



## Foreseeable accidents

Industrial mishaps are due to accumulated organisational weaknesses

Despite there having been a streak of industrial accidents in India of late, the notion that they are isolated and incidental persists. Within days of each other, four workers were killed in a 'mishap' in a septic tank in Surat while nine workers were killed by an explosion at a steel plant in Visakhapatnam. They appear to be different circumstances: one involved workers entering a confined space and succumbing to toxic gases; the other involved 150 tonnes of molten steel and a violent blast. Yet, industry has known of these risks and had developed preventive measures decades ago. In the Surat incident, four workers entered the tank and were overcome by toxic fumes. The circumstances resemble a well-known pattern in fatalities in confined spaces, where the first victims are often followed by would-be rescuers who enter without protection. There have been deaths in similar circumstances in Surat's industrial sector in recent years. The working area must be mechanically ventilated and have rescue personnel on standby while the workers must have breathing apparatuses, harnesses and retrieval lines, and clear lines of communication. Unprotected entry must be strictly prohibited. Septic tank deaths and deaths due to manual scavenging are in fact rarely accidents in the sense of unforeseeable events, but failures of basic safety management, and the recurrence of such incidents speaks to the persistence of that failure. Likewise, while steelmaking is intrinsically more dangerous because it combines extreme temperatures, pressurised gases, heavy equipment, and enormous stores of heat energy, industry still knows the hazards it poses, and further that even relatively small process failures can result in multiple casualties.

Both incidents, and the patterns they extend, are reminders of persistent safety failures in many parts of Indian industry. In Visakhapatnam, trade unions and former employees have alleged that the plant had reduced staffing, heavier workloads, ageing equipment, deferred maintenance, and an increasing dependence on contractual labour. Some also linked these trends to the difficulties the plant faced following the Centre's divestment plans and the resulting constraints on investments. However true any of these factors are, they confirm that a major industrial accident is almost always due to the accumulation of organisational weaknesses. In fact, contract labour is central to understanding both incidents. Occupational safety research has consistently found that contracted workers face higher risks because they may receive less training and operate within systems with fragmented accountability. The incidents have also occurred during the gradual and uneven implementation of India's new occupational safety framework – and highlight the invisible fact that the country's industries remain anchored by old problems of manpower shortage, caste- and class-based exposure to hazardous labour, and a 'cost over safety' mindset in financially stressed units.

## Sport during a war

The United States is giving the FIFA World Cup a bad name

No showpiece event of a sport has lived up to its billing quite like the FIFA World Cup. The 2026 edition, which kicks off on Thursday, offers proof. With 48 teams and 104 matches, it is the biggest ever. With roughly one in four FIFA member nations qualifying, and six of the seven continents represented, it is the most inclusive yet. From Oceania to North America, it wraps the whole universe. It is also the first time that three countries will be hosting the quadrennial extravaganza – the United States, Canada and Mexico. Top players in Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo and Neymar have touched down, and so have coaches such as Carlo Ancelotti and Thomas Tuchel. While Messi will aim for a repeat of Argentina's trophy-winning exploits from 2022, Ronaldo will gun for Portugal's first. Neymar, yet to win the coveted Cup, has a very heavy cross to bear, for he comes from the land of Pele and five-time champion Brazil. Kylian Mbappe's France, titlist in 2018 and runner-up in 2022, remains strong. Spain, with the irresistible teenager Lamine Yamal in its ranks, is a favourite, and so are Germany and England to a lesser degree. But four-time winner Italy is absent, for a scarcely believable third straight occasion.

The World Cup also serves a purpose beyond the turf – of shrinking differences, uniting populations and promoting cross-cultural exchanges. In this, the latest instalment has stumbled badly. On Monday, it emerged that the U.S. had denied entry to Somali referee Omar Artan, the best men's referee from Africa in 2025 and one of the 52 handpicked by governing body FIFA. There are credible reports of journalists being refused visas and squad members being questioned by immigration authorities. In an unfortunate turn, the military stand-off between the U.S. and Iran has forced the West Asian nation to camp in Mexico and travel to Seattle (more than 2,000 km away) and Los Angeles for its group-stage games. It is both a logistical nightmare and an affront to the core sporting tenet of a level-playing field for all teams. Fans are also rankled by the high ticket costs, limited public transport facilities and steep visa fees. That a travel-intensive competition is being held amidst a disruption in global fuel supplies and spike in energy prices is not lost on anyone. These concerns will likely dissipate once Mexico and South Africa set the ball rolling at the majestic Estadio Azteca. However, it is essential to reflect and learn in order to chart a more inclusive future.

