of the farmers' agitation against the now-repealed farm laws, when the lack of prior dialogue bred alienation and distrust. At PU too, many feel that their voices are being ridden roughshod over. This impression could have been prevented through communication. For an institution that thrives on academic freedom and intellectual exchange, unilateral decision-making sends a discordant signal.

There is no denying that PU's governance has shown strains. Delays in decision-making, factionalism and procedural inertia have hampered its responsiveness to academic challenges. Reforms in governance are necessary to make it more efficient and globally competitive. But such changes must emerge from consensus, not confrontation. It would not only uphold PU's democratic ethos but also ensure that governance structures reflect the needs and aspirations of those who sustain the institution. Dialogue, not decree, remains the cornerstone of enduring reform. PU's success has rested on its ability to balance autonomy with accountability. As the region's premier public university located in Chandigarh, it serves not just Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, but also the idea of federal cooperation.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 1925

Swarajist policy

IT was a very important speech which Pandit Motilal Nehru made at Bombay on Saturday in opening the campaign on behalf of the Swaraj party for the forthcoming Council of State elections. After repeating his already famous statement that the party had sailed as near the wind as possible and could not sail any nearer, he said, "If something substantial is not done by the Government which the country would accept as honourable, proper and fitting settlement, the plain duty of the party would be to come out and work in the country and do what the Governor of the United Provinces in his recent address to durbars had termed 'educate our masters,' namely, men in the village in India." It is not quite clear what Nehru really meant by the words "come out," whether he meant that the party leaders would resign their seats and again become full-fledged non-cooperators, or that while retaining their seats they would concentrate their attention largely on work in the country. It is difficult to believe that after the experience of the three years during which the Swarajists of today had non-cooperated with the Government along with other non-cooperators, anything like a boycott of the Councils in the old sense would ever again be attempted. For one thing, the attempt would amount to a confession of failure and prove those non-cooperators to have been right who had from the first ridiculed the idea of Council entry. Secondly, it would mean the throwing away of all those advantages which the Swaraj party has undoubtedly gained.

What lies beneath India-US defence pact

Renewal of the bilateral framework is a gambit shrouded in ambiguity



EVEN as the ink is still drying on the Major Defence Framework Agreement between the United States and India, the choice of the venue for signing this compact, on the sidelines of the 12th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) recently, itself speaks volumes.

It very poignantly underscores the current strain in the India-US relationship. The signing was a ceremony of convenience, a ritual reaffirmation conducted on neutral ground, for neither India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh nor US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth found it politically expedient to travel to the other country's capital.

This geographical nuance is the first clue to the complex and convoluted, though profoundly pragmatic, foxtrot that this agreement represents. It is not a grand alliance forged in the fires of shared ideology, but a tactical entente negotiated in the portentous shadow of shared apprehensions.

This framework had its genesis in 2005, when the US was playing to a different rhythm in the aftermath of the deadliest attack on American soil after the Pearl Harbour incident (December 7, 1941). The attack that took place on September 11, 2001, colloquially called 9/11, shook the spectre of US unipolarity to its very roots, given that a non-state actor, al-Qaeda, had carried out an unprecedented assault on American sovereignty.

In retribution for the attack, the George W Bush administration launched an all-out assault on Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, christening it a



ENTENTE : Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth signed the agreement in Malaysia. pn

war on terror. This led to a fundamental restructuring of the US force posture globally, compelling it to seek partners beyond its traditional Atlantic and Asia-Pacific treaty allies.

The Congress-led UPA government in New Delhi, under the leadership of Dr Manmohan Singh, saw an opening to end India's technological isolation and the nuclear apartheid it had been subjected to since 1974, when it carried out its first nuclear test. It used defence cooperation with the US as the key to open the doors for lifting global sanctions on India's civil nuclear programme and inviting private participation to augment it.

Even Russia did not substantively oppose India's overtures to the West. Though China was rising, its assertiveness was measured, its "wolf warrior" diplomacy yet unborn, and its network of military bases in the Indo-Pacific a spectre of the future.

The Indo-Pacific was a novel and nascent concept, being nurtured by the likes of former Japanese Prime Minister late Shinzo Abe. The US and its allies, ranging from Japan to Australia, saw India as a probable counterweight to a resurgent but then non-belligerent China.

Today, the context is inverted. Beijing's global outreach and its

America's complete estrangement from India would be a geopolitical gift to Beijing and Moscow of incalculable value.

sprawling network of military bases have made the "China threat" one of the organising principles of American defence strategy. The Quad is yet to be properly institutionalised despite its tenuous existence since 2007.

Russia, now a Union State with Belarus and an antagonist of the West, has been India's primary source of discounted crude oil since 2022. These purchases have recently, perhaps temporarily, been moderated by Indian refiners under the threat of secondary sanctions. This creates a fundamental schism in the geo-economic postures of Washington and Delhi.

The US, under the second Trump administration, has metamorphosed from exceptionalism to transactionalism, buoyed by the Make America Great Again (MAGA) brigade. The US is again contemplating a

G2 world order with China. It was first mooted in 2009 during Barack Obama's Democratic presidency. The G2 implicitly subverts the multipolarity that India sees as its manifest destiny.

In this maelstrom, the renewal of the framework is a gambit shrouded in profound ambiguity. For India it seems to be a necessary hedge, a symbol of continuity deliberately initialised in a moment of discontinuity.

This, unfortunately, is a marriage of convenience, not a shared vision. Delhi's political silence in the face of President Trump's repeated assertions of US mediation, singularly misplaced as they are, to end India's kinetic action against Pakistan in May continues to be deafening.

India's pragmatic alignment with the Taliban on Afghan sovereignty and its continued preference for Russian energy, notwithstanding the current hiatus, are clear signals that its commitment to the US-led system is now conditional. The agreement seems to be an instrumentality for Delhi to keep the Americans engaged while trying to resolve the contentious imposition of exorbitant and unwarranted tariffs, humiliating deportations and the H-1B visa issue.

From Washington's perspective, the renewal is at best an act

of strategic retention. The Trump administration, for all its disdain for traditional alliances and its cosy overtures to Islamabad, cannot afford to let the linchpin of its Indo-Pacific strategy simply unravel. A complete estrangement from India would be a geopolitical gift to Beijing and Moscow of incalculable value.

Thus, the framework serves as a placeholder, a mechanism to keep India within the gravitational pull of American influence, even as the two nations publicly disagree on Russia and privately distrust each other's ultimate intentions. It is an acknowledgment that, for all its frustrations with India's independent streak, the US has no viable alternative partner in the Indian Ocean Region capable of acting as a counterweight to Chinese expansionism.

The public hyphenation of India and Pakistan by Trump may satiate some alleged business interests, but the quiet renewal of a 10-year defence pact seems to reveal a more profound and enduring calculation within the Pentagon and the wider US strategic community.

To ask, therefore, if this renewal is a sign of strategy or weakness, of wisdom or folly is an avoidable binary. It is a continuum born out of shared strategic imperatives. It is a policy commitment in its recognition of a shared, overarching challenge, yet it is an act of symbolism because the substantive policy underpinnings required to give it true meaning — a convergence on Russia, a common approach on state-sponsored terrorism emanating from Pakistan and a congruence on the contours of a future global order — are glaringly absent.

For now, the renewed defence agreement stands at best as a wager that the strategic imperative of balancing, if not containing, China continues to dictate. This outweighs even the acute divergences of the present for both the US and India. Whether this wager is a stroke of genius or a grand delusion is a question that only the unforgiving tribunal of the future would provide an answer to. For the present, the continuity in defence cooperation with the US should be welcomed.

“

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

We have a better chance of assuring our future if we remember who our friends are. — Henry A Kissinger

”

To lend or not to lend books

TARU BAHL

RUNNING my hands over the glossy hardbound cover of the latest Booker Prize winner, caressing the embossed title of a forgotten classic, fixing the eyes on the refurbished shelf of my favourite bookstore, asserting sole ownership rights after paying for a pile of books — this pattern repeats itself unerringly. It is almost an obsessive, compulsive habit. When there is a longish gap, the withdrawal symptoms are all there — irritability, restlessness, nervous anxiety and emotional distress.

For some strange reason, I have never been able to savour reading a borrowed book. Of course, there have been times when the purse strings have been tight and I have resolved not to splurge on books and instead relied on libraries to satiate my hunger for reading. Doing my bit for the environment, I have sincerely tried switching over to Kindle, but the desire to buy and own a book has persisted. Also, while I feel no guilt about spending a few thousand rupees on new paperbacks, spending the same on a dress rankles.

There was a time when I would enthusiastically recommend a book to a like-minded friend, eager to share excerpts or indulge in a discussion on the story line and characters, but now I steer clear of any such sharing. People have an effortless way of walking off with a book and closing the chapter, quite literally, after that. Getting a book back is like a tightrope walk, considering the risk of offending the borrower and souring the relationship forever.

Although I may forget and forgive a lot that goes on in our lives, when it comes to books, I can be downright mean. I never seem to forget which friend is sitting on which book of mine. When I meet a friend who has borrowed a particular book, I find an uncomfortable thought gripping me — why has it not been returned?

Going to a friend's house and seeing my copy of Vikram Seth's *An Equal Music* sitting on a dusty shelf in her office library made me uneasy. My eyes kept darting to that corner wondering if she had even read it at all or remembered that she had borrowed it and that a book that has been lent needs to be returned. All this while she was rambling about her maid issues and my mind was obviously not with her.

Once I recommended Edward de Bono's *Simplicity* to a confused youngster, hoping he would declutter his life and incorporate some of the author's wisdom. He returned the book claiming it had helped him immensely, but it was all yellowed, greying and in tatters. It has now been over a year since I got the book back and it has been restored as far as possible, but I cannot bring myself to being chatty with him as if this had never happened.

Why do I feel so strongly about my books? I have for long tried to resolve the dichotomy between my obsession and my confounding, guilt-ridden confession. On it, among other things, hinges my being 'good friend material.'

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

No shortcut to success

Apropos of 'Nuggets in the dust'; hard work, perseverance and tenacity brought success to our women cricketers, not shortcuts. The players are mostly from small towns and rural areas, with a humble background. Since India possesses a demographic dividend with an abundance of talent, it is vital to tap these resources for national progress. Governments both at the Centre and in states need to work out a comprehensive national employment generation plan to create more and more jobs. Political parties, governments and leaders focus their energies on elections instead of national development goals.

RAVI SHARMA, DHARIWAL

Explore career options in India

With reference to 'Nuggets in the dust'; the youth who seek to escape poverty by fleeing to foreign shores can take a cue from the champion girls of the Indian women cricket team. The government has started numerous schemes for skill development and job creation, including startups. The youth should avail of them. Jobs have already reduced in dream destinations like the US, Canada and the Europe due to their sluggish economy, nationalistic politics and the fast growth of AI technology. The youth must discover career options within the country, state or village.

KR BHARTI, SHIMLA

Ignoring demographic advantage

Refer to 'Education the weakest link in Haryana's story'; private universities in the state cater only to the elite, while public universities suffer from stagnant promotions and delayed appointments of teaching staff, and shrinking funds. The model Sanskriti schools which now follow the CBSE curriculum have sidelined the Haryana Board, leading to their steady decline. The merger of government schools, instead of improving access, has further alienated rural students. Teacher recruitment across various levels has stagnated for years, leaving a surplus of unemployed BED graduates. The sector has long been marred by corruption. Unless Haryana undertakes urgent structural reform and

restores integrity, inclusivity and merit to the education system, its demographic advantage will turn into a social liability.

HARSH PAWARIA, ROHTAK

Transparency not a mere slogan

Refer to 'Pawar deal'; the Pune land controversy, involving a firm linked to Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar's son, exposes deep flaws in political ethics and public accountability. Merely cancelling the deal cannot erase the perception of misuse of power. When those in authority face such allegations, transparency must not remain a slogan, but result in concrete action. Citizens expect the government to uphold its integrity by ordering an impartial probe ensuring that the law applies equally to all, irrespective of position. Genuine accountability, not political shielding, is the true test of democratic governance.

MANYA SAWHNEY, ZIRAKPUR

Change social attitudes

Refer to 'A disturbing trend'; the growing misuse of laws meant to protect women is worrisome and deserves serious reflection. The deeper malaise lies in our social attitudes, where gender roles are steeped in mistrust. Legal safeguards alone cannot fix this imbalance. Education, awareness and a culture of fairness can ensure that laws empower rather than divide. Protecting women's rights and preserving justice must go hand in hand — neither should come at the expense of the other.

AVINSHIAPPAN MYILSAMI, COIMBATORE

End chaos on PU campus

The ongoing student protest at Panjab University has disrupted academic activities and created unnecessary tension in the campus and outside. While students have the right to voice their demands, prolonged unrest affects both their education and the institution's reputation. It is imperative that both the university administration and student representatives engage in constructive dialogue to resolve issues amicably. Respecting each other's views and patience are essential for restoring the sanctity of the institution.

NAVDEEP SINGH, AMRITSAR



# How Bihar's women became kingmakers



**RAVI RANJAN**  
PROFESSOR, ZAKIR HUSAIN  
DELHI COLLEGE, DU

THE tracking of women's participation in the Bihar Assembly elections in the last two decades reflects the politics of presence. Their rising voting percentage and role as kingmakers clearly defines that. The first phase of the Bihar Assembly elections saw 64.66 per cent voter turnout compared to 57.20 per cent in 2020. In 1962, barely three out of 10 women reached the polling booth. By 2020, the number had risen to six.

Election Commission data shows that women turnout leapt from 30 per cent to 59.6 per cent, thereby erasing the gender gap and then flipping it. In the last Assembly race, more women than men voted in 167 of the 243 seats. Parties now woo them the way they once chased caste blocs.

Records indicate that whenever women have outnumbered men in voting, it has benefited the NDA. Given the impact of SIR and anti-incumbency, it would be interesting to note whether this correlation continues this time.

This transformation shows not only political awareness among women but also reflects their stake in the state's developmental process and demand for democratic rights.

The shift started in 2010, when for the first time, women's turnout crossed 54 per cent while men lagged at 51 per cent. Awareness did part of the work; policy did the rest.

In 2006, Nitish Kumar reserved half of the panchayat seats for women. In the semi-feudal agrarian society, where villages had rarely seen a woman chair a meeting, Bihar elected 4,535 women as mukhiyas (gram panchayat presidents) in 2015. Around 54 per cent of Bihar's 1.36 lakh elected village representatives were women by 2015.

Power, once a men-only club, had been cracked. Political parties no longer consider women as peripheral voters echoing the male members' choice. Women are asserting themselves as a collective force and wanting that their demands be integrated into the mainstream politico-policy discourse.

Numbers underline the shift: Bihar female labour-force participation, which was a dismal 4.1 per cent in 2017-18, hit 30.5 per cent in 2023-24 — a seven-fold increase. Rural women workforce led the charge at 33.5 per cent compared to the urban female work force of 16 per cent.

It seems that this factor has influenced the voter turnout in the 2025 Assembly elections — the rural seats of Muzaffarpur district have performed better than the urban seats in voter turnout. Out of the 11 Assembly segments, Muzaffarpur urban saw the lowest turnout of 59.26 per cent. The other constituencies, which are mostly rural or semi-urban, saw more than 69 per cent voter turnout. The



**SHIFT:** In 2010 for the first time, women's turnout was more than that of men — it crossed 54% while men lagged at 51%. REUTERS

highly urbanised Patna has barely crossed 36 per cent. With the rise in labour force participation, women have made their political presence felt independently of men, and strongly.

Meanwhile, female literacy rose from 33 per cent in 2001 to roughly 60 per cent by 2017 (NSS data). Maternal mortality ratio (MMR) fell from 130 per lakh births to 118 per lakh births. However, that the sex ratio at birth slipped from 921 in 2001 to 918 in 2011 (SRS 2017-18) is a reminder that the preference for a male child remains.

Two schemes introduced by the Nitish government in the last two decades have turbocharged the change. The first policy measure entailed the distribution of bicycles free of cost to every girl reaching Class IX.

A 2017 study in the *American Economic Journal* clocked a 32 per cent jump in secondary school enrolment of girls and 40 per cent shrink

The bicycle that once carried a girl to school now takes her to the polling booth.

in gender gap. Six African nations have replicated the idea; the UN has stamped it as "best practice."

The second scheme is the Jeevika initiative, wherein 10.6 lakh self-help groups of women who began with pooling Rs 10 each to access credit collectively have driven change beyond economics in Bihar. Their success is recognised globally.

The recently launched Mukhyamantri Mahila Roggar Yojana provides Rs 10,000 to over 20 lakh SHG members, extending financial empowerment, although the Opposition has attacked the scheme, considering the time of announcement and intention.

Every party now courts the 3.5 crore women with voter IDs. The NDA has dangled police job quotas — with 23.66 per cent constables being women in Bihar; it is India's highest — and the 2016 liquor ban. The *Lancet* credits that ban with stopping 2.1 million

beatings of women by men, even as the NCRB logs show that crimes against women rose by 16.8 per cent in 2021.

The RJD has countered with a promise of Rs 2,500-monthly deposits and permanent SHG jobs with a Rs 30,000 salary.