# The forgotten copilot of Air India flight 171

A year since the tragic crash of Air India flight AI 171 that cost 260 lives on June 12, 2025, the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA), Government of India, and its Air Accident Investigation Bureau, have strayed from their promised "transparent and factual" path. The only piece of information that is available to us is the Preliminary Report that was published in July 2025. The cryptic report has hidden pointers that are worth highlighting, in the absence of any final report.

The flood of false narratives spread by some sections of mainstream media and social media compel this writer to highlight issues. The usual tendency of the MoCA and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) to conceal the truth and place the blame on the pilot has, in this case, taken a different turn. Instead, there is a defence of the captain and playing possum in the face of claims by some pilots' associations and "aviation illiterates" – as a former National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigator has described them in a YouTube video – that the crash resulted from failures on the part of the airline and the aircraft manufacturer.

### Media narratives versus facts

The first clear indication appears on pages 12-13 of the preliminary report which says: "The forward EAFR [Enhanced Airborne Flight Recorder] was located on 16 June 2025 from the wreckage debris beside the Building F." The forward EAFR records both the digital flight data and voice data from cockpit area mike. It is therefore evident that the AAIB has listened to the cockpit voice recorder (CVR) recording and alerted the MoCA, which in turn informed the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). On the same day, June 16, citing intelligence inputs and a perceived threat, the MHA reportedly ordered X-category commando protection for the head of the AAIB. He continues to enjoy this protection at taxpayers' expense, even as the travelling public and the families of the crash victims remain in the dark.

Certain narratives in the media and social media have been on the report of the fuel control switches (FCS) having transitioned from run to cutoff and then cut-off to run after several seconds delay.

The use of the word "transitioning" in the report is being bandied about as evidence of



**Captain A. (Mohan) Ranganathan**

Former airline instructor pilot, aviation safety adviser and also a former member of the Civil Aviation Safety Advisory Council (CASAC), India

One year on, the AI 171 investigation demands answers, accountability, and closure

American influence on the report. What is being forgotten is the fact that the FCS is a spring loaded switch that has to be lifted off the run slot, moved over the gate and dropped into the cut-off slot.

The same action is required for moving the switch from cutoff to run. These switches cannot be moved by a software error or a power failure. The only CVR statement in the report mentions this: "one of the pilots is heard asking the other why did he cutoff. The other pilot responded that he did not do so." The rest of the CVR recordings were apparently shared with the MoCA and the MHA for the threat perception.

The Government of India knew the facts on June 16, 2025 and is still dragging its feet to provide closure to the affected families who are experiencing mental agony.

### A red herring

The latest angle that is occupying centre stage is the Ram Air Turbine (RAT). Calculations about when the RAT deployed in flight and how this was due to a major wiring fault are being used by interested parties to digress from the key issue of who moved the FCS to cut off the engines. Page 14 of the report says that the "RAT hydraulic pump began supplying hydraulic pressure at about 08:08:47 UTC", which is a clear indication the RAT was deployed five seconds earlier, around 08:08:42 UTC.

The report mentions that once the aircraft achieved the maximum recorded airspeed of 180 knots at about 08:08:42 UTC, immediately thereafter, the Engine 1 and Engine 2 FCS moved from run to cutoff position one after another with a time gap of one second.

When both engines were cut off, two things would have happened immediately. The entire instrument panel in front of the copilot would have gone blank and the power supply to the rear EAFR shut. The rear EAFR becomes a lame duck and whatever data the investigators retrieve will only be what is recorded prior to that time. The actual backup of critical data would have been lost had the forward EAFR data not been recovered.

The Boeing 787 Manual lists four conditions that result in the automatic deployment of RAT to provide backup. It also mentions that the RAT can be deployed manually by pressing the RAM Air Turbine switch on the hydraulic panel. This will

be recorded both on the EAFR as well as the sound recorded on the CVR. The clear reason why RAT deployed before the engines were cut off will be evident on both the EAFR and CVR recordings.

Under normal circumstances, when a major emergency takes place on take-off, the Captain must take over the controls and the copilot reverts to pilot monitoring duty even if he was the Pilot flying. The CVR will clearly indicate if that action took place. The EAFR apparently records the flight controls of the copilot side moving during the entire event. In the case of flight AI-171, the delay in moving the FCS for the no. 1 and no. 2 engines, at 08:08:52 and 08:08:56, respectively, can be explained by the circumstances confronting the poor co-pilot: a blank screen, no guidance, both engines without power, and the task of controlling the aircraft with his right hand while attempting to restart the engines with his left hand.

For his low experience on the aircraft type and performing a manoeuvre which is never given for copilots during training, First Officer Clive Kunder did a remarkable job in steering the crippled aircraft away from crowded areas where more lives would have been lost on ground.

### Closure requires the truth

There were two pilots on board. The FCS were deliberately moved to cut off the engines. Only one of them could have done it and not a software error or a power system error. If the AAIB could have deciphered the CVR data to alert the MoCA and the MHA as early as June 16, 2025, fishing for excuses to deviate from the facts will only damage the credibility of the Indian aviation system.

The United States NTSB and the Air Accidents Investigation Branch of the United Kingdom have far more experience in deciphering the EAFR/Digital Flight Data Recorder and CVR data than the Indian AAIB or the DGCA. One hopes that the authorities in India do not drag their feet and face the humiliation of the NTSB releasing its own findings, as it did in the SilkAir (1997) and China Eastern (2022) fatal crashes, which ultimately established "Deliberate Human Intervention".

The families of First Officer Kunder and all those who perished in the crash on June 12, 2025, deserve closure to their mental agony.

# Protecting federalism must be the INDIA bloc's 'glue'

At the meeting on June 8, 2026, of political parties under the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc, in New Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah noted that the Congress party is the only party with a presence across all Indian States, whereas other parties are typically confined to one or two States. He argued, therefore, that the Congress is the only party that is capable of acting as the "glue" that holds the alliance together.

### Congress leads, but informally

All constituents of the alliance acknowledge the pivotal role that the Congress plays in driving the INDIA bloc forward. Even the Left parties, despite their various criticisms of the Congress, broadly agree with this view. The criticism levelled against the Congress during alliance meetings is that it has failed to effectively facilitate the electoral success of its partners and, at times, has campaigned in ways that cast doubt on the fundamental principles and political positions of its allies.

The INDIA bloc was formed prior to the 2024 general election as a loose coalition of parties opposed to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Although the Congress played a significant role in its formation, some alliance partners did not agree to the party assuming formal leadership of



**D. Ravikumar**

Second time Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) from Viluppuram, Tamil Nadu, and General Secretary of the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK)

The alliance's future depends on defending federalism and democracy

the coalition. No leader was elected for the alliance either. While action plans were occasionally drawn up and resolutions passed, the alliance never evolved into a formal organisational structure.

### The basis of unity

Contrary to Mr. Abdullah's assertion, it is not the Congress that serves as the bloc's "glue"; rather, a shared apprehension about the BJP is the objective factor that brought the coalition into being. The BJP's unlawful and authoritarian political conduct has instilled fear among all non-BJP parties. It is this very fear that acts as the unifying force for the Opposition.

Consequently, a compelling necessity has arisen for all parties – which realise that they have no meaningful political future unless the BJP is defeated in the upcoming general election – to work in union.

However, defeating the BJP alone cannot be the sole objective of an alliance. The INDIA bloc comprises both national and regional parties. It is true that the BJP's domineering style of politics threatens the very existence of Opposition parties.

More importantly, however, it poses a threat to the Constitution, parliamentary democracy, secularism and the federal principles enshrined in the Constitution by increasingly concentrating

power in the hands of the Union government. Consequently, opposition to the BJP has brought these parties together, and there is nothing inherently wrong with that.

### State rights matter

Yet, an alliance formed merely out of fear cannot endure in the long run. The principle of federalism, and the Constitution that upholds it, must serve as the real "glue" that gives this alliance coherence and an organised structure. It is essential that not only national parties within the alliance – such as the Congress – but also regional parties from North India, where awareness of State rights is often inadequate, embrace the conviction that State rights must be safeguarded. Only by internalising this principle can the bloc move forward effectively.