The reading is clear: ignore women, lose power. The 2020 election results prove it. Of the 119 constituencies where women outnumbered men in voters' list, the NDA won 72 (60.5 per cent) and the MGB won 42 (35.3 per cent). The CSDS-Lokniti post-poll survey found that among upper-caste, Kurmi, Koeri, Dalit and EBC voters, more women than men tilted towards Nitish Kumar. Young voters under 39 backed the NDA; older ones kept faith with the RJD. Caste still matters, but gender now slices across it.

However, the Assembly benches tell a different story. In 2020, only 26 of the 371 women candidates won — a seven per cent strike rate.

This year, the count is worse: just 258 women fielded against 2,357 men. The BJP has fielded 13 women, the JD(U) 13, the RJD 23, Jan Suraj 25 and the Congress five. But, symbolism still counts. Every woman who contests chips away at the idea that politics is a male sport.

As per the ECI data, the 2000 Assembly elections saw 62.57 per cent voting. It was the highest turnout in post-Independence Bihar, with 70.71 per cent men and 53.28 per cent women voting — a gap of almost 18 per cent. The Rabri Devi-led RJD formed the government.

In the 2005 elections, the voter turnout was 45.92 per cent but the gender gap had reduced sharply, with 47.02 per cent male voters and 44.62 female voters turning out. Nitish formed the government in alliance with BJP. After 2005, in all succeeding elections, women voters' turnout has surpassed that of men, and Nitish has managed to become CM. If this trend continues, Nitish may once again be lucky on November 14.

The bicycle that carried a girl to school/college now carries her to the polling booth. Democracy in Bihar has a new accent. Bihar's men migrate; its women who stay and stitch the state together with the needle of votes. In 2025, they will prick every manifesto that treats them as vote bank instead of builders of the new Bihar. Freebies buy mornings; jobs buy decades. Women know the difference. Gen Z women are prioritising their aspirations of education, job and safety in a thriving democracy, where all voices count equally.

# 150 years of Vande Mataram: The song that built a nation



**NAYAB SINGH SAINI**  
CHIEF MINISTER OF HARYANA

THE year 2025 marks a defining milestone in India's civilisational journey — 150 years of the national song Vande Mataram. Composed in 1875 by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, this song was more than a literary creation. It was a weapon of words that sowed the seeds of Indian consciousness, identity, freedom and nationhood. Vande Mataram was the anthem of awakening — a surge of faith that pierced through the darkness of colonial rule and kindled the dawn of independence.

In the long arc of India's freedom struggle, there was scarcely a moment when the cry of Vande Mataram did not echo from the throats of revolutionaries, satyagrahis, reformers and patriots

ready to lay down their lives for the motherland.

Born amid the political and social ferment of Bengal, the song soon became the voice of India's soul. In 1882, through the novel *Anandamath*, it entered the public imagination as the spiritual core of national awakening.

When Rabindranath Tagore first sang it publicly at the 1896 Calcutta Congress session, it became the hymn of unity. Then came the Partition of Bengal in 1905, which transformed Vande Mataram into a living emblem of national pride. From village squares to secret meetings of revolutionaries, one chant bound the nation — Vande Mataram!

It was this song that deified the motherland and infused the freedom movement with spiritual strength, emotional fire and ideological direction. In 1950, Rajendra Prasad, India's first President, accorded it the status of National Song — a fitting recognition of its timeless power.

I believe that no movement can succeed through arms alone. It needs conviction, thought, emotion and character. Vande Mataram shattered the colonial mindset that glorified servitude



**PATRIOTIC:** Vande Mataram was not just a song; it was a weapon of awakening. SANDEEP JOSHI

and reminded Indians that they belonged to one of the world's oldest civilisations — rich in culture, tradition, values and unshakeable self-respect.

From its rhythm arose the courage of Veer Savarkar, the sacrifice of Chandrashekhar Azad, the rebellion of Bhagat Singh and the nationalist vision of Subhas Chandra Bose. History bears witness — every word of Vande Mataram had the power to unsettle the British Empire.

Today, under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India

Nationalism is not about division; it is about unity — that is the spirit of Vande Mataram.

strides confidently towards new horizons — self-reliance, technological leadership, global trust, cultural renaissance and the pursuit of world peace.

In this era of 'Amrit Kaal', Vande Mataram assumes a renewed significance. Modern India does not wish to merely celebrate its past glory; it aspires to shape the future. The song remains a moral compass for Indian democracy, reminding us that politics is not about power — it is about the primacy of the nation.

For the Prime Minister,

every policy decision begins with one guiding belief — India first, the people of India first, and the spirit of India first. That, he says, must be the core direction of Indian democracy.

Over the past decade, Modi has redefined Vande Mataram as more than a cultural memory or a symbolic chant. He has placed it at the heart of modern nation-building, inspiring a new generation to embrace nationalism with confidence, dignity and purpose.

With India emerging as a global power, he has reaffirmed the country's civilisational prestige on every world platform, evoking respect for the motherland, pride in identity and the conviction that the nation always comes first.

As we mark 150 years of Vande Mataram, it is evident that the spirit of this song continues to animate the philosophy, confidence and policy direction of a New India.

The next 25 years will be decisive in shaping India's destiny. The journey to 2047 is not merely about becoming an economic powerhouse, but about nurturing collective character, social

discipline, cultural resurgence and deepening the roots of democracy. To achieve this, India needs a unifying national emotion that binds generations together and that spirit lies in Vande Mataram.

Vande Mataram does not merely connect us emotionally; it awakens our democratic responsibility. It reminds us that nationalism is not about division — it is about unity. It is this inclusive nationalism that makes India's democracy the strongest, most vibrant, and most compassionate in the world.

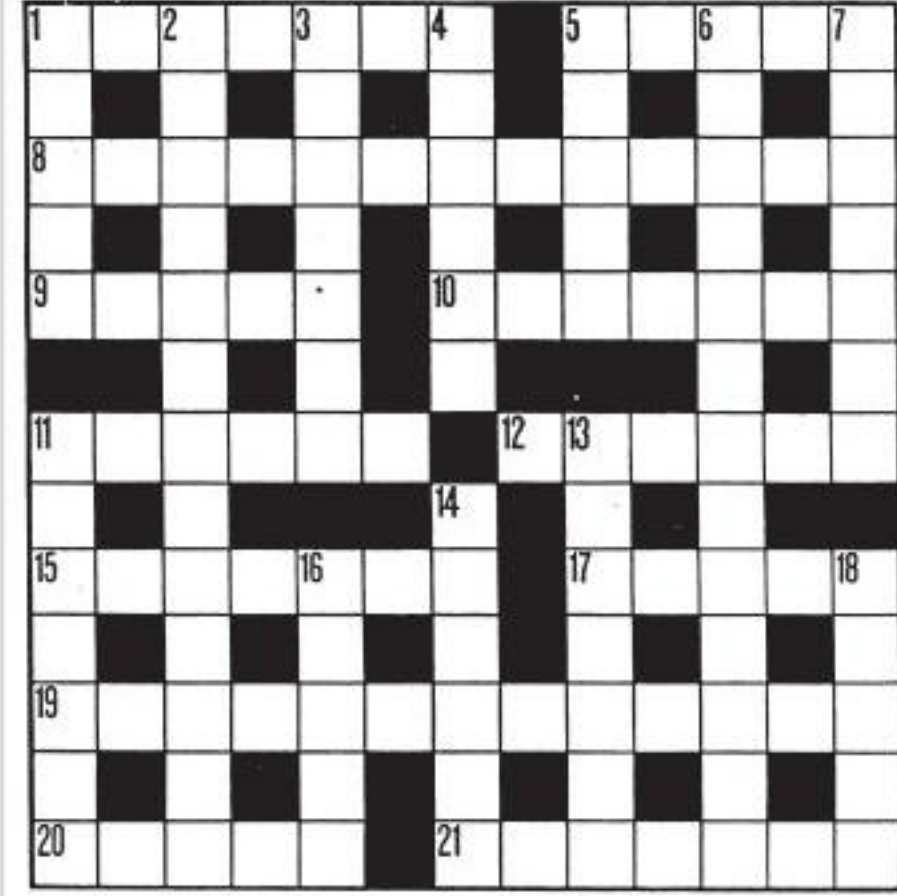
Vande Mataram is not just a song; it is a salutation to Mother India. It is the eternal hymn of our Constitution, our culture, our freedom, our identity and our shared national spirit.

As we mark 150 years of this immortal verse, we must remind future generations that no matter how far India advances, how fast technology evolves, or how vast globalisation becomes — our soul, our identity and our national axis will always remain rooted in the motherland.

There is nothing holier than the soil of India.

Vande Mataram!

## QUICK CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1 Fixed regular salary (7)
  - 5 Impair quality of (5)
  - 8 Unintentionally (13)
  - 9 Gruesome fiend (5)
  - 10 Painstaking (7)
  - 11 Handwriting (6)
  - 12 For all to see (6)
  - 15 Soothe (7)
  - 17 Malicious burning of property (5)
  - 19 Finished (4,3,6)
  - 20 Produce as profit (5)
  - 21 What remains (7)
- DOWN**
- 1 Discernible change in opinion (5)
  - 2 Pitifully bad (2,1,5,5)
  - 3 Cover completely (7)
  - 4 Straightforward (6)
  - 5 Absolute (5)
  - 6 Crazy (3,2,4,4)
  - 7 Constancy (7)
  - 11 Readiness for duty (5-2)
  - 13 Paltry sum (7)
  - 14 Seller (6)
  - 16 Give as prize (5)
  - 18 Gentle push (5)
- Yesterday's Solution**
- Across:** 1 Blush, 8 Sit tight, 9 Avian, 10 Stand off, 11 Lisle, 12 Jot, 16 Nutria, 17 Iguana, 18 Map, 23 Solid, 24 Run out on, 25 Musty, 26 All along, 27 Decry.
- Down:** 2 Live it up, 3 Small fry, 4 Bistro, 5 Stunt, 6 Aglow, 7 Stiff, 12 Jam, 13 Tip, 14 Out of use, 15 In kilter, 19 Amount, 20 Break, 21 Knoll, 22 Bugle.

## SU DO KU



**YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION**

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

**CALENDAR**

**NOVEMBER 11, 2025, TUESDAY**

- Shaka Samvat 1947
- Kartik Shaka 20
- Kartik Purnimite 26
- Hijari 1447
- Krishna Paksha Tithi 7, up to 11:10 pm
- Shubh Yoga up to 9:45 am
- Pushya Nakshatra up to 6:18 pm
- Moon in Cancer sign
- Gandmoola start 6:18 pm

## FORECAST

CITY	TUESDAY WEDNESDAY		1729 HRS 06:45 HRS	
	MAX	MIN	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	27	11		
New Delhi	28	11		
Amritsar	26	10		
Bathinda	26	08		
Jalandhar	26	10		
Ludhiana	27	09		
Bhiwani	26	08		
Hisar	26	08		
Sirsa	26	08		
Dharamsala	24	08		
Manali	16	03		
Shimla	19	08		
Srinagar	16	02		
Jammu	26	11		
Kargil	10	-06		
Leh	07	-06		
Dehradun	28	12		
Mussoorie	19	08		



## A BLAST THAT COMES WITH A WARNING: DELHI'S OLD FEAR RETURNS

THE explosion near Delhi's Red Fort on Monday evening has raised fresh concern over the state of India's internal security. Preliminary reports suggest a car blast close to the metro station that serves the busy heritage precinct. The cause is still under investigation, and the authorities have not confirmed whether it was a deliberate act of terror or a catastrophic accident.

Even so, the choice of location has revived unease. The Red Fort, from where India marks its Independence Day each year, is both a historic and symbolic site. Any incident in its vicinity carries psychological impact far beyond the immediate loss. Delhi has seen similar episodes before; each time, they have tested the capital's preparedness and its confidence in everyday safety.

The timing compounds the concern. The explosion comes as agencies in Jammu and Kashmir claim to have dismantled a large, transnational terror module with possible overseas links, and Gujarat's Anti-Terrorism Squad reports arrests of individuals allegedly associated with radical networks. While no direct connection has been established, the coincidence of events across regions merits close scrutiny.

Over the past decade, India's counter-terror effort has strengthened its border and intelligence capacities. Yet, urban preparedness often lags behind. Policing structures remain reactive, and inter-agency coordination tends to tighten only after an event. The danger today lies less in infiltration from across the border than in the quiet spread of radical influence and logistics within ordinary spaces—apartments, workplaces, universities.

If early findings confirm a planned attack, it will signal a shift back to low-cost, high-visibility terror operations designed to erode public assurance rather than inflict mass casualties. If not, the incident should still serve as a stress test for urban safety and crisis response.

Either way, the message is clear: vigilance cannot be seasonal or reactive. Intelligence, policing, and civic alertness must operate as a single system, not a chain of afterthoughts. Terror may adapt its form and face, but the challenge for the state remains the same—to stay one step ahead, calmly and without complacency.

## RESILIENT AIRPORT INFRA NEEDED AGAINST SPOOFING

IT'S a form of electronic warfare that's typically reported from conflict zones or borders. However, last week, GPS spoofing hit Delhi's Indra Gandhi International Airport. Fake satellite signals misled aircraft navigation systems, sent flight paths off course, and threw operations at the country's busiest airport into chaos. Not just for a day or two, some pilots reported encountering spoofing all through the week. The incidents coincided with the airport's main runway undergoing instrument landing system (ILS) upgrades, which left the arriving aircraft more dependent on satellite navigation, and hence, vulnerable to spoofing. Trouble with the air traffic control's automatic message switching system affected more than 800 flights.

In essence, GPS spoofing involves manipulating navigation data with malicious intent. Unlike jamming, which blocks GPS signals, spoofing involves transmitting fake satellite signals to override genuine ones. The aircraft's navigation systems pick up these counterfeit signals and calculate wrong data for position, altitude, time, and speed. The fake signals override the genuine satellite signals using specialised hardware or software. The receiver may consider the amplified spoofed signals as authentic, ending up flying blind or even worse, dangerously off-course.

India is not alone in facing the menace, which the International Air Transport Association has noted is on the rise worldwide. However, it's also a national risk, with aviation experts warning of a threat to the "integrity of civilian navigation systems". This March, the government reported as many as 465 GPS interference and spoofing incidents in the border region near Amritsar between November 2023 and February 2025.

For Delhi, mitigation requires promulgating ILS at the earliest, which the airport operator has promised by November 27. Once the upgrades are done, IGLA's main runway will be equipped with Category III capabilities at both ends, enhancing capacity and resilience against adverse weather and technical disruptions. For the future, the government should deploy more advanced detection systems, increase reliance on and upgrade ground-based navigation, and improve data sharing and pilot training in collaboration with international bodies. If we learnt anything from one of the worst crashes in India's history this June, it's that we need to keep working on air safety continuously. Rest is not an option.

### QUICK TAKE

#### ATTACKS THAT NEVER CEASED

IT seems things have gone back to being abnormal in Gaza since the ceasefire that's supposed to have come into effect on October 10. Israel's official and unofficial killing machines are continuing to whirr on one pretext or another. The UN has identified this October as the month with the highest number of settler attacks in the occupied West Bank since 2006—246 out of 1,500 through 2025. Continued bombing of Gaza is claiming lives almost every day. All this amid a new estimate that roughly 70,000 of the more than 200,000 tonnes of explosives Israel dropped on the territory remained undetonated. If the world thought it could turn eyes from Gaza's plight, now is not the time.

SARITA Devi could well be Bihar. A one-woman personification could not be more apt. She's yet to get her pucca *makaan*. In the matchbox-sized piece of the earth that's in her name, the floor is still cool mud. The roofing is pre-modern too, except for patches of tarpaulin and polythene. But her optimism pierces that ceiling. Her family is among the last 10 or 12 in this Dalit tola waiting for a concrete roof over their heads. She's confident it's on the way—whenever wins this Friday.

Around her is a colony that hugs a highway rushing back to Patna. The highways of Bihar today all seem scripted by Pirandello—a play in search of characters. Wide strips of shining new tar, all very 21st century, but mostly empty. Not counting the occasional big SUV, they look like tarmacs poised for takeoff. Only waiting for a plane.

If a local Rip Van Winkle were to wake up in the Bihar countryside, he wouldn't be lost. Nothing much has changed in 20 years. The breeze of the highways has not swept in much, but has left behind slipstreams of ambition. There's not much to slake that thirst. Only horizontal mobility—rickety shared vans going to town, trains ribboning out filled with gig workers.

In Patna, Rip Van Winkle may have woken up with a new face—well, a facelift of sorts, patchy yet tangible. India's growth story bursts through the shabbiness of Bihar's capital city. New five-star hotels, new malls, a BMW showroom, signs of new money colliding on the streets with familiar forms of life. Cheek by jowl with fancy buildings are wet markets, tin-roofed shanties, acres of teeming humanity. All contemplating flight, but pulled down by gravity.

Sarita's hamlet, not too far from Patna, is a microcosm of that. For drinking water, there's still only a hand pump. But most of the old mud-and-brick hutments, with moss creeping out of cracks, have given way to compact, brightly painted homes. Fluorescent green, pink, blue, yellow—with a touch of pride in the form of *cham-dramala* motifs along the terraces. Sarita's own attire, a synthetic sari of orange and blue with a glinting silver border, mirrors the change. It's the kind of sari a young Dhirubhai might have once pedalled across small-town Gujarat to sell, long before he turned a textile dream into an industrial empire.