Though the Congress understands the importance of upholding the Constitution, it remains reluctant to fully recognise and champion the rights of States. It will truly grasp the significance of regional parties only when it recognises that federalism is one of the basic features of the Constitution, and that secularism alone is not sufficient to distinguish it from the BJP. If the Congress continues to sideline federalism, it risks being viewed by regional parties merely as a substitute for the BJP rather than as an alternative political force.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Defections defy democracy

The report on Union Minister Bhupender Yadav's meeting with rebel Trinamool Congress MPs raises troubling ethical questions. While political dialogue is legitimate in a democracy, outreach to legislators who have openly defied their party inevitably creates perceptions of encouraging defections and political horse-trading. The anti-defection law was enacted precisely to preserve electoral mandates and prevent governments and parties from being destabilised through inducements. What is more disturbing is the normalisation of such practices across party lines. Voters elect representatives based on party platforms, not personal political bargains. If democratic mandates can be altered through post-election manoeuvring, public faith in institutions will steadily erode. **Gopalswamy J., Chennai**

### Bharathiraja

Veteran film director Bharathiraja set a new trend in Tamil cinema by bringing rural themes and settings to the forefront. This shift attracted audiences of all kinds, as the village flavour was both fresh and refreshing. His directorial debut, *16 Vayathinile*, was not only a huge success but also transformed Tamil cinema to a considerable extent, compelling producers and directors to think differently. In that sense, he was a true trendsetter. One should also not overlook the fact that Ilaiyaraaja received his breakthrough with the same film. None of these artists looked back thereafter. **V. Lakshmanan, Tirupur, Tamil Nadu**

Alongside K. Balachander and Balu Mahendra, Bharathiraja helped shape modern Tamil film-making. Through classics such as *16 Vayathinile*, *Muthal Mariyathai*, and *Alaigal Oivathillai*, he brought the spirit of rural Tamil Nadu to

the screen with authenticity and emotion. He also introduced and nurtured many talented actors who became superstars. I fondly remember asking for his business card during a meeting; his reply was unforgettable: "Bharathiraja does not need a business card." **A.P. Thiruvadi, Chennai**

At a time when Tamil cinema was dialogue-oriented and an extension of drama enacting, Bharathiraja, in the 1970s, changed this by telling the story through the camera. It was he who transformed the art of direction with camera frames. Bharathiraja-Ilaiyaraaja-SPB songs were the order of the day in the 1980s. **A.V. Narayanan, Chennai**

The director was an exponent of village drama, bringing authentic rural narratives and realistic characters to the

mainstream. His timeless classics have reshaped the visual language of regional cinema. **C.K.S. Maniam, Chennai**

Bharathiraja's films, enriched by Ilaiyaraaja's music, were an integral part of my growing-up years. I still remember the excitement of watching his movies with neighbours after we bought our first television set and later a VCR. By taking cinema out of the studio and into the villages and open landscapes of Tamil Nadu, he gave audiences like me a profound sense of connection to the world around us. Like *Mann Vasana*, his stories, deeply rooted in emotions and the Tamil soil, will live on in our hearts forever. **Ananthi Santhaiyan, Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh**

Some film-makers make movies, but a very few change the dynamics and magnitude of cinema forever. Needless to say,

Bharathiraja belonged to the latter. **R. Sivakumar, Chennai**

### NCERT books not available

The new academic session has already begun, yet many students are still unable to obtain the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) textbooks that they require. Most local bookstores report that the books are out of stock, and students are being asked to wait several weeks for fresh supplies. As a result, many students are falling behind in their studies and facing difficulties in completing their homework and assignments. Some students have been forced to rely on borrowed books or photocopies. **Preetham C., Bengaluru**

### Pilgrim welfare

I was in Tiruvannamalai on June 4. As a 70-year-old, I had to stand in a queue for hours to have darshan of Lord Arunachala. Though

separate queues are reportedly available for senior citizens, no signboard indicating this was prominently displayed, nor did any temple employee guide me. After the long wait, I was brusquely told to move on by a young man who was the age of my grandson. Although wall-mounted fans had been installed along the queue, none of them was functioning. Even to reach the counter issuing ₹50 tickets for special darshan, one had to stand in line for nearly two-and-a-half hours, with no provision for seating, unlike at Tirupati. With a growing number of devotees from neighbouring States contributing to the temple's increasing revenue, there is a need for improvements in facilities. Another issue is the exorbitant fares charged by auto-rickshaw drivers. **V. Jayaraman, Chennai**

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

# Negotiating federalism in higher education

Higher education in India has emerged as an important site through which the changing dynamics of Indian federalism are being expressed. Issues relating to regulatory authority, curriculum, language policy, public funding, and digital governance have transformed the sector into a critical site where competing visions of the Union and State governments intersect. These developments not only shape the direction of higher education but also illuminate broader questions concerning the distribution of power within the Indian Union. As a result, governance of higher education can no longer be viewed merely as a sectoral policy concern; rather, it has become an integral component of India's evolving federal architecture.

Some recent examples include the contestations surrounding the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 across different States. Recent regulatory reforms facilitating the establishment of foreign university campuses in India have also generated varied responses from State governments, reflecting differing perspectives. This fragmented political landscape has important implications for higher education governance in the country. However, they have received only relatively limited attention.

**Growing influence of Centre**  
Several developments have illustrated these tensions. In Tamil Nadu, the State government repeatedly opposed various aspects of the NEP 2020, particularly the three-language formula as well as the University Grants Commission's (UGC) circular on the third language this year. Centre-State tensions in higher education were also evident in the disputes over the appointment of Vice-Chancellors and the powers of Governors in States such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, and West Bengal.



**Edho Mathews**

is with the Kerala State Higher Education Council. Views expressed are personal

Although education remains constitutionally within the Concurrent List, the prevailing governance dynamic increasingly favours the Union

Although education remains constitutionally within the Concurrent List, which gives both the Union and the States legislative authority, the prevailing governance dynamic increasingly favours the Union. Through the Ministry of Education, the UGC, and various regulatory and accreditation bodies, the Union government possesses substantial leverage over universities and colleges across the country.

The introduction of the NEP, 2020 is an important restructuring attempt to redesign the architecture of higher education in India. The policy has proposed sweeping reforms, including four-year undergraduate programmes, an Academic Bank of Credits, institutional restructuring, multidisciplinary universities, and internationalisation initiatives. These reforms also represent an expansion of the influence of the Centre into domains that have historically been the preserve of State governments.

Moreover, access to central funding now is increasingly dependent on compliance with nationally designed reform agendas. Programmes such as the Institutions of Eminence initiative and competitive research mechanisms under the Anusandhan National Research Foundation have contributed to the influence of the Union government over States' authority.

The role of national regulatory agencies has also become another important site of conflict. The structures proposed by the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025, which are intended to replace existing higher education regulatory bodies including the UGC, have generated apprehensions regarding the gradual erosion of the authority of State governments. Another important dimension to centralisation is digital governance. Mechanisms such as the Academic Bank of Credits have expanded the capacity of the Union government to standardise

and monitor higher education governance across States.

In States with strong regional political identities, these reforms are viewed not just as administrative issues but as constitutional questions concerning the balance of power within the Indian Union.

**Strategic adaptation**

Interestingly, the implementation of the NEP, 2020 has also revealed that Centre-State relations in higher education are not purely adversarial. Rather than adopting positions of complete acceptance or outright rejection, many States, including Opposition-ruled States, have selectively adapted aspects of reforms in accordance with local political contexts. This reflects the emergence of a more negotiated form of federalism characterised by strategic adaptation.

For instance, with respect to internationalisation, several States are seeking to position themselves as regional education hubs by facilitating partnerships with overseas institutions. These developments underscore the growing recognition of higher education as a strategic instrument for global visibility and knowledge-driven development. The debate surrounding the establishment of international branch campuses further illustrates this change. While the regulatory framework and policy direction are largely determined by the Union government, the actual implementation of such initiatives depends substantially on State governments through local administrative clearances, infrastructure support, and investment facilitation.

As India's regional political landscape continues to evolve, the trajectory of higher education governance will depend not only on constitutional provisions or national-level policy frameworks, but also on the capacity of the Centre and the States to negotiate competing political and developmental priorities within the federal structure.

# Why TVK is eager to woo AIADMK cadre

Tamil Nadu's ruling party is strengthening itself by welcoming rival members

**STATE OF PLAY**

**T. Ramakrishnan**

The recent defection of a large number of former Ministers and legislators belonging to the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) to the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) has prompted many to wonder whether the ruling party is seeking to build its organisational network through these latest recruits.