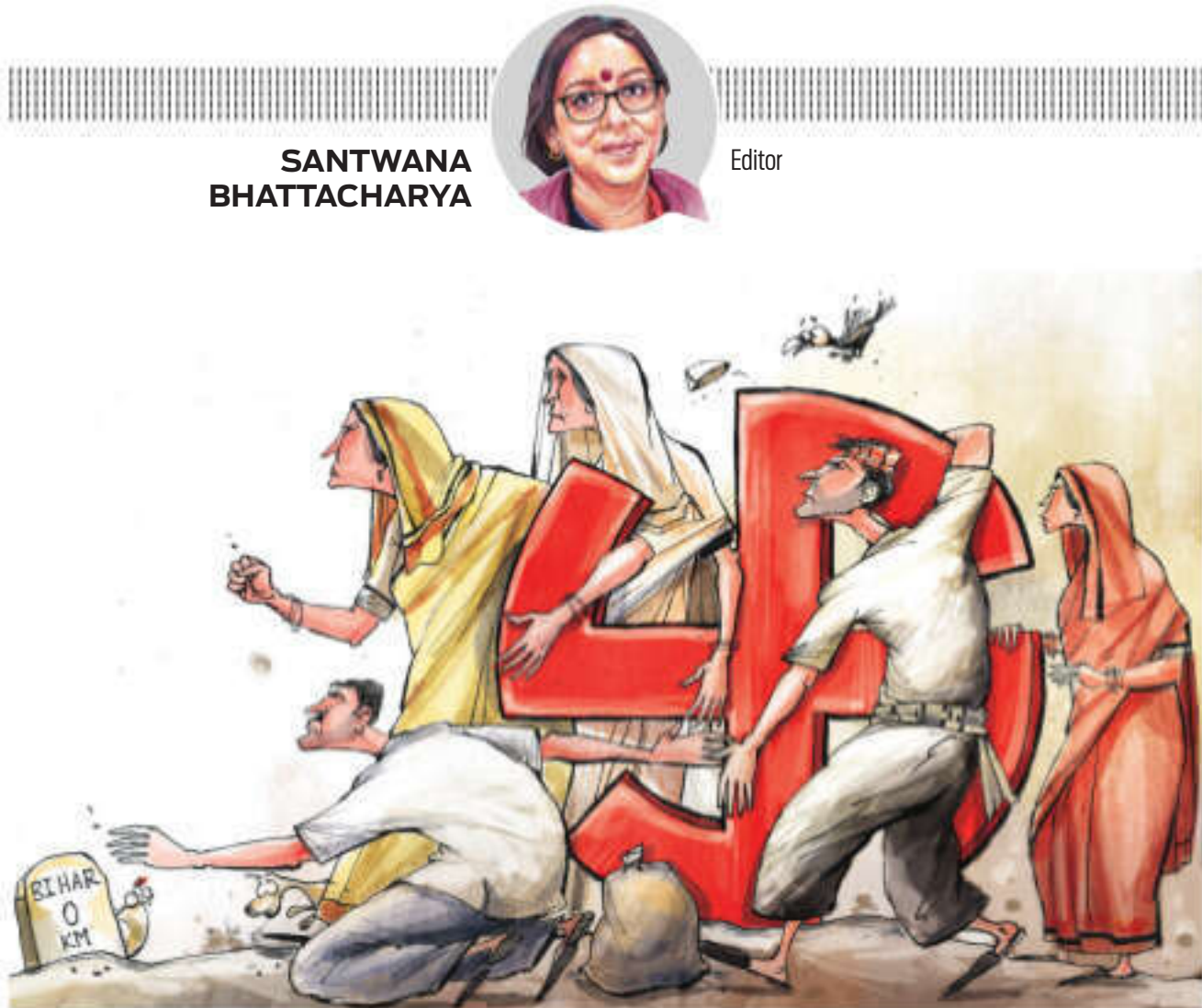
Bihar, the 'B' of the degrading collec-

Gender has never before been so pronounced in elections. But whoever the women of Bihar choose, the groundswell of aspiration can no longer be ignored

## WOMEN HOLD UP MORE THAN HALF OF BIHAR'S EARTH

SANTWANA BHATTACHARYA

Editor



SOURAV ROY

tive noun 'Bimaru', gives off the sense of being ready for a similar transformation. Sarita, and millions like her across the state, are not sitting passively. Women, famously, have walked out on their old role in politics. They are no longer silent spectators, they have a voice. Nitish Kumar was among the first to hear it. He knew this was one constituency that does not migrate, that stays back to vote. By now, it's a decisive bloc of over 3.5 crore voters.

In the first phase of voting, that voice was a crescendo. The bumper 69 percent turnout was essentially a female chorus. Women outvoted men in nearly all of those 18 districts. The female turnout percentages notched unbelievable figures—77.42 in Samastipur, 77.04 in Madhepura, 76.57 in Muzaffarpur, 76 in Gopalganj. The men

were 17-15-10 per cent behind.

For all the change brought by new actors, the political landscape of Bihar is almost entirely masculine. From the avuncular Nitish and the bristling Tejashwi Yadav, both very homespun, to the two prodigals who have returned with the stamp of outside prosperity, Chirag Paswan and Prashant Kishor. The men are the ones kicking up all the dust, shooting off their mouths, often their guns. The women are deciding between them. Today, they are putting in their casting vote. By evening, after Seemanchal votes, Bihar may well have moved into post-caste politics. Not wholly or in full measure, but substantially. The female vote, as proved in Muslim voting patterns after the triple *talaq* ban, can be community-agnostic. It can emancipate itself from natal loyalties.

## R&D: A PUBLIC & PRIVATE CHALLENGE

VENNI V KRISHNA

Professorial Fellow, University of New South Wales, Australia



five years. Most of these programmes leverage government support as a catalyst for attracting private investment. For instance, over 70 percent of the ANRF's ₹1.0 lakh crore budget depends on private participation.

Since 2020, the government launched nearly a dozen national missions in critical and emerging technologies such as AI, green hydrogen, semiconductors, electric mobility, quantum, geospatial, biopharma and ocean research. Their success will hinge on the depth and scale of private sector engagement, both in terms of investment and innovation capacity, raising a key question: what if private funding does not materialise?



Despite promises and several new schemes, India's investment in science and technology research as a share of GDP remains abysmal. Both govt and private investments have to be substantially raised to secure India's strategic future

Private funding for GERD remains a persistent challenge. Industry contributions account for only about 0.3 percent of GDP, whereas in most advanced economies, the private sector invests 1.5-3 percent. A 2024 study by the principal scientific advisor found that, among 1,000 listed firms, only 20 could be classified as genuinely R&D-intensive, underscoring the limited scale and concentration of private research investment. None of India's top firms approach glo-

bal benchmarks: Infosys invests less than 1 percent of its turnover in R&D, compared to 11 percent among global peers; Wipro (0.65 percent), L&T (0.13 percent), Vedanta (0.02 percent), and Reliance (0.66 percent) show similar patterns. Meanwhile, 70 percent of the world's top 500 MNCs have established global capability centres in India, employing thousands of scientists and engineers. As Naushad Forbes, a former CII president, observed, if foreign firms can leverage India's talent pool so effectively, why can't the leading domestic firms?

Indian small and medium enterprises, which contribute significantly to employment, continue to languish with residual R&D support, accounting for only about 1 percent of total industrial R&D. The government should seriously consider increasing the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research's budget by at least 200 percent, reflecting its expanded role in coordinating regional innovation clusters and serving as the R&D backbone for SMEs.

R&D capabilities could also be integrated into the expanded Production-Linked Incentive scheme. While the government offers a 200 percent weighted tax deduction for in-house R&D, there is no robust mechanism to verify whether firms claiming these incentives are genuinely engaged in research. It is time the department of science and technology adopted international best practices, particularly drawing lessons from South Korea's R&D tax incentive.

The ongoing global trade turbulence is a wakeup call. India must act decisively to transform these challenges into opportunities. To achieve meaningful progress in new missions, the government should commit to raising public R&D expenditure, while encouraging the private sector to increase its contribution to at least 0.6 percent of GDP within the next three years. Achieving these targets will not only strengthen India's scientific and technological foundations over the coming decade but also safeguard its economic and strategic autonomy amid rising geopolitical uncertainties.

(Views are personal)

### MAILBAG

WRITE TO: [letters@newindianexpress.com](mailto:letters@newindianexpress.com)

#### Three perspectives

Ref: *A bypoll to redefine shape of Telangana politics* (Nov 10). A win for the ruling party is often pitched as an endorsement of the chief minister's leadership and performance of the government. For BRS, a win would significantly boost the morale of the party cadre and signal to the public that the party is still formidable. The BJP views such bypolls as a chance to measure their growing support among urban, aspirational voters.

VKS Krishnan, Kumbakonam

#### Mother nature

Ref: *Vande mataram* (Nov 10). The author has sweetly expressed the sentiments of the entire nation. Just like everybody has a mother who has fed one affectionately and brought up to be a strong person, the nation has a mother personified in its vast pristine waters, tasteful fruits, and soothing cool winds. Bowing to such a mother is natural.

H S Gopala Krishna Murthy, Bengaluru

#### Women's vote

Ref: *All eyes on Bihar women* (Nov 10). It is encouraging to see that women voters are emerging as a decisive factor in Bihar. Over the years, women have shown increased awareness of their rights, priorities, and expectations from governance. Issues such as safety, healthcare, employment, and access to education directly shape their everyday lives. Political parties must recognise this shift and move beyond symbolic promises.

Rony Hehrman Nivete, Vellore

#### Proactive vigilance

Ref: *Gujarat ATS arrests three people allegedly conspiring to carry out terror attack* (Nov 10). A major terror plot has been averted from Gandhinagar and Banaskantha districts in Gujarat. Three suspected Islamic State operatives were synthesising a deadly poison that can be used as a biological weapon. The nation must be proactively vigilant against such plots.

SLakshmi, Hyderabad

#### Speaking out

Ref: *Singing our souls awake* (Nov 10). The author's words that 'a low-maintenance Hindu' who 'dares not speak the name' signify the cultural values of our grooming in Sanatana dharma. At a time when other religions are exploiting this unspoken value, an outspoken Hindu is the need of the hour.

Ullatill Pakiteeri Raghunathan, Thrissur

### THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

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# Common sense politics key for long-term power

TELANGANA Chief Minister Anumula Revanth Reddy on Sunday said that the Congress would remain in power in Telangana till 2034. He made this grand statement during an interaction with the media ahead of the much-awaited Tuesday's by-poll to the Jubilee Hills Assembly seat. This is not the first time that he has made such a comment. He said so several times earlier too. His confidence might have stemmed from the fact that political parties retained power for a second term in the last three decades in this region. While Telugu Desam Party was in power from 1994-2004, Congress ruled from 2004 to 2014 in the undivided Andhra Pradesh. Post bifurcation that saw the emergence of Telangana as a separate state, Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS), later rechristened as Bharat

Rashtra Samithi (BRS), was in power for two terms from 2014 to 2023. That way, TDP's Nara Chandrababu Naidu was in power for two consecutive terms, Dr YS Rajasekhara Reddy of Congress retained power in 2009 in the undivided AP, while BRS founder Kalvakuntla Chandrashekar Rao retained power in 2018 in Telangana.

But this doesn't mean that people will simply give a second consecutive term to the Revanth-led Congress. In 1994, Congress faced ignominious defeat after a single term while TDP under its mercurial founder NT Rama Rao also lost elections miserably in 1989. However, it is not to say that it's an impossible task to remain in power for a longer period. This is best illustrated by Narendra Damodardas Modi. He was continuously in power in his home state,

Gujarat, since 2001 before his elevation as the Prime Minister in 2014, in which position he is already into his third successive term. As the head of an elected government, he completed 24 years recently. Naveen Patnaik in Odisha, Nitish Kumar in Bihar and Jyoti Basu in West Bengal ruled their respective states uninterruptedly for over two decades. There are some other examples as well. But long-term power doesn't come easily. After winning the first term, parties and leaders need to handle power with care, take steps that benefit a large chunk of the electorate in both short term and long term, and initiate measures to consolidate their position. Further, the promises they make should be implementable. This is where most parties and leaders falter. In their eagerness to come to power, they make promises

left, right and centre. And then they struggle to implement them. The Congress government in Telangana is in a similar situation now. KCR lost power in 2023 despite implementing several high-value welfare schemes due to the severe anti-inflation factor against MLAs.

On its part, Congress promised extended versions of KCR's welfare schemes. In addition, it also promised welfare schemes that were promised in Karnataka. Now it's struggling to implement all those promises due to financial constraints. Debt burden left behind by the KCR government is also a hindrance. But it can still implement the promises if it plugs leakages in the freebies. For instance, it can restrict financial assistance under Rythu Bharosa up to three acres to all farmers. Implement-

ing its promise to increase old-age pensions should be the priority. Further, it should build a positive narrative about the state's economy, attract more investments and make concerted efforts to fuel economic growth. Higher economic growth will be useful in raising additional debt. More important is common sense politics with people's interest on top. Reining in corruption must be prioritised. Devoid of these, Revanth Reddy's wish to get a second consecutive term will remain a pipe dream. So, irrespective of whether Congress wins the Jubilee Hills by-election or not, the Grand Old Party needs to pull up its socks if it wants to retain power in Telangana in the next Assembly polls. It is more so for Revanth Reddy, who was the X factor in the party's 2023 triumph. That's beyond doubt, as of now.

LETTERS

Ande Sri leaves behind a rich literary legacy

MONDAY'S sudden death of Ande Sri has shocked the people of Telangana in particular, and the literary lovers across the two Telugu states in general. Ande Yellaiah, who was popularly known as Ande Sri, breathed his last at Gandhi Hospital while undergoing treatment. He was 64. Born in the erstwhile Warangal district, he was a writer and lyricist par excellence even without having any formal schooling. He played a key role in the Telangana movement with his literary works. From among the several coveted awards and honours that he won, was the Nandi award for his song in the film 'Ganga'.

The state Government have accorded a great tribute to his writings in his lifetime by adopting his wonderfully penned "Jaya Jayahe..." as the State song. He proved that writers could play crucial roles in any political movement. His untimely will create a huge void in the literary world.

Pratapa Reddy Yaramala, Tiruvuru (AP)

# Pendency among courts threatens country's independence



DR MADABHUSHI SRIDHAR ACHARYULU

JUSTICE Madan Bhimarao Lokur, Chairperson, United Nations Internal Justice Council, and former judge of the Supreme Court, is anguished seeing the rising pendency of litigation and vitals of the justice system getting eroded as also the rule of law's constitutional life.

Addressing a conference in Mahindra University, Hyderabad, he touched upon various issues, including the current challenges and potential solutions for the justice delivery system in India, which, he maintained, was at the crossroads.

He explained the historical rise and the present situation that is threatening our system.

Justice Lokur said that when the Supreme Court was established, there was minimal work for the judges, but the justice delivery was quick.

The first major case was on freedom of speech and expression, which was filed by journalist Ramesh Thapar in February 1950. He challenged the ban on his publication "Crossroads", which was decided by a five-judge bench within three months in May, illustrating the quick disposal rate. In those early days,

A 13-judge bench of the

Supreme Court decided the Kesavananda Bharati case and laid down the Basic Structure Doctrine of the Constitution in 1973. This doctrine states that the Constitution has essential features (a basic structure) that cannot be completely wiped out by amendments.

According to him, this is one of the greatest gifts the Indian judiciary has given to the world, which, subsequently, was adopted by many countries. However, problems began surfacing after this decision.

The decision was immediately followed by the super-session of three Supreme Court judges. Around this time, there was also talk about having a committed judiciary—one that follows the ideology, principles, or policies of the executive without challenge. Post Emergency (1975-1977), the election of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi that was challenged was set aside by a single judge of the Allahabad High Court.

Privative detention—a dark chapter:

The Supreme Court's judgment during the Emergency in the A.D.M. Jabalpur case regarding preventive detention under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) was "perhaps the lowest point" to which the court had gone. Although some judges later stated they were under pressure, the decision went against the citizen. This judgment has since been overruled and is considered a "dark chapter".

After the Emergency was lifted in 1977, the Supreme Court "bounced back" and gave the nation important gifts, primarily concentrating on access to justice.

**The historic evolution of PIL:**

This development allowed citizens to approach the Supreme Court without formalities, court fees, or strict procedures, often by sending a letter to the Chief Justice or a senior judge. PIL led to significant changes in various areas:

The Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra (RLEK) in Dehradun sent a letter about limestone quarrying in Mussoorie Hills causing air pollution. The apex court banned quarrying and initiated environmental jurisprudence. A letter from social activist Swami Agnivesh regarding bonded labourers led the Supreme Court to ensure the release of almost 30,000 bonded labourers, giving life to Article 23 (prohibition of begging or forced labour) and Article 21 (right to live a life of dignity) of the Constitution.

The court took up the issue of police blinding crime suspects/convicts with acid based on a newspaper report, leading to medical treatment for the victims. The court entertained a petition by Sheila Barse concerning the inability to look after mentally ill patients, arguing that they also have a right to life under Article 21. This led to establishing a mental hospital in Tezpur, Assam, under court orders. As another part of access to justice, the Supreme Court started Lok Adalats (People's Courts) to sort out small grievances pending in courts. This was a precursor to mediation and conciliation and has been adopted in some other countries, like in Africa.

**Bhopal gas tragedy:**

Justice Lokur cites the



Bhopal gas tragedy where thousands died, and the victims' families still suffer from medical issues. Despite 487,000 claims being filed, the US court sent the case back to India (even though the Government of India said the Indian justice system could not handle it), and justice was not effectively delivered.

**Pendency affecting independence:**

After this tragedy another dangerous tragedy was in the form of pending cases (Pendency): The number of pending cases has escalated significantly. In March 2014, the total number of pending cases across High Courts and district courts was 3.18 crore: High Courts: 44 lakh and district courts 2.73 crore.

The total number of pending cases has now risen to 5.33 crore-HC 63 lakh (an increase of 20 lakh in 10 years); district courts 4.70 crore. Effectively, there has been an average increase of 20 lakh new pending cases per year since 2014.

Another crisis is "vacancies of judges". In 1987, the Law Commission of India recommended having 50 judges per one million people. Based on the 1987 population of 800 million, India needed 40,000 judges. India currently has only about 22,000 to 23,000 judges. With the current population of 1.4 billion, 70,000 judges

are needed based on the Law Commission's recommendation. Currently, 26 per cent (293 out of 1,122 sanctioned posts) of High Court judge posts are vacant. Vacancies in district courts are around 19-21 per cent, support staff (nearly 4.90 lakh staff would be required for 70,000 judges).

**Poor implementation of laws:**

Enacted laws and institutions meant to improve the system are poorly implemented: Although there was a recommendation in 1986, the law was enacted 23 years later. The state of Telangana, for example, has zero operational Gram Nyayalayas, despite having sanctioned 55 at one point. In places they exist, pending cases have reached 2.5 lakh. Among family courts, the pending cases have gone up to 12 lakh.

**Consumer forums and RTI:**

Both have huge dependencies. Appeals under the Right to Information (RTI) Act have reached four lakh in pending cases, and some states lack an Information Commission. The core solutions proposed are implementation of laws, introduction of technology, and reforms in judge appointments.

Justice Lokur underscored the implementation of existing laws like the Gram Nyayalayas Act, RTI Act, and proce-

dural codes (CPC and CrPC) and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).

**Using technology and AI:**

He maintained that adopting E-courts project involved providing computers and laptops to every judge and court, introducing video conferencing units in jails for routine hearings saves huge amounts of money and time.

The distinguished legal luminary said that AI is making its way into the justice system. Towards this, the law and judiciary must be ready to tackle issues arising from AI, such as a driverless car violating a traffic rule. The Collegium System, the best available option, and appointing judges should be scientific and useful after due improvements.

Justice Lokur called for reforms based on the UN recruitment process for tribunal judges for nine vacancies: a) Inviting applications (which is not done in India), b) A written examination (writing a two-hour judgment) to assess legal reasoning (not done in India), c) A detailed, minimum one-hour interview (not done in India) and d) developing an effective case management system.

He urged students to look into these problems and solutions, take advantage of the existing possibilities (like technology, AI, and clinical education), and contribute to the betterment of the justice delivery system. Hope someone out there will think on these lines and work out remedial measures and solutions?

(The writer is a former Central Information Commissioner, and presently Professor, School of Law, Mahindra University, Hyderabad)

**JH polls is a litmus test for the top three**

PROPOS, "Revanth's future as CM will hinge on JH outcome," Nov 10. The Jubilee Hills byelection in Hyderabad has evolved into a defining contest for Telangana's three key players—the ruling Congress, BRS and the BJP. Beyond determining the fate of one urban constituency, the November 11 vote is poised to recalibrate the state's political landscape. For Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy, it has become a prestige battle. A win would consolidate his leadership, silence internal dissent, and restore confidence in a government perceived as wobbling under factional pressures. A defeat, however, could magnify rifts and weaken his grip over both cabinet and cadre. For the BRS, the by-poll represents a fight for political relevance. The BJP, meanwhile, views Jubilee Hills as a strategic springboard to gain urban traction and future momentum in Telangana's shifting electoral terrain.

N Sadhasiva Reddy, Bengaluru-56

**Joint efforts can save Delhiites from inhaling poison**

AS Delhi's Air Quality Index (AQI) reached alarming levels and is drifting around 400 is a cause of serious concern because it threatens people's health, economy and stability. In this do or die situation, it is imperative that to safeguard the health of Delhiites, the government and all political parties must come together and act strongly and firmly to check sources of pollution arising from various sources instead of indulging in diversionary tactics that is making the lives of people miserable. The crux of the matter is in listening to hotchpotch advice from people drawn from different fields and taking up cloud seeding and other piece-meal arrangements, which have literally failed to control emissions. Therefore, at this critical juncture, what is really required to tap emissions control is a long-term strategy with a policy firmness and action plan to keep the old vehicles off the road, shift to public transport, sustainable agriculture, industrial reform and above all creating public awareness and citizen participation to make clean air a universal right. Until then, Delhiites will continue to inhale poison.

K R Srinivasan, Secunderabad-3

**Nipping in the bud**

IT is heartening that the Gujarat Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) has successfully foiled a terror bid with the arrest of three ISIS-linked ultras from Ahmedabad. They were reportedly in Gujarat for weapons and carry out attacks at multiple locations across the country. It is quite dreadful that one of the arrested, Dr Ahmed Mohyuddin Syed hails from Hyderabad. The alleged mastermind of the plot had begun synthesising a deadly point from cyanide and ricin, a lethal toxin that can be used as a lethal biological weapon. Such proactive and vigilant moves by agencies like the ATS can thwart the dastardly designs of jihadist elements.

S Lakshmi, Hyderabad

thehansreader@gmail.com

BENGALURU ONLINE

K'taka Govt hikes sugarcane price; Farmers end protest

BENGALURU: The Karnataka government has announced an increase of ₹100 per tonne in the sugarcane procurement price, following sustained protests by sugarcane farmers in several districts. The additional payment will be shared equally, with ₹50 per tonne to be paid by sugar mills and ₹50 per tonne by the State government.

The decision comes amid ongoing agitations demanding higher and uniform sugarcane prices. While the revised rate has prompted farmers in parts of Belagavi to withdraw their protests, farmers in Bagalkote district have continued their agitation, insisting on a minimum price of ₹3,500 per tonne.

Sugarcane pricing is determined based on the Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) announced by the central government, linked to the sugar recovery percentage. For the 2024-25 crushing season, the Centre has fixed FRP at ₹3,550 per tonne for 10.25% recovery, inclusive of cutting and transportation charges.

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

# 'Water is Future': Charting a water secure, climate resilient Karnataka

NS BOSERAJU

OUR bond with water begins before birth and endures beyond death. From a child's first bath to the final rites, water is life's sustainer, purifier, and healer. As I travel through Karnataka, I see it in the farmer's sweat, the river carrying ashes and the village well yielding hope. Water is not a resource—it is life. Honouring this elixir of life is our duty to future generations.

**A critical juncture:**

Karnataka is at the water crossroads. Over seven per cent of India's desertified land lies here, with droughts having become routine.

The Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) and Karnataka Ground Water Directorate data reveal groundwater extraction rose from 66.3 per cent (2023) to 68.4 per cent (2024), with annual drawal up from 11.3 to 11.6 billion cubic metres despite slight recharge decline. About 20 per cent of taluks are over-exploited.

**Urban areas suffer most:**

Bengaluru Urban and Rural hit 100 per cent extraction in 2024. The Dynamic Groundwater Resource Assessment flags 45 severely over-exploited taluks—Kolar, Chikkaballapura, Bengaluru Rural, Chitradurga—with rates of 147–193 per cent. Dry wells, deeper boreholes, and long treks for water are everyday realities. Yet, targeted Lift Irrigation Schemes (LIS) and conservation structures have downgraded six over-critical, four critical, and 10 semi-critical taluks in two years. This amply illustrates that intervention works and quite well, at that.

Globally, the UN Special Rapporteur on water rights warns that treating aquifers as private property fuels abusive extraction, jeopardising

marginalised communities. Karnataka must view groundwater as a communal fixed deposit—preserved and grown, not recklessly drawn.

**Lessons from success:**

Karnataka has reversed decline before. The K&C Valley, Hebbal-Nagavara, and Vrishabhavathi treated-water recycling projects—Asia's largest—treat Bengaluru's wastewater to NGT/CPCB standards via BWSSB, then replenish tanks across Kolar, Chikkaballapura, Bengaluru Urban/Rural, and Tumkuru through minor irrigation. Extraction fell 58–73 per cent, earning UN recognition as a replicable model.

The Minor Irrigation Department maintains 3,785 tanks and has built over 8,000 conservation structures. Under Atal Bhujal Yojana, 736 structures rise across 1,199 stressed Gram Panchayats, with 2,214 Digital Water Level Recorders tracking levels daily. Science, technology, and community convergence recharge aquifers—but scale and institutionalisation are urgent.

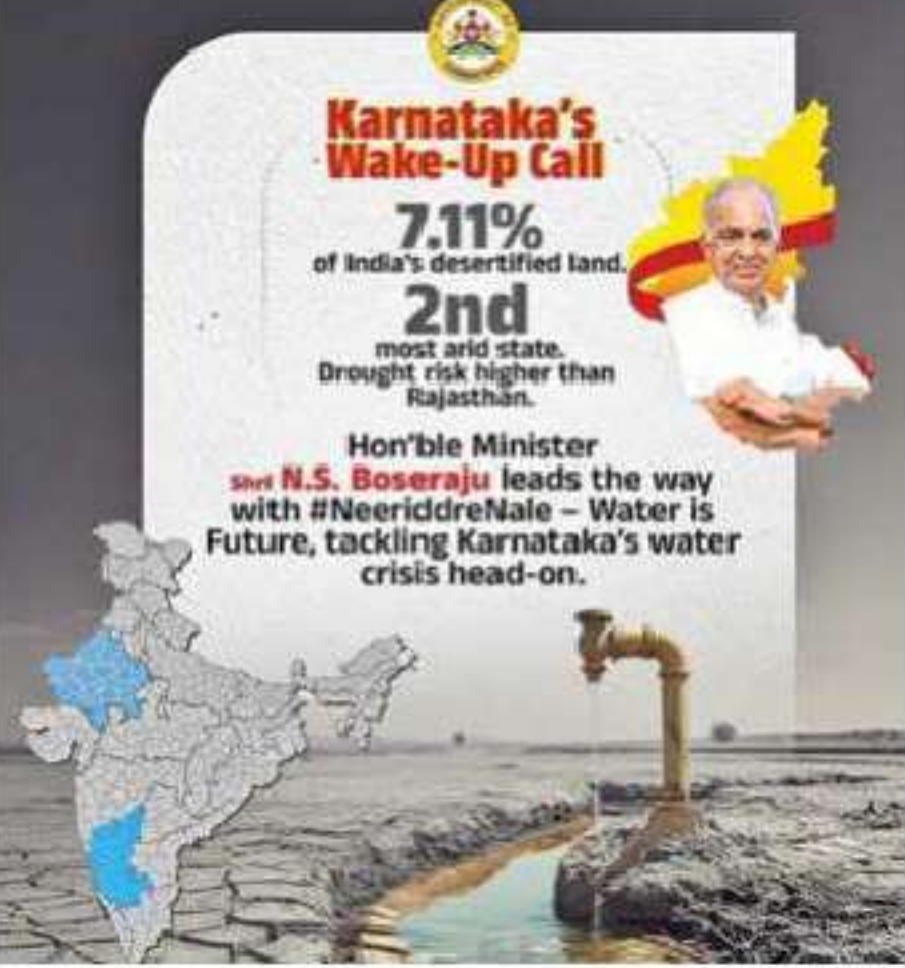
**Reduce, reuse, recharge and recycle:**

Born of necessity, 'Water is Future' unites conservation under the 5A Framework:

Aspiration – A water-secure Karnataka where no child drinks contaminated water, no farmer abandons land; rooted in dignity and the right to water.

**Action plan:**

There is a need to classify gram panchayats (GPs) into red, yellow and green categories via a Master Atlas mapping wells, aquifers, and structures. **Deliver localised plans:** Check dams, percolation ponds, crop-water budgeting, extraction regulation. Establishing GP-level water knowledge centres for capacity building.



**Awareness campaigns:** Multi-channel outreach via schools, workshops, digital platforms, and conducting Nirridare Nale Grama Sabhas on World Water Day. There is a need to empower women, youth and citizens as stewards.

**Awards for accomplishment:** Celebrate innovators in harvesting, irrigation, and agriculture to spark replication.

Achieve Prosperous Karnataka – Link water security to growth via industry-academia-civil society partnerships.

**Institutional backbone:**

A Project Management Unit (PMU) within the Groundwater Directorate must anchor the execution. It will house a Centre of Excellence, deploy a digital water stack using satellite imagery and AI to monitor lakes/aquifers, and oversee GP plans.

**KPIs:** Groundwater trends, geo-tagged recharge structures, extraction cuts in red zones, data drives agile and, governance accountability.

**SDG alignment:**

'Water is Future' advances multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

**SDG 6 (Clean water):** Sustainable withdrawal via recharge, harvesting, reuse.

**SDG 3 (Health):** Cleaner aquifers reduce contamination.

**SDG 2 (Zero Hunger):** Equitable irrigation supports climate-adaptive farming.

**SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities):** Treated wastewater reuse, borewell regulation.

**SDG 9/12:** Digital monitoring, efficient practices.

**SDG 13 (Climate action):** Healthy wetlands and aquifers build resilience.

**From data to duty:**

The 2024 national data shows recharge at 446.90 BCM, extractable 406.19 BCM and extraction 245.64 BCM. Safe units rose from 62.6 per cent (2017) to 73.4 per cent (2024); over-exploited fell from 17.24 per cent to 11.13 per cent.

One should note that progress is possible—but Karnataka's local crises demand urgency.

Governance sets frameworks; citizens drive change. Shift from extraction culture to 'reduce, reuse, recharge, recycle—the Prime Minister's mantra. Install harvesting pits, reuse treated water, recharge collectively, diversify crops and adopt precision irrigation.

Time, one joins 'Water is Future'. This is not just a programme, but a people's movement. Every drop saved, tank revived, borewell regulated is patriotism. Let cradle and pyre, field and factory, hamlet and metropolis share one truth: clean, abundant water. That is the future we owe our children.

(The writer is Minister for Science and Technology and Minor Irrigation, Karnataka)



DECCAN Chronicle

11 NOVEMBER 2025

Greater transparency is needed over UCC

Introduction of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) is a mandate of the Indian Constitution as stated in Article 44: “The State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India.” However, it has been a contentious issue due to its potential to undermine the diverse lifestyles people have adopted in different parts of the country. Governments since independence have kept the proposal for a UCC on the back burner due to this factor but the BJP, after discovering its divisive power, has placed it at the top of its agenda.

Hence, Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s praise for the BJP government in Uttarakhand for the introduction of the UCC in the state and the steps it has taken to “check demographic change and illegal religious conversion” has no surprise element. The Uttarakhand law, which came into force in January this year, provides for uniform personal laws for marriage, divorce, inheritance, and succession while giving exception to the state’s Scheduled Tribes. The law received flak as it interfered with the private lives of people as exemplified by its restrictive definition on live-in relationships. Some provisions have been relaxed since its introduction, and the government has promised further changes. It has told the high court recently that it will make the law “more practical, transparent and citizen-friendly” and will “clarify procedures around live-in relationships, registration and appeals while strengthening privacy protections”.

No one knows about the contours of a UCC; no BJP leader has given the people a concrete idea of it. The language that accompanies the talk of a UCC by the BJP is not of national integration but of divisiveness.

emancipation of the most marginalised people and helped national integration.

But the UCC, unfortunately, does not follow this pattern. It has been on the agenda of the BJP for quite some time as the saffron party has found it can help further its partisan agenda. No one knows about the contours of a UCC; no BJP leader has given the people a concrete idea of it. The language that accompanies the talk of a UCC by the BJP is not of national integration but of divisiveness.

The Prime Minister and the government he heads at the Centre have a major role in setting the national agenda. It would ideally be made of components that will take the country forward. If Mr Modi and his party believe that the UCC will indeed help usher in a more equitable, democratic and civilized society, then they should put their cards on the table and invite people for an open discussion. Occasional oblique references do not indicate a healthy approach to such a national issue.

Health curbs to block US visas?

Weeks after making the most popular US visa, the H-1B, exorbitantly expensive, the Donald Trump administration appears keen on shutting down all avenues for foreigners to enter the United States. As part of this agenda, it has expanded the powers of consular officers to deny a visa on the grounds of public charge to any foreigner with lifestyle diseases such as diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, or sleep apnea.

Under the new rules, the visa applicant must satisfy the consular officer that they have sufficient financial resources to cover healthcare costs for their entire lifetime without seeking public cash assistance.

The rules also require consular officers to consider the health of family members, including children and elderly parents, when determining the public charge criterion.

This allows the officer to deny a visa by citing possible future or unforeseen health complications of dependents that could affect the applicant’s ability to earn a livelihood.

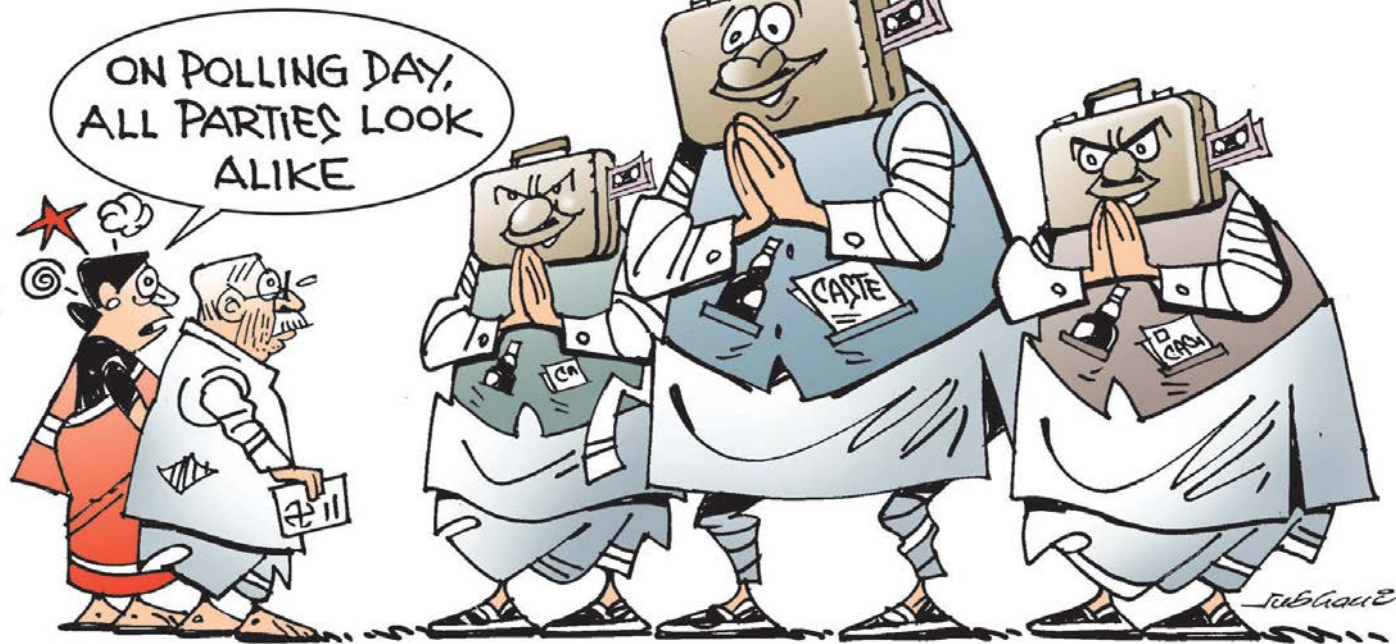
The new restrictions appear to be aimed at ensuring that only wealthy or highly skilled foreigners enter the US. Those who want to build a career based on entrepreneurial spirit alone may not receive visas.

Although experts believe that the public charge rule will primarily be invoked for long-term visas, the US Immigration and Nationality Act views every foreigner seeking to enter the US—even on a nonimmigrant visa—as a potential immigrant. As such, consular officers will have the authority to deny visas to tourists and students as well.

With these restrictions, the Trump administration has effectively ended the Indian fascination with the US visa that began in the late 1990s. In the short term, this may negatively impact India by reducing foreign remittances.

However, on the positive side, it may also prevent the emigration of highly talented entrepreneurial Indians, thereby allowing India to benefit from their contributions at home.

Subhani



Amidst SIR row, Rahul’s Haryana expose jolts EC



Shikha Mukerjee

The Election Commission, established as an independent body under the Constitution to conduct free, transparent and ideally flawless elections, operates a “system” that is replete with errors and wholly complicit in hiding flaws. Its functionaries serve up the weakest excuses when its systems are exposed as inefficient.

Asked about the magnitude of errors found in electoral rolls in Dhakola village of Haryana’s Ambala district last week, booth level officer Arvind Aggarwal said: “Only previous officials can explain how this mistake happened.” However, the EC, under its current chief, Gyanesh Kumar, doesn’t have the luxury of dodging responsibility. He declared himself a new broom that will usher in a new era. Alas, the past mistakes left uncorrected were discovered and the onus is on him.

Institutions, unfortunately, can’t argue that “previous officials can explain how this mistake happened”. Institutions like the EC have histories, precedents and continuing responsibilities. After spending thousands of crores of rupees on making the “system” work, it must own up for its mistakes.

A national newspaper was following up on Rahul Gandhi’s momentous revelations that in Haryana’s Dhakola, the same woman’s photograph appears on the voters list over 223 times. A report found it was an understatement; her photo appears 255 times against different names in two booths in the village.

Charanjeet Kaur knows the voters list is replete with mistakes; her reaction was: “Whenever I go to vote, the election staff, policemen on duty and polling agents all laugh.” But this is not a laughing

matter for the EC, the Haryana government and everyone who, from all accounts, knew what was wrong, but failed to revise the voters’ list.

There was a moment in the history of elections in India when Mamata Banerjee, then in the Congress, marched to Kolkata’s Writers’ Buildings to evict the government of Jyoti Basu as she doubted the legitimacy of the election that was widely suspected of being “scientifically rigged”. Though the Basu government survived, the electoral rolls and proof of voter identity changed forever. Instead of just names and addresses, voters were enrolled with photographs and the Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC). This is what the EC has succeeded in subverting; putting a name, a face and an address together.

That a single person’s face appears on the rolls 255 times, as the news report said, or 223 as Rahul Gandhi claims, is a scandal. It goes to the heart of the links between democracy and elections. It reveals that governance in India, at the EC and in states, is dysfunctional. Does it matter that the data Rahul Gandhi dug up was from the electoral rolls used in the 2024 Haryana polls? It does not. It doesn’t matter that he went on a “Vote Adhikar Yatra”, trekking across Bihar in the company of Tejashwi Yadav of the RJD, Dipankar Bhattacharya of the CPI(M-L) and others, to tell voters that the EC was involved, even as he accused the ruling BJP-JDU coalition led by Nitish Kumar of “Vote Chori” through the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls.

The connection between the Haryana expose to the election in Bihar after the SIR’s completion is simple. If electoral rolls in 2024 were as full of errors in

An election process that is flawed and remained flawed over a decade cannot challenge the legitimacy of a voter just because the EC has now decided it could produce “pure electoral rolls”.

Haryana, what is the credibility of the SIR process in 2025 meant to produce “pure electoral rolls to strengthen democracy”? That, however, is a later question. The first question that must be answered by Gyanesh Kumar and the EC is what was going on for “at least a decade”. A newspaper tracked 17 individuals who cast their votes based on electoral rolls where the same face appears in 255/223 places. These voters said they had voted, because they had successfully convinced the presiding officer that their vote was legitimate and the electoral roll was rotten with errors.

A system as flawed as this is not likely to be different in the 27 other states of India. The pan-India SIR now underway in 12 states/UTs, including poll-bound West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry, are all engaged in cleaning up flawed electoral rolls. The principal flaw in the rolls, the EC claims, is the enrolment of “illegal migrants”.

After Rahul Gandhi’s revelations, independently confirmed by the news media, the EC must explain who is “ineligible” and why. It can no longer plug the narrative that illegal migrants have been illegally issued various documents like Aadhaar, EPIC and ration cards to naturalise Bangladeshis or Rohingyas, thereby subtracting the vote share of Hindus. The EC must also explain what it meant by its excuse in March this year, when it declared “irrespective of the EPIC, any elector can cast a vote only at their designated polling station in the constituency where they are enrolled and nowhere else”. How then were 17 individuals in Dhakola village allowed to vote, when Charanjeet Kaur’s photo

graph appeared 255 or 223 times in the voter list?

The EC’s “chalta hai” attitude is obvious. In Dhakola village, Jyoti Ram and his daughter-in-law Roma Devi voted in the 2024 Haryana polls because “the election agents know us, so we don’t face much trouble casting our votes despite Charanjeet Kaur’s photograph appearing next to our names”, and added: “Even for poll staffers, it’s challenging to raise objections when nearly 250 voters share the same issue.”

Why should voters in West Bengal have to prove anything, even citizenship? If election agents are authorised to allow voters with mismatched IDs to vote, why does India spend money on CCTV cameras inside polling booths? An election process that is flawed and remained flawed over a decade, or maybe longer, cannot challenge the legitimacy of a voter just because the EC has now decided it could produce “pure electoral rolls”.

The EC’s credibility has been completely busted. In March it said: “To allay apprehensions, the commission has decided to ensure allotment of unique EPIC numbers to registered electors. Any case of duplicate EPIC number will be rectified by allotting a unique EPIC number.” Media investigations found that the EC deactivated the deduplication software “designed to identify duplicate and photo-similar entries in the electoral rolls”. The software, news reports said, were not used after 2022, when three crore duplicate/wrong entries were found. What is really going on in the name of “pure electoral rolls”? Money is squandered, the result is suspect and the politics of hunting down and disinfecting India of illegal Muslim migrants is on, with one exception—poll-bound Assam, where chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is a one-man Bengali-speaking Bangladeshi disinfecting machine, with the full support of the party to which he belongs, the BJP.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist

LETTERS

SIR, STALIN IS RIGHT

CM M.K. Stalin has rightly listed out the flaws in SIR and also pinpointed several issues in the exercise. The writing on the wall is clear. It is a matter of concern that EPS supports SIR knowing fully well the dangers involved of the people losing their democratic voting right. Stalin has said that the machinations of the BJP and its allies would be thwarted by the people of TN in 2026 by voting DMK to power. The mandate for DMK should be overwhelming in the 2026 elections. The Supreme court has the task to save Indian democracy by its intervention of stopping SIR work immediately in all states which are to go to polls in a few months.

M.C.VIJAY SHANKAR Chennai

SIMPLE LANGUAGE A MUST

The call of PM NarendraModi to make legal documents devoid of jargon and lengthy, complex sentences deserves the gratitude of millions of Indians who are not conversant with them and their meaning. Many legal terms are borrowed from Latin, Greek, Italian and Persian making it difficult for ordinary people to understand. Many commercial contracts also contain wordings and complex sentences that make the readers’ heads spin. Insurance policy documents for example are lengthy, and language employed too difficult to comprehend.

S.Nagarajan Iyer Coimbatore

RAINING SIXES

Hitting six sixes in a single over is a rare and impressive feat in cricket, achieved by only a handful of players in international and domestic cricket. Some notable instances include Herschelle Gibbs and Yuvraj Singh in international cricket, and Garfield Sobers and Ravi Shastri in first-class matches. Meghalaya’s Akash Kumar scored an 11-ball fifty, the fastest in the history of first class cricket. The record previously belonged to Wayne White, who took 12 balls to complete a half-century for Leicestershire against Essex in 2012.

CK SUBRAMANIAM Chennai

Mail your letters to chennaidesk@deccanmail.com

Aakar Patel



How Mamdani won New York despite money power of rivals

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution reads as follows: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances”.

The language seems slightly archaic because it was written in 1789, but is clear enough for us to understand that freedom of speech cannot be curtailed. It can, however, be restricted, for example when related to threats of violence or pornography.

In 2010, the US Supreme Court eliminated restrictions on the funding of elections, interpreting this as a First Amendment free speech right. Corporations and wealthy individuals were free to influence elections, by creating political action committees that spend money on advertising. This was the outcome of the famous Citizens United case, which fatally damaged America’s democracy because both their major political parties are now permanently influenced by corporate interests. If the reason you won your seat is your donors, then it is likely that your actions in office will also be influenced by them. This seems to have become inescapable in US politics. However, there is another way of doing politics, and though its formula is

simple, its execution is very hard. To attempt something that carries a high failure rate takes a certain sort of determination and outlook. To succeed in it is truly remarkable. An example of this comes to us from the recent New York election for mayor. There were two different approaches to contesting from the two major candidates. The first approach is the one preferred by both major political parties and their candidates, which is to win by raising more money than the opponent. This money is then deployed chiefly on messaging—advertising on television and mailers to overwhelm the voter with positive impressions about the candidate paying for the ad and negative ones about the opponent.

The more ads one can put out the greater the chance of success. A report from 2018 headlined “How money affects elections” found that more than 90 per cent of the time, the candidate who raised and spent more than their rival won their race for a seat in Congress (their version of the Lok Sabha).

One major candidate in New York, Andrew Cuomo, took this approach and raised more than five times the money that his opponent had. He lost. Why?

The second approach, the reason this piece is being written, is to convince voters not through advertising but through personal conversations. This is effective but does not seem to be scalable. It seems especially

absurd to attempt in a general election where the voters are in the millions. The scale has to be staggering and the number of people required to do this would surely cost more than advertising. And it would be difficult for these people to open conversations with strangers, because many at home would either not answer the door or ask the person to leave, or not stop on the street when hailed.

Even if they chose to speak, then it would not be easy to convince them to vote for the candidate. After all this, the success rate is likely to be much less than one in 10. Meaning that for every person who is convinced into voting for the candidate, another 10 slam the door or say they will support the other side or just walk on.

How would one keep these workers motivated enough to keep attempting this and not just stay at home or in a cafe and pretend that they had been knocking on doors or stopping strangers on the street? These are the reasons this approach is not preferred and why candidates choose to just raise more money.

It can only succeed under certain conditions: First, that the message is compelling to a large number of potential voters. Second, that the workers are highly motivated and not put off by the high rate of failure. The motivation of the workers here is not money but the cause. It is similar to propagation and proselytising. Third, that there is some mech-

anism that monitors the engagement and sees it through to voting day. Meaning to repeatedly stay in touch with people once contact is made.

This was the approach used by Zohran Mamdani, the Indian-origin socialist who won the election and will soon be New York City’s mayor. Those who say he is inexperienced and knows little about leadership do not understand that to motivate people to throw themselves into something that has a high rate of failure, and then succeed at it, is the highest expression of leadership. An army of over one lakh volunteers trained and led by 700 senior volunteers worked for Zohran. These were mostly young people but also many middle-aged and old people who gave hours, for many months, doing physical work for their cause.

More than \$40 million was spent by corporates backing Andrew Cuomo to paint Zohran Mamdani as a “terrorist”. They lost to the volunteers who were paid nothing.

This win will be studied for a long time because it reduces to bare essence the two approaches to winning elections and shows the limits of billionaires’ power.

As activists in America often say: They have money, we have people.

The writer is the chair of Amnesty International India. Twitter: @aakar\_patel





OPINION

The  
Hindustan Times  
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

Climate future  
needs new NDCs

Countries at COP30 must expand climate ambitions and commit to shorter time frames

In the run-up to COP30 — it began in Belém, Brazil, on Monday — the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) projected a 70% chance that the average warming over the next five years will exceed 1.5 degrees above the pre-industrial level. The 1.5-degree target adopted in the Paris Agreement refers to the average warming over the long term (20 years). But the WMO’s projected short-term spike is a portent of the accelerating climate crisis, and serves as a reminder of both the vast gap between action taken and action needed to contain warming within the 1.5-degree cap — which avoids cataclysmic effects — and the little time left to bridge this gap.

It is against this backdrop that nations must drastically expand ambitions under the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) framework and commit to shorter timelines on energy transition and emission reduction through other means. The NDCs not only reiterate countries’ commitment to the climate goals in these times of fractured geopolitics, but they are also, primarily, benchmarks that make climate action measurable and thereby an instrument of accountability. “Ratcheting up” ambitions, as envisioned in the Paris Agreement, has become even more urgent after the US — one of the largest absolute and per capita emitters — withdrew from the landmark climate pact. Given the Trump administration’s focus on reviving domestic manufacturing, aided by coal-fired power generation, the burden to offset the impact of US emissions also falls on the global community.

However, COP30 began with 109 countries having submitted their NDC 3.0 — for action post 2030 — and 89 still to submit. India is among those whose NDC 3.0 is pending submission. While the country has recorded good progress on its last NDC iteration, expectations are that it will assume the mantle of global climate leadership along with China and the European Union, given it is both a large absolute emitter and remains extremely vulnerable to the climate crisis. A revised NDC with new action points and instruments of climate action would also mean policy clarity for business activity at home, especially in the renewables and climate-tech space.

At the same time, India and others in the developing world must keep up pressure on rich nations to commit significantly larger funding for climate action, faster. The substance of some of their NDCs 3.0 falls quite short of the action that is required of them. COP30 should become the forum where they are held to account as well.

State must not outsource  
citizens’ protection

In May, Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said that the state government would issue firearm licences to “indigenous” people living in “remote and vulnerable areas” of the state. Last week, he said the first lot of licences would be issued in February. The policy is flawed on multiple counts.

First, the responsibility of providing security to citizens, irrespective of where they reside, rests with the State. The external borders are to be defended by the armed forces, and within the country, the police are entrusted with the task. The State must have monopoly over violence, subject to oversight from Parliament and the judiciary. Second, the State must not discriminate among citizens over their “indigeneity”. “Indigeneity” is a politically charged word in Assam, with a history of stoking religious polarisation and violence. Arming a section of society under this category is a fraught project. Three, the policy is meant to prevent “infiltration”. Infiltration is a serious issue in Assam’s riverine region that borders Bangladesh. But it is also a complex issue that calls for Bangladeshi help by the State since the process has been shaped by the region’s vulnerable geography and complicated history. This too has been politicised, though Sarma has claimed his policy is religion-neutral. A society armed with legal approval to use firearms may upset the delicate pact that ties citizens to the State and result in vigilante groups.

India’s experience with arming civilians for self-protection is instructive. The Salwa Judum in Chhattisgarh, wherein the State raised village militias to counter the Maoists, led to the militarisation of the region and had to be folded up on the Supreme Court’s orders. That Maoism is on its last legs owing to coordinated security action carries a lesson: There are no shortcuts to good policing, be it in Chhattisgarh or Assam.

{ GRAND STRATEGY }

Happymon Jacob



Bending Constitution to  
back a garrison State

New amendment sanctifies the Pakistan army’s control over that country — a coup without a formal coup

Pakistan’s parliament is currently debating the proposed 27th Constitutional Amendment, which aims to overhaul Article 243 and fundamentally reshape the control and command of the country’s armed forces. The debate on this issue is largely inconsequential, given the army’s strong grip on the country’s political landscape. Having been promoted to field marshal after the India-Pakistan standoff earlier this year and buoyed by US President’s personal support, Pakistan army chief Asim Munir is swiftly consolidating his personal influence over the armed forces, of the army over other services, and of the Pakistan military over the civilian leadership of a country — thereby further intensifying an already deeply lopsided civil-military relationship.

The 27th Amendment aims to introduce significant changes to Pakistan’s civil-military relations and the military’s role. It proposes the establishment of a chief of defence forces (CDF), who will command all three services — the army, navy, and air force. The CDF

will always be the chief of the army staff, whose tenure has been increased to five years. To make way for the CDF, the longstanding but ceremonial role of chairman joint chiefs of staff committee (CJCS) will be dissolved later this month, coinciding with the retirement of the current CJSC, General Sahir Shamshad Mirza. While military titles (such as field marshal, marshal of the air force, and admiral of the fleet) are not unusual, the immunity from removal except through impeachment is a unique feature of Pakistan.

The amendment also proposes appointing a commander of the national strategic command (CNSC) to oversee all nuclear and strategic assets. This post will be appointed by the prime minister on the army chief’s recommendation, from within the army, shifting control away from civilian oversight. The centralisation of power with minimal resistance has never been this blatant in Pakistan, even during the heights of the Pervez Musharraf regime.

These developments have significant implications for both Pakistan and India. For Pakistan, it signals the ascent of general Asim Munir as the dominant figure in the country, arguably the most powerful person since Zia-ul-Haq, the military ruler who governed Pakistan from 1977 to 1988. Munir may be even more powerful than Zia; he has wielded this influence without a military coup,

without facing international pushback for undermining democratic institutions with active help from the political class, and without any direct governance responsibilities. He has also managed to restore the army’s image within Pakistan from its weakened state a year ago, secured a prolonged tenure, and gained lifetime immunity, thereby consolidating his dominance quietly but effectively.

The timeline of his rise to power is interesting. Although he became army chief in November 2022, he gained prominence earlier this year with an anti-Hindu tirade claiming that Hindus and Muslims cannot co-exist. This statement came exactly a month before the horrific Pahalgam attack, in which innocent civilians were targeted by terrorists traced to Pakistan.

Immediately after the standoff with India, Pakistan launched a propaganda campaign to claim a 1971-like victory, which Munir leveraged to strengthen his internal position and secure the rank of field marshal. He then orchestrated Pakistan’s rather clever outreach to President Trump, who appeared to have developed a favourable view of Munir. He has also made serious strategic outreach to West Asia, including formalising a defence pact with Saudi Arabia.

With the proposed amendment, Munir’s tenure will extend to five years, he will command all three services, and gain lifetime immunity, all within just



Today, there is little challenge to Munir in Pakistan even though he has not captured executive power in the country. AFP/ISPR

eight months, at a time when Pakistan’s economy is experiencing severe stress. Today, there is little challenge to Munir in Pakistan even though he has not captured executive power in the country.

This will undoubtedly deepen existing fissures within Pakistan’s military, where the army has historically held a privileged position. The current amendment effectively makes the army chief the *de facto* commander of the air force and navy as well — an outcome that the two services are likely to strongly oppose. The creation of the CNSC, always to be manned by an army officer, will ensure that all of Pakistan’s nuclear weapons and delivery systems, including second-strike missiles traditionally under naval control, will be under the army’s exclusive authority. In short, one man will command all three of Pakistan’s military forces for five years and command its nuclear forces.

The amendment signals a definitive shift toward greater military dominance in Pakistan’s defence and strategic policymaking — a coup without a formal coup. In Pakistan, the army already controls the country; soon, this control may become enshrined in the constitution. Even though Munir is only formalising

the existing dominance of the military and reinforcing the army’s superior position in Pakistan’s civil-military relations, the constitutional amendment, unlike an executive order, will make it near impossible for future leaders to reverse the imbalance.

The Pakistan army, under an empowered Munir, whose antipathy towards India is well known, poses a significant challenge to India. If the Pakistan army has traditionally been India-focused, it will now be even more intensely so. The general public, Imran Khan’s supporters, and Pakistani civil society are likely to resist these changes. In such a scenario, a diversionary war or conflict with India could be seen as the most effective strategy, as it tends to unify the country under the army’s anti-India narrative. India must, therefore, keep a close watch on Munir’s moves.

Happymon Jacob is distinguished visiting professor of Shiv Nadar University, the founder-director of Council for Strategic and Defense Research, and editor, INDIA’S WORLD magazine. The views expressed are personal

COP30 must drive shift  
from pledges to action

The 30th Conference of Parties (COP30) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has just begun in Belém, Brazil. The attention is on how nations translate their climate pledges into concrete action. With rising geopolitical tensions, climate risks and widening ambition gaps, this year’s summit is a decisive moment. Countries are expected to submit their third round of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC 3.0), outlining global ambition on climate action.

With the COP presidency having returned to a developing country, there is an opportunity for the Global South to seize the climate agenda. The climate crisis has moved beyond numbers and breaking records to actual impact. In South Asia, extreme heatwaves and widespread flooding have caused excessive damage to life and property. The impact is not limited to the Global South, with Europe now being the fastest-warming continent in the world.

The breaching of the 1.5°C climate threshold underscores the importance of NDC 3.0 as an opportunity for countries to reclaim the climate narrative by setting ambitious targets. To date, 109 countries have submitted updated NDCs.

In the decade since the Paris Agreement, progress has certainly been made. This year, clean energy investment is expected to double that for fossil fuels, and temperature rise may be limited to 2.4°C instead of 3.7-4.8°C if current NDCs are implemented. However, more can be done, and needs to be done.

Developed countries have enhanced emissions reductions commitments in their NDC 3.0 submissions, but these are not enough to combat global climate concerns. The European Union (EU) has struggled to reach consensus on its targets. In the updated NDC submitted recently, the EU reiterated its goal of achieving 55% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels by 2030 and introduced an indicative contribution of 66.25-72.5% by 2035. However, civil society organisations have repeatedly highlighted inadequacies in the EU’s climate ambitions.

It is time for developed countries to deliver on their financial commitments. India has championed the inclusion of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC) in the Paris Agreement. At previous COPs, India emphasised the need for climate justice, asking developed countries for rapid emissions reductions. Climate justice is also the key theme of Brazil’s NDC, and the issue is expected to dominate COP30.

China, the world’s largest carbon emitter, has committed to cautious emissions reduction targets in its updated NDC, including increasing the share of non-fossil fuels to 30% in primary energy consumption.

India’s updated NDC, yet to be submitted, is believed to be about enhancing its energy efficiency and emissions reduction targets. Notably, India is on track to exceed the 2030 NDC targets, and has already achieved the “50% of non-fossil fuel installed power capacity” target five years ahead of the deadline. India aims to add 500 gigawatts (GW) of renewable energy by 2030, and NDC 3.0 is an opportunity to reinforce its climate leadership role. To achieve the Paris Agreement targets, the world needs to invest \$6.3-6.7 trillion annually by 2030, including \$2.3-2.5 trillion in

emerging and developing economies alone. Yet, actual climate finance flows fall far below this threshold, particularly for adaptation, resilience and Just Transition priorities. The gap is expected to widen unless structural reforms are accelerated.

Last year’s “Finance COP” stressed the need to bridge this gap in climate funding. India and the G77 group had called for \$1 trillion annually, but the New Collective Quantified Goal aims for \$300 billion in annual climate finance from developed countries by 2035. COP30 faces the test of turning this momentum into meaningful action. The world can no longer rely on incremental increases; it must ensure pledges translate into on-the-ground impacts and unlock finance for a Just Transition in addition to mitigation and adaptation. Domestic politics and geopolitical tensions continue to constrain public climate finance. Advanced economies must expand concessional funding, align country platforms with national transition priorities in emerging markets and developing economies (EMDEs), and derisked, co-finance pipelines in the Global South.

High transaction costs and complex procedures limit access to international grants and concessional finance. Streamlined accreditation, faster approval cycles and localised project preparation facilities can enhance fund absorption and deployment.

A robust and inclusive taxonomy is needed to help identify viable transition technologies and activities, screen investments and provide clarity for investors and companies on the country’s long-term climate priorities.

Multilateral development banks must shift from balance sheet preservation to risk sharing, using guarantees and hybrid instruments to attract private finance and lower the cost of capital for EMDEs.

Critical minerals are emerging as the new oil in the global energy transition. These resources have become the backbone of renewable energy technologies, electric vehicles and energy storage systems, with demand rising exponentially as the world accelerates toward net zero.

COP30 must expand the climate dialogue to include resource security. Just Transition and equitable access as core pillars of the energy transition, through actions such as diversifying supply chains through global co-operation and responsible exploration that benefits local economies, setting global sustainability standards to govern mining, refining and trade, protecting ecosystems and local communities, strengthening international partnerships for processing and refining through joint ventures, technology transfer and South-South collaboration.

Advancing the circular economy by scaling up recycling, reuse and materials substitution to reduce dependence on primary extraction.

COP30 must turn pledges into progress. Climate finance must move from promise to delivery with enhanced commitments empowering a just and inclusive transition. To help achieve this, the world needs a framework for critical minerals to ensure the clean energy shift is not only green but fair, transparent and secure.

Vibhuti Garg is director, IEEFA South Asia and Purva Jain is energy specialist (Gas & International Advocacy). The views expressed are personal

{ ANUTIN CHARNVIRAKUL } PRIME MINISTER, THAILAND



What happened shows that the hostility hasn’t decreased as we thought it would. So we can’t proceed any further from here

On the suspension of the Thailand-Cambodia peace agreement



What India needs to do to  
become an arbitration hub

At the latest edition of the Delhi Arbitration Weekend (DAW), Union law minister Arjun Ram Meghwal remarked that “it is time to revisit Section 34 of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996”. The observation could not be more timely. If India is serious about its ambition of becoming a global arbitration hub, the autonomy of arbitral proceedings must be reinforced and judicial interference curtailed.

The institutional framework already exists. The Delhi International Arbitration Centre (DIAC), the Mumbai Centre for International Arbitration (MCIA), and the GIFT City International Arbitration Centre have been established to provide modern facilities and align Indian arbitration with international standards. Yet India has not secured the confidence of the international business community. The problem lies not in infrastructure but in the interpretation and application of the Act, particularly Section 34.

Section 34 was conceived as a narrow safeguard. It empowers courts to set aside arbitral awards only in exceptional circumstances such as fraud, incapacity, or breaches of natural justice. The provision reflects the principle of minimal judicial intervention, which is central to the UNCITRAL Model Law. In practice, however, this principle has been diluted. Section 34 petitions have become routine and are often treated as disguised appeals. Proceedings stretch for years, undermining the speed and finality that arbitration promises.

The Supreme Court has on several occasions sought to rein in this trend. In *McDermott International Inc. v. Burn Standard Co. Ltd.* (2006), the Court held that a court cannot correct errors of the arbitrators and that its role is confined to setting aside an award, not substituting its own reasoning. In *Kinnari Mullick v. Ghanshyam Das Damani* (2018), the Court reaffirmed that Section 34 does not empower courts to modify or rewrite arbitral awards. The 2015 amendment to the Act was intended to codify this philosophy by narrowing the definition of “public policy” and introducing timelines for disposal of petitions. The Supreme Court in *Ssangyong Engineering & Construction Co. Ltd. v. NHAI* (2019) gave effect to this intent, holding that post-2015, courts cannot revisit the merits of a dispute under the pretext of “public policy” or “patent illegality”. In *Delhi Airport Metro Express Pvt. Ltd. v. DMRC* (2022), the Court stressed that judicial interference must be limited to rare cases of extreme perversity that shock the conscience.

Despite these authoritative rulings, the reality remains very different. Section 34

petitions continue to evolve into extended battles, followed by Section 37 appeals and sometimes even special leave petitions before the Supreme Court. Arbitration thus risks becoming the first step of litigation rather than an alternative to it. For businesses, the result is predictable. High-value arbitrations continue to be seated in Singapore or London rather than in Delhi or Mumbai.

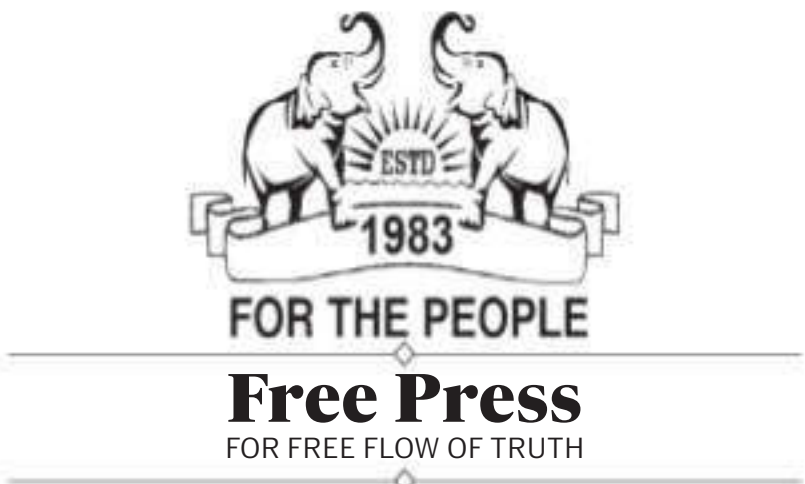
The comparison with Singapore is instructive for our growth. The Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC) has emerged as Asia’s leading arbitral seat not only because of modern facilities but also because of the legal culture in which it operates. Singapore courts adopt a restrained approach. Awards are final except in rare cases involving fraud or breach of natural justice. Challenges are resolved swiftly, timelines are respected, and outcomes are predictable.

If India is to advance its vision of becoming an arbitration hub, reform of Section 34 is imperative. First, the “public policy” exception should be statutorily confined to exceptional grounds such as fraud, corruption, or fundamental breaches of natural justice. Vague categories like “morality” or open-ended “patent illegality” should be eliminated. Second, the statutory timeline for the disposal of Section 34 petitions must be enforced with real discipline. The one-year period introduced by the 2015 amendment is rarely followed in practice. Unless courts adhere to deadlines, arbitration will remain hostage to delay. Third, the structure of appeal requires rationalisation. Section 34 challenges followed by Section 37 appeals and further escalation through special leave petitions undermine finality. A single-tier, fast-track challenge mechanism, similar to the model in Singapore, would restore confidence in Indian arbitration.

India’s aspiration to be an arbitration hub is both laudable and necessary. With increasing cross-border transactions and foreign investment flows, the demand for credible dispute resolution frameworks will only rise. Institutions and infrastructure, however modern, cannot achieve this vision on their own. Judicial arbitration in India is shielded from universal enthusiasm, investors will continue to look elsewhere. Arbitration ultimately rests on trust. Trust that the process will be efficient and trust that an award, once rendered, will be respected.

Kumar Kartikeya is an advocate at the Supreme Court of India. The views expressed are personal





## Slowing the tide of kidney disease

The latest data on the burden of chronic kidney disease (CKD) in South Asia, indicating that 16% of the population is affected, should be seen as a worrying public health warning. India, the most populous country now with over 1.4 billion people, is caught up in several crises that have major health implications, one of which is the accelerating growth of CKD. Several social and environmental factors have coalesced, notably high prevalence of diabetes and hypertension, hot climate, pollution, and toxic chemicals, leading to rising rates of kidney damage. Lifestyle factors are at play too, such as high sugar and salt content in packaged food, lack of physical activity, and disturbed sleep patterns due to work pressure, noise, and always-on entertainment. In a minority of cases, genetic factors contribute to CKD. The medical community is naturally concerned about this snowballing crisis, as progression to kidney failure happens without warning; there is no indication of the developing disease until the kidneys have nearly stopped working. Precise numbers for CKD are not available in the Indian context due to poor data gathering, but globally, people living with kidney disease rose from 378 million in 1990 to 788 million in 2023. What is more, the only therapy for kidney failure is dialysis or a kidney transplant, and while the former is expensive, scarce and not easily accessible in remote areas, transplants are even more difficult to have due to organ shortages. Fortunately, the understanding of CKD is improving, testing is simple and inexpensive, and modern drugs slow disease progression. Reducing the number of people developing diabetes and hypertension, and using population-level screening to identify those who need essential drugs—which can be given free or at low cost—has to be pursued by a national mission.

*Precise numbers for CKD are not available in the Indian context due to poor data gathering*

A more recent entity posing a challenge in the sub-continent is CKD of unknown origin, or CKDu, where there are no identifiable factors contributing to weakening of the kidney's functioning. Recent research commissioned by the Tamil Nadu Health System Reform Program of agricultural workers estimated that 5.3% had CKD, and half of that number had CKDu. Significantly, besides the association of known risk factors, outdoor work that labourers do was also implicated in acute kidney injury, arguably due to low water intake. The depressing tide of data on India's disease patterns calls for enlightened policymaking at the level of the Union, state governments and municipal bodies. Citizens are caught in a perfect storm of unhealthy, easily available, energy-dense and salty food; restricted physical activity in vehicle-choked cities; severe air pollution; and poor sleep patterns, all of which are contributors to cardiovascular disease. The CKD follows sooner rather than later. India can ill afford to continue going down this path. True development is predicated on a healthy, productive population, for which governments need to step up with the right policies.

## Tharoor thorn in Cong's flesh

How do you solve a problem like Shashi Tharoor? This is a question that must be baffling the Congress leadership. The four-time Thiruvananthapuram MP has put his party in the spot more times than can be counted. His latest salvo was the effusive praise of BJP leader LK Advani, whom he described as a 'true statesman'. Greeting the BJP veteran on his 98th birthday, Tharoor lauded his commitment to public service, his modesty, and his decency. When the Congress leader was called out on social media for his praise of someone who had sowed the seeds of hatred, courtesy his rath yatra, Tharoor defended Advani, saying it was unfair to reduce his long years of public service to one episode. Just as Jawaharlal Nehru's legacy cannot be judged by the China debacle or Indira Gandhi by the Emergency alone, the same courtesy should be extended to Advani, he said. The Congress promptly distanced itself from Tharoor's statement, saying he speaks for himself. The party spokesman did not hesitate to add that the fact he can make such statements as a CWC member and an MP is evidence of the Congress' 'liberal spirit'. Just a few days ago, Tharoor, in an article on dynastic politics, said one family, that is, the Nehru-Gandhi family, had 'cemented the idea that political leadership can be a birthright'. Terming dynastic politics as a grave threat to Indian democracy, Tharoor expounded that the time had come to replace dynasty with meritocracy. Each of Tharoor's pronouncements is not surprisingly greeted with glee by the BJP camp.

The Congress leader seems to be almost daring his party leadership to take action against him, as was evident during his high praise of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Operation Sindoor. He went out of his way to laud the military operation, which was in direct contravention to the Congress line, and he also led an all-party delegation to several countries to explain India's position on Pakistan's terror infrastructure, though he was not nominated by the Congress. Tharoor has embarrassed the Kerala unit of the Grand Old Party with his praise of the Pinarayi Vijayan government's industrial policies and its growth in the start-up sector. Amid the backlash caused by his comments, Tharoor staked claim to the Kerala CM's post, stating that opinion polls backed him. The charismatic Congress leader with his impeccable command over English has been a constant thorn in Congress's flesh. He decided to contest against Mallikarjun Kharge, the party's official candidate for the Congress president's post, and bagged a substantial number of votes. Shashi Tharoor has proved time and again that he will not be silenced. Like the proverbial jack-in-the-box, he pops up much to the chagrin of Congress.



Inside Track

AJAY JHA

One of the famous quotes of Lalu Prasad Yadav was, "jab tak rahega samosa main aloo, tab tak rahega Bihar main Lalu" (As long as there is potato in samosa, Lalu will remain in Bihar). Bihar is still there. Potato-stuffed samosas are still being fried and sold in Bihar, but Lalu was conspicuous by his absence from electioneering as Bihar embarked on electing its 18th Legislative Assembly. Lalu, known for his hilarious one-liners often tinged with arrogance, had coined this famous phrase at the height of his political career over three decades ago to boast about his enduring presence in Bihar politics. He rightly believed that he had cracked the election code and discovered the MY formula to keep winning elections forever. MY was still relevant in Bihar elections, though it was no longer Laloo's 'Muslim' and 'Yadav'; rather, it was 'Mahila' (women) and 'Youth', as they were identified as the decisive factors in making or unmaking the government in a



Willow Talk

HARIDEV PUSHPARAJ

November 2, 2025, will go down as a landmark day in the annals of Indian cricket in general and Indian women's cricket in particular for the incredible ODI World Cup victory achieved by Harmanpreet Kaur & Co. at the DY Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai.

Women's cricket in India, which forever remained the poorer cousin of its men's counterpart, had its '1983' moment when Team India beat the gutsy South Africa team in the summit clash by 52 runs.

To understand the enormity of the victory and put things in perspective, the viewership of the 2025 Women's World Cup final, which India won, equalled the streaming viewership record of 185 million users on JioHotstar set by the 2024 Men's T20 World Cup final, where the Indian men had emerged champions. It was unthinkable and unfathomable at one point to even imagine Indian women's cricket getting the kind of attention and traction that it is getting today.

However, the journey has been a long and arduous one, and the absolute high of that heady night at the DY Patil has been a culmination of years of agonising failures that the team faced collectively and individual players, who struggled to see a better day for themselves and the team as a whole.

This was India's third World Cup final after defeats in the 2017 ODI World Cup final in England and the 2020 T20 World Cup summit

state yearning for development and a break from caste-based politics.

It is rare that the founder and incumbent president of a powerful political party did not address even a single rally. It was not that he was in hospital or jail. He appears to be doing fine physically and continues to be out on bail as a convict in the infamous fodder scam. Lalu was very much present in Patna throughout. But he refrained from appearing in public, apparently under instructions from his younger son Tejashwi Yadav, the Opposition's chief ministerial candidate in the Bihar elections. To Tejashwi, his father is no longer an asset but a liability, which he did not want to carry in public. And there is solid logic behind his decision to keep Lalu indoors.

The Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) appeared to be on a surge and cruising towards a possible victory in the 2020 elections until Lalu decided to use his charm in his quest to see his son become the chief minister ahead of the second of the three-phased elections. RJD and its

allies in the Mahagathbandhan did well in the first phase, and suddenly the mood in Bihar changed after Lalu addressed a couple of rallies, although he was not fit enough to campaign due to his ailing health. The RJD-led Mahagathbandhan fell agonisingly short of the majority mark by a mere 12 seats, which was attributed as much to the poor strike rate of the Congress party, which contested 70 seats and won only 19, as to Lalu's negative impact in the last two phases of polling.

Lalu's speeches damaged the RJD's prospects since the prevailing perception was that Bihar was on the verge of giving a mandate to a youth like Tejashwi. Lalu's presence suddenly revived old memories of the Jungle Raj—the 15 years of the RJD rule with Lalu and his wife Rabri Devi at the helm of government. Barring a handful, not even ardent supporters of the RJD wanted a return to the Jungle Raj when law and order was tossed out into the Ganga, police and bureaucrats were forced to bend backwards before RJD cadres, kid-

napping became the most lucrative industry in the state, and Bihar plunged into the darkest phase of its history. The BJP-led NDA tried its best to remind Bihar voters of the impending Jungle Raj if the RJD were to return to power under Tejashwi. And Tejashwi did not want to take that risk. He has used his lineage to reach where he is now and probably thought he could do well without his father's help this time. The memories of coming so close yet falling short in 2020 continue to haunt him. Consequently, he decided that the best place for Lalu in the Bihar election was to rest at home. This surprised none, though many expressed remorse that Lalu's name or pictures were not even used in the RJD's posters and banners.

Tejashwi's track record is not spotless, though. He served as deputy chief minister for just over three years in two stints under Nitish Kumar. On both occasions, a wave of unlawful activities began, and gun brandishing started. To top it all, Tejashwi and his elder brother Tej Pratap began the con-

struction of LARA Mall (taking the initial letters of their parents' names) on an allegedly ill-gotten piece of land in the heart of the state capital, Patna. The land is believed to be part of the Land for Job scam during Lalu's tenure as the federal railways minister. The entire Lalu clan is accused and currently out on bail. Questions continue to be raised about how Tejashwi acquired his riches when he is a school dropout, had no business experience, and had a short career as a cricketer, playing just one Ranji Trophy match for Jharkhand and never the IPL, although he was a contracted player for the Delhi Daredevils for two years at the minimum base price. Officially, he declared his wealth to be worth Rs 8.98 crore in his election affidavit, which in real terms could be manifold. It is clear that before Bihar could, Tejashwi has thrown Lalu out of Bihar politics, even as the entire state continues to savour the potato-stuffed samosa.

Ajay Jha is a senior journalist, author and political commentator.

## The 1983 moment recreated by Indian women cricketers

The WPL effect on Indian women's cricket has been unmistakable, as players have been able to rub shoulders with the best in the business



**Women Power:** The win achieved by the Indian women's cricket team at the DY Patil Stadium in Mumbai is a historical feat, showcasing once again that women in India have the gumption to win against all odds, including societal discrimination.

clash in Australia.

For a team that had tasted the mental agony of losing two World Cup finals, it's never easy to bury those ghosts when the odds are stacked against the side, but India's women cricketers finally attained glory like they truly belonged.

Midway through the tournament, when Pratika Rawal was ruled out for the knockout stages of the global championship, there was serious concern in certain quarters as to how India would cope with the pressure of a semifinal and a final.

Losing a form player like Pratika may have dented their plans a bit, but the replacement was the prodigious Shafali Verma, who was

not part of the initial 15-member squad for the World Cup.

The Rohtak-born Shafali then went about her business in clinical fashion and rose to the occasion like a phoenix in the final against South Africa, where she struck a crucial 87 as India batted first and then scalped two wickets in defence of 299. From the days of Diana Edulji and Shanta Rangaswamy, when the Indian women's cricket team competed hard at the international arena but in a realistic sense were just also-rans, to being the World Champions of today, it's been quite a journey.

From Diana Edulji being told in 2011 by a former Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) presi-

dent that if he had his way he wouldn't allow women's cricket to happen to becoming a force to reckon with in its own right, Indian women's cricket has well and truly arrived with a World Cup trophy in hand finally.

Unearthing players of the likes of Jemimah Rodrigues, Smriti Mandhana, Shafali Verma, Richa Ghosh, Pratika Rawal and Amanjot Kaur has a lot to do with the BCCI's Women's Premier League (WPL), which started in 2023.

The WPL has been a game changer, as it is modelled on the likes of the Indian Premier League (IPL), which catapulted Indian cricket to the next dimension when it launched in 2008 after India's 2007 T20 World Cup victory.

The WPL effect on Indian women's cricket has been unmistakable, as the Indian players coming from the grassroots have been able to rub shoulders with the best in the business, with players from all across the world featuring in it. The likes of Nat Sciver-Brunet, Ellyse Perry, Alyssa Healy, Annabel Sutherland, and Hayley Mathews have brought a lot to the table with their class, technique, and style, influencing and inspiring Indian players.

India clinching the ODI World Cup title after three WPL seasons is a testament to the huge influence the league had on the players' growth and development in terms of skills, exposure, confidence, etc.

One of the major factors in India's incredible World Cup victory has to undoubtedly be the

man at the helm of affairs, Amol Muzumdar, the head coach of the team. The Mumbai-based, who had a storied first-class career himself, is a man who only truly understands the sweetness of success after the long bitterness and despair of failures. The role of a coach is immense in any team sport, and for a group of women thirsty for international success and a world title, Muzumdar came to the fore in October 2023.

From stories of being padded up all day and waiting for his chance to bat in the Harris Shield while Sachin Tendulkar and Vinod Kambli batted their way to a record 664-run partnership to scoring 260 in the Ranji Trophy in his debut in 1994 and scoring 11,000 FC runs and yet never making it to the Indian team, Muzumdar had an incomplete story when it came to cricket. Perhaps, even he would have seldom imagined that the finest and greatest moment of his professional cricket career (as player or coach) would come when he would coach the Indian women's cricket team to World Cup glory on home soil.

Images of Harmanpreet Kaur kneeling down to touch Muzumdar's feet to seek his blessings have now become iconic across various spectrums of the media, while the homecoming he received when he returned to his Vile Parle residence in Mumbai is now the stuff of legend.

Haridev Pushparaj, Sports Editor, The Free Press Journal.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Politicising School Children

The reports on school children singing the RSS anthem during the Vande Bharat inauguration in Kerala are deeply disturbing. Using children to advance political or ideological agendas is a serious constitutional and ethical violation. The National Anthem was the only appropriate choice for such an event. Society must reject the Sangh Parivar's divisive politics and uphold secular values enshrined in our Constitution. This misuse of public space demands immediate condemnation and accountability.

Padmanabha S., Kochi

#### Delhi Car Explosion

A ghastly explosion in a car at Red Fort Metro Station's parking area shocked Delhi. Five vehicles were gutted and two people injured, with one death suspected. Fire engines battled flames for hours. Authorities must probe

whether it was terrorism or an accidental blast. Public awareness is essential to prevent transport of explosive materials. Let's hope this was an accident, not a terror act.

PVP Madhu Nivriti, Secunderabad

#### Election Commission Bias

The Election Commission's silence on divisive speeches by ruling leaders in Bihar reveals partisanship. Despite the Model Code of Conduct, the government credited ₹10,000 to women voters' accounts days before elections—an open misuse of power. Its hasty revision of electoral rolls raises further suspicion. The EC's credibility lies shattered; democracy stands endangered. Immediate reform is vital to prevent further institutional erosion.

Tharcus S. Fernando, Chennai

#### Luxury Behind Bars

Parappana Agrahara Jail seems more like a celeb-

erty resort than a correctional facility. Viral videos showing inmates using mobiles and enjoying luxuries expose collusion within prison administration. When criminals live better than citizens, justice becomes a farce. Instead of routine probes, the government must root out corruption and restore discipline. Privilege in prison makes a mockery of law.

K. Chidanand Kumar, Bengaluru

#### IPO Market Manipulation

Lenskart's volatile debut exposed the growing risk in India's IPO market. Many overpriced issues misled investors, with promoters fudging numbers to ensure listings succeed. Selling shares at ₹52 and reissuing at ₹402 within months is unjustifiable. SEBI must enforce stricter disclosure norms and accountability. Greed drives investor losses; caution is essential in overhyped IPOs.

S.N. Kabra

#### Punctuality Double Standards

Rahul Gandhi's punishment for being late to training was treated theatrically, but political leaders across parties are habitual latecomers. Their delays disrupt traffic and cause public inconvenience. Courts should enforce punctuality norms for all leaders to ensure discipline and accountability. Political privilege should never override civic respect and responsibility.

N. Mahadevan, Chennai

#### Courtesy Over Politics

Shashi Tharoor's birthday visit to L.K. Advani was a simple act of courtesy, wrongly criticised by his own party. Recognising contributions of political rivals reflects maturity, not betrayal. Leaders should rise above hatred and learn from opponents' achievements. Such gestures foster goodwill and strengthen democratic culture.

Sunil Okhade, Indore



#### Ensure Doctors' Security

Apropos to "Three Coop Hospital doctors assaulted; MARD warns mass leave" (Nov 9), cases of doctors becoming targets of attacks by the relatives and friends of the patients who die while being treated are increasing across the country. This portends a dangerous trend. Doctors work under pressure to treat patients. With the threat of being attacked weighing on them, under what frame of mind will they discharge their duties? There should be a mechanism in place to protect doctors and the support staff from such attacks.

H.P. Murali, Bengaluru



THE ASIAN AGE

11 NOVEMBER 2025

Greater transparency is needed over UCC

Introduction of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) is a mandate of the Indian Constitution as stated in Article 44: “The State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India.” However, it has been a contentious issue due to its potential to undermine the diverse lifestyles people have adopted in different parts of the country. Governments since independence have kept the proposal for a UCC on the back burner due to this factor but the BJP, after discovering its divisive power, has placed it at the top of its agenda.

Hence, Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s praise for the BJP government in Uttarakhand for the introduction of the UCC in the state and the steps it has taken to “check demographic change and illegal religious conversion” has no surprise element. The Uttarakhand law, which came into force in January this year, provides for uniform personal laws for marriage, divorce, inheritance, and succession while giving exception to the state’s Scheduled Tribes. The law received flak as it interfered with the private lives of people as exemplified by its restrictive definition on live-in relationships. Some provisions have been relaxed since its introduction, and the government has promised further changes. It has told the high court recently that it will make the law “more practical, transparent and citizen-friendly” and will “clarify procedures around live-in relationships, registration and appeals while strengthening privacy protections”.

No one knows about the contours of a UCC; no BJP leader has given the people a concrete idea of it. The language that accompanies the talk of a UCC by the BJP is not of national integration but of divisiveness.

According to the Prime Minister, the Uttarakhand government has set an example for other states to emulate. It is quite normal for the Prime Minister of the country to pick the right practice from various states and tell the country to take the right cues from them; prime ministers have done so in the past. Some of the path-breaking initiatives across the country had their genesis in pilot projects implemented in some obscure district but brought to the national attention by the Union government. The women’s self-help group was such an idea that then prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee picked up from Kerala and promoted across the country. Most such ideas contributed to the emancipation of the most marginalised people and helped national integration.

But the UCC, unfortunately, does not follow this pattern. It has been on the agenda of the BJP for quite some time as the saffron party has found it can help further its partisan agenda. No one knows about the contours of a UCC; no BJP leader has given the people a concrete idea of it. The language that accompanies the talk of a UCC by the BJP is not of national integration but of divisiveness.

The Prime Minister and the government he heads at the Centre have a major role in setting the national agenda. It would ideally be made of components that will take the country forward. If Mr Modi and his party believe that the UCC will indeed help usher in a more equitable, democratic and civilized society, then they should put their cards on the table and invite people for an open discussion. Occasional oblique references do not indicate a healthy approach to such a national issue.

Health curbs to block US visas?

Weeks after making the most popular US visa, the H-1B, exorbitantly expensive, the Donald Trump administration appears keen on shutting down all avenues for foreigners to enter the United States. As part of this agenda, it has expanded the powers of consular officers to deny a visa on the grounds of public charge to any foreigner with lifestyle diseases such as diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, or sleep apnea.

Under the new rules, the visa applicant must satisfy the consular officer that they have sufficient financial resources to cover healthcare costs for their entire lifetime without seeking public cash assistance.

The rules also require consular officers to consider the health of family members, including children and elderly parents, when determining the public charge criterion.

Under the new rules, the visa applicant must satisfy the consular officer that they have sufficient financial resources to cover healthcare costs for their entire lifetime without seeking public cash assistance.

This allows the officer to deny a visa by citing possible future or unforeseen health complications of dependents that could affect the applicant’s ability to earn a livelihood.

The new restrictions appear to be aimed at ensuring that only wealthy or highly skilled foreigners enter the US. Those who want to build a career based on entrepreneurial spirit alone may not receive visas.

Although experts believe that the public charge rule will primarily be invoked for long-term visas, the US Immigration and Nationality Act views every foreigner seeking to enter the US—even on a nonimmigrant visa — as a potential immigrant. As such, consular officers will have the authority to deny visas to tourists and students as well.

With these restrictions, the Trump administration has effectively ended the Indian fascination with the US visa that began in the late 1990s. In the short term, this may negatively impact India by reducing foreign remittances.

However, on the positive side, it may also prevent the emigration of highly talented entrepreneurial Indians, thereby allowing India to benefit from their contributions at home.

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K. SUBHAKAR

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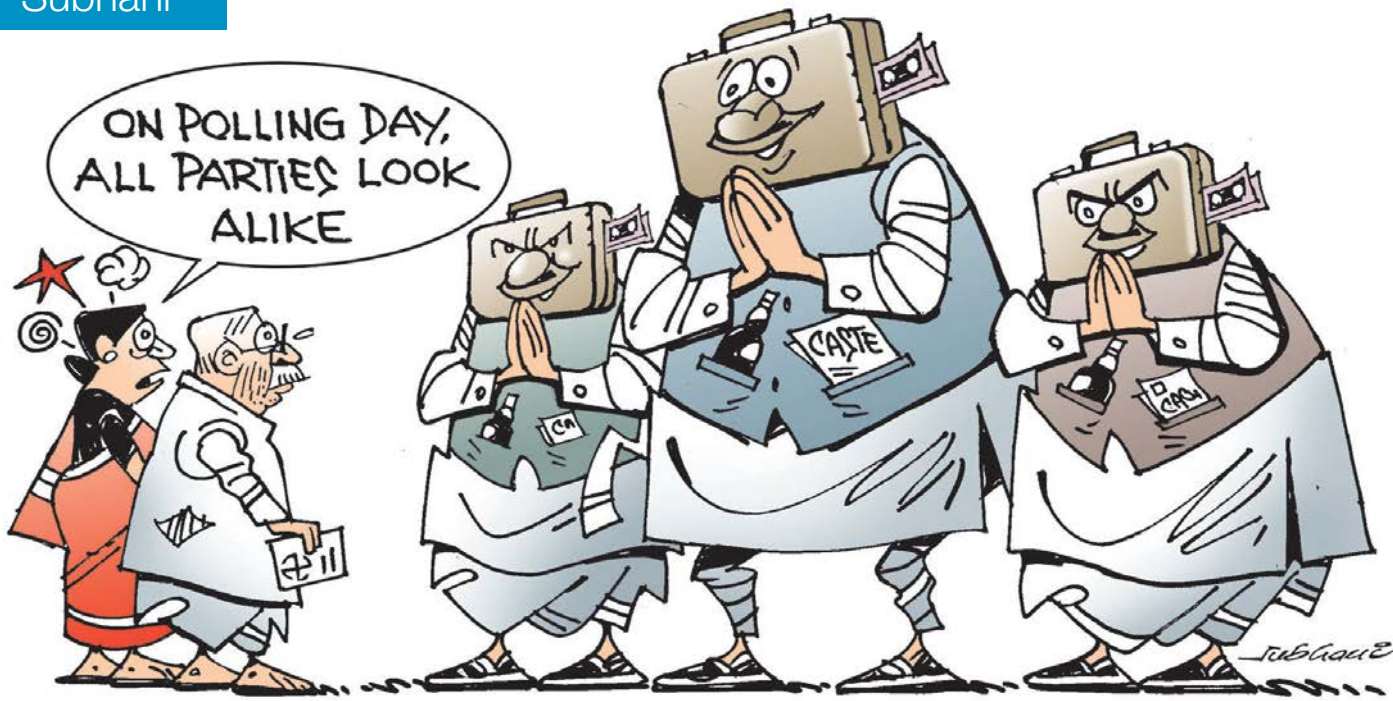
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Subhani

ON POLLING DAY, ALL PARTIES LOOK ALIKE



Amidst SIR row, Rahul’s Haryana expose jolts EC



Shikha Mukerjee

The Election Commission, established as an independent body under the Constitution to conduct free, transparent and ideally flawless elections, operates a “system” that is replete with errors and wholly complicit in hiding flaws. Its functionaries serve up the weakest excuses when its systems are exposed as inefficient.

Asked about the magnitude of errors found in electoral rolls in Dhakola village of Haryana’s Ambala district last week, booth level officer Arvind Aggarwal said: “Only previous officials can explain how this mistake happened.” However, the EC, under its current chief, Gyanesh Kumar, doesn’t have the luxury of dodging responsibility. He declared himself a new broom that will usher in a new era. Alas, the past mistakes left uncorrected were discovered and the onus is on him.

Institutions, unfortunately, can’t argue that “previous officials can explain how this mistake happened”. Institutions like the EC have histories, precedents and continuing responsibilities. After spending thousands of crores of rupees on making the “system” work, it must own up for its mistakes.

A national newspaper was following up on Rahul Gandhi’s momentous revelations that in Haryana’s Dhakola, the same woman’s photograph appears on the voters list over 223 times. A report found it was an understatement; her photo appears 255 times against different names in two booths in the village.

Charanjeet Kaur knows the voters list is replete with mistakes; her reaction was: “Whenever I go to vote, the election staff, policemen on duty and polling agents all laugh.” But this is not a laughing

matter for the EC, the Haryana government and everyone who, from all accounts, knew what was wrong, but failed to revise the voters’ list.

There was a moment in the history of elections in India when Mamata Banerjee, then in the Congress, marched to Kolkata’s Writers’ Buildings to evict the government of Jyoti Basu as she doubted the legitimacy of the election that was widely suspected of being “scientifically rigged”. Though the Basu government survived, the electoral rolls and proof of voter identity changed forever. Instead of just names and addresses, voters were enrolled with photographs and the Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC). This is what the EC has succeeded in subverting; putting a name, a face and an address together.

That a single person’s face appears on the rolls 255 times, as the news report said, or 223 as Rahul Gandhi claims, is a scandal. It goes to the heart of the links between democracy and elections. It reveals that governance in India, at the EC and in states, is dysfunctional. Does it matter that the data Rahul Gandhi dug up was from the electoral rolls used in the 2024 Haryana polls? It does not. It doesn’t matter that he went on a “Vote Adhikar Yatra”, trekking across Bihar in the company of Tejashwi Yadav of the RJD, Dipankar Bhattacharya of the CPI(M-L) and others, to tell voters that the EC was involved, even as he accused the ruling BJP-JDU coalition led by Nitish Kumar of “Vote Chori” through the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls.

The connection between the Haryana expose to the election in Bihar after the SIR’s completion is simple. If electoral rolls in 2024 were as full of errors in

An election process that is flawed and remained flawed over a decade cannot challenge the legitimacy of a voter just because the EC has now decided it could produce “pure electoral rolls”.

Haryana, what is the credibility of the SIR process in 2025 meant to produce “pure electoral rolls to strengthen democracy”? That, however, is a later question. The first question that must be answered by Gyanesh Kumar and the EC is what was going on for “at least a decade”. A newspaper tracked 17 individuals who cast their votes based on electoral rolls where the same face appears in 255/223 places. These voters said they had voted, because they had successfully convinced the presiding officer that their vote was legitimate and the electoral roll was rotten with errors.

A system as flawed as this is not likely to be different in the 27 other states of India. The pan-India SIR now underway in 12 states/UTs, including poll-bound West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry, are all engaged in cleaning up flawed electoral rolls. The principal flaw in the rolls, the EC claims, is the enrolment of “illegal migrants”.

After Rahul Gandhi’s revelations, independently confirmed by the news media, the EC must explain who is “ineligible” and why. It can no longer plug the narrative that illegal migrants have been illegally issued various documents like Aadhaar, EPIC and ration cards to naturalise Bangladeshis or Rohingyas, thereby subtracting the vote share of Hindus. The EC must also explain what it meant by its excuse in March this year, when it declared “irrespective of the EPIC, any elector can cast a vote only at their designated polling station in the constituency where they are enrolled and nowhere else”. How then were 17 individuals in Dhakola village allowed to vote, when Charanjeet Kaur’s photo

graph appeared 255 or 223 times in the voter list?

The EC’s “*chalta hai*” attitude is obvious. In Dhakola village, Jyoti Ram and his daughter-in-law Roma Devi voted in the 2024 Haryana polls because “the election agents know us, so we don’t face much trouble casting our votes despite Charanjeet Kaur’s photograph appearing next to our names”, and added: “Even for poll staffers, it’s challenging to raise objections when nearly 250 voters share the same issue.”

Why should voters in West Bengal have to prove anything, even citizenship? If election agents are authorised to allow voters with mismatched IDs to vote, why does India spend money on CCTV cameras inside polling booths? An election process that is flawed and remained flawed over a decade, or maybe longer, cannot challenge the legitimacy of a voter just because the EC has now decided it could produce “pure electoral rolls”.

The EC’s credibility has been completely busted. In March it said: “To allay apprehensions, the commission has decided to ensure allotment of unique EPIC numbers to registered electors. Any case of duplicate EPIC number will be rectified by allotting a unique EPIC number.” Media investigations found that the EC deactivated the deduplication software “designed to identify duplicate and photo-similar entries in the electoral rolls”. The software, news reports said, were not used after 2022, when three crore duplicate/wrong entries were found. What is really going on in the name of “pure electoral rolls”? Money is squandered, the result is suspect and the politics of hunting down and disinfecting India of illegal Muslim migrants is on, with one exception — poll-bound Assam, where chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is a one-man Bengali-speaking Bangladeshi disinfecting machine, with the full support of the party to which he belongs, the BJP.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist

LETTERS

STRAYS: BE PRACTICAL

The Supreme Court order to remove stray dogs from public institutions is both ad hoc and ill-considered, as it conflicts with the existing Animal Birth Control rules advocating a “sterilise-vaccinate-return” approach. It is also impractical and inhumane due to the immense logistical challenges and costs of building enough shelters. The “sterilise-vaccinate-return” approach is endorsed by WHO. It’s the most humane and effective method for long-term control of strays and rabies eradication. Mass sheltering is logistically impossible given India’s large stray dog population. The costs alone will be prohibitive.

Amrapali Roy  
Jamshedpur

NOT WIT, BUT FEAR

CAN SATIRE ever truly be pro-establishment (“Could satire ever be pro-establishment?”, Nov. 9)? That would be like a court jester flattering the king for his baldness. Real satire must punch up; else, it mutates into propaganda wearing a clown’s nose. The “pro-establishment funnyman” of today, thriving on memes that mock the powerless or less powerful, is less a satirist than a cheerleader. His laughter is not born of wit but of fear — of being excluded from the royal banquet. True humour unsettles power; it’s a mirror, not a megaphone. When laughter starts serving the throne, it’s no longer satire, but stand-up comedy for courtiers.

K. Chidanand Kumar  
Bengaluru

IS TN COLOUR BLIND?

TAMIL NADU chief minister M.K. Stalin says the DMK-Left-VCK alliance can’t be defeated by the BJP. When black, red and blue come together, saffron can’t do anything, he claimed. The alliance formed in 2019 has been successful till now and will continue its success in the 2026 Assembly elections, he hopes. But one thing is clear; Tamil Nadu’s people can’t be taken for granted and they can become “colour blind” if the CM overlooks the fact that his governance hasn’t delivered on expectations. He failed to keep his promise to contain price rise and did not maintain basic infrastructure like roads. He also played politics with a “divide and rule” policy, bringing in religion and casteism to please vote banks.

A.P. Thiruvadi  
Chennai

Aakar Patel



How Mamdani won New York despite money power of rivals

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution reads as follows: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances”.

The language seems slightly archaic because it was written in 1789, but is clear enough for us to understand that freedom of speech cannot be curtailed. It can, however, be restricted, for example when related to threats of violence or pornography.

In 2010, the US Supreme Court eliminated restrictions on the funding of elections, interpreting this as a First Amendment free speech right. Corporations and wealthy individuals were free to influence elections, by creating political action committees that spend money on advertising. This was the outcome of the famous Citizens United case, which fatally damaged America’s democracy because both their major political parties are now permanently influenced by corporate interests. If the reason you won your seat is your donors, then it is likely that your actions in office will also be influenced by them. This seems to have become inescapable in US politics. However, there is another way of doing politics, and though its formula is

simple, its execution is very hard. To attempt something that carries a high failure rate takes a certain sort of determination and outlook. To succeed in it is truly remarkable. An example of this comes to us from the recent New York election for mayor. There were two different approaches to contesting from the two major candidates. The first approach is the one preferred by both major political parties and their candidates, which is to win by raising more money than the opponent. This money is then deployed chiefly on messaging — advertising on television and mailers to overwhelm the voter with positive impressions about the candidate paying for the ad and negative ones about the opponent.

The more ads one can put out the greater the chance of success. A report from 2018 headlined “How money affects elections” found that more than 90 per cent of the time, the candidate who raised and spent more than their rival won their race for a seat in Congress (their version of the Lok Sabha).

One major candidate in New York, Andrew Cuomo, took this approach and raised more than five times the money that his opponent had. He lost. Why?

The second approach, the reason this piece is being written, is to convince voters not through advertising but through personal conversations. This is effective but does not seem to be scalable. It seems especially

absurd to attempt in a general election where the voters are in the millions. The scale has to be staggering and the number of people required to do this would surely cost more than advertising. And it would be difficult for these people to open conversations with strangers, because many at home would either not answer the door or ask the person to leave, or not stop on the street when hailed.

Even if they chose to speak, then it would not be easy to convince them to vote for the candidate. After all this, the success rate is likely to be much less than one in 10. Meaning that for every person who is convinced into voting for the candidate, another 10 slam the door or say they will support the other side or just walk on.

How would one keep these workers motivated enough to keep attempting this and not just stay at home or in a cafe and pretend that they had been knocking on doors or stopping strangers on the street? These are the reasons this approach is not preferred and why candidates choose to just raise more money.

It can only succeed under certain conditions: First, that the message is compelling to a large number of potential voters. Second, that the workers are highly motivated and not put off by the high rate of failure. The motivation of the workers here is not money but the cause. It is similar to propagation and proselytising. Third, that there is some mech-

anism that monitors the engagement and sees it through to voting day. Meaning to repeatedly stay in touch with people once contact is made.

This was the approach used by Zohran Mamdani, the Indian-origin socialist who won the election and will soon be New York City’s mayor. Those who say he is inexperienced and knows little about leadership do not understand that to motivate people to throw themselves into something that has a high rate of failure, and then succeed at it, is the highest expression of leadership. An army of over one lakh volunteers trained and led by 700 senior volunteers worked for Zohran. These were mostly young people but also many middle-aged and old people who gave hours, for many months, doing physical work for their cause.

More than \$40 million was spent by corporates backing Andrew Cuomo to paint Zohran Mamdani as a “terrorist”. They lost to the volunteers who were paid nothing.

This win will be studied for a long time because it reduces to bare essence the two approaches to winning elections and shows the limits of billionaires’ power.

As activists in America often say: They have money, we have people.

The writer is the chair of Amnesty International India. Twitter: @aakar\_patel