Even though it is well known that the Vijay Makkal Iyakkam (VMI), a voluntary organisation made up of newly elected Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay's fans, has provided the much-needed manpower for the TVK, there is a perception in certain quarters that the ruling party has not yet acquired enough strength on the ground. Under such circumstances, it is quite natural that the TVK follows an "open-door policy" for anyone with political experience, especially from the AIADMK, which has finished third in the April-May Assembly election. There have been accretions to the ruling party from the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) too but the TVK's keenness to woo as many cadres as it can from the AIADMK is clearly evident. At an event to mark the admission of the defectors last week, one of the prominent faces of the new regime and Minister for Public Works and Sports Development Aadhav Arjuna said that "the AIADMK and the TVK are one and the same. The TVK is not a different party but [like] a parent body." This observation has prompted leaders and observers to describe the TVK as "a new AIADMK."

The main reason why the ruling party is targeting the



Dravidian major is the latter's comparative weakness in relation to its traditional adversary, the DMK. The depth of its defeat can be appreciated better if one is to take a close look at how it suffered electoral reverses in the 2026 Assembly poll. Apart from winning only 47 Assembly seats (against 66 seats in 2021), the party forfeited deposit in 19 seats, the highest so far. But the DMK, which contested four seats more than the AIADMK's 172, did not forfeit deposit in any constituency. In terms of vote share in contested seats, the DMK fared better with 32.17% as against the other's 28.7%.

**A new alternative**

There is one school of thought within the AIADMK, as articulated by general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami late last week, that the party's performance was not as poor as it was in 1996 when it secured only four seats and that of the DMK's in 1991 when it won just two seats. But there is one qualitative difference between 2026 and 1991 and 1996 — there was no credible third alternative force available then, unlike the TVK now. Besides, the number of seats where both the Dravidian majors forfeited deposits was much lower — 3 for the DMK in 1991 and 2 for the AIADMK in 1996. Moreover, as regards the AIADMK, the signals were out even in the 2024 Lok Sabha

polls when the party forfeited, for the first time in a parliamentary election, deposits in seven constituencies. It is against this backdrop that the TVK, which has catapulted to power in the recent polls, is consolidating its position.

There are a few more compelling factors for the ruling party to take under its fold members of the AIADMK. In the Assembly polls, the TVK drew a blank in eight districts including Villupuram (with seven Assembly constituencies) and Nagapattinam-Mayiladuthurai-Tiruvavur (put together, 10 seats). It knows that it has to have a strong base in all these areas, even though no leading figure from these places was there in the latest round of defectors.

In addition, local body polls are going to be held in eight months, as declared by Mr. Arjuna a couple of days ago. Rural local bodies in 28 districts, which comprise 9,581 village panchayats, 314 panchayat union councils, and 28 district panchayats, do not have elected representatives. The term of such bodies in nine other districts will be over in four months. In February next year, the term of all major urban local bodies will also end. Going by all indications, the authorities would like to have elections to the rural and urban local bodies together. This is why the Minister has challenged the DMK asking whether it would be able to bag mayorship even in one municipal corporation.

It may be the hope of the TVK that if the party were to come out with flying colours in the local body polls, it can make moves, both politically and administratively, much more confidently than it has done so far.

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# Major lacunae in reporting industrial accidents

The inconsistencies in the data compiled by the Labour Bureau and the DGFASLI point to severe lapses in reporting of industrial accidents

**DATA POINT**

**Sambavi Parthasarathy**  
**Pon Vasanth B.A.**

The death toll from the explosion at the Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited-Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (RINL-VSP) on June 8, rose to nine on Wednesday. Following the incident, a familiar chain of bureaucratic responses has been triggered such as ex-gratia for the bereaved families and the constitution of an expert committee for a high-level probe. These were the same measures taken after the last major accident at the plant in 2014, and indeed after most workplace accidents across the country. But India appears to be lagging in strengthening institutional mechanisms needed to prevent such accidents (Chart 2).

The problem begins with the very collection of safety data, as the gaps in the annual Standard Reference Notes (SRNs) of the Directorate General Factory Advice Service and Labour Institutes (DGFASLI) reveal. DGFASLI helps implement the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSH) Code, 2020. The OSH, for which the rules were notified only last month, renamed the DGFASLI as the Directorate General of Occupational Safety and Health.

Each SRN records industrial accidents in two sections: one from data compiled by the Labour Bureau and the other from DGFASLI's own correspondence with Chief Inspectors of Factories. The two never match, pointing to lapses in reporting (Chart 3).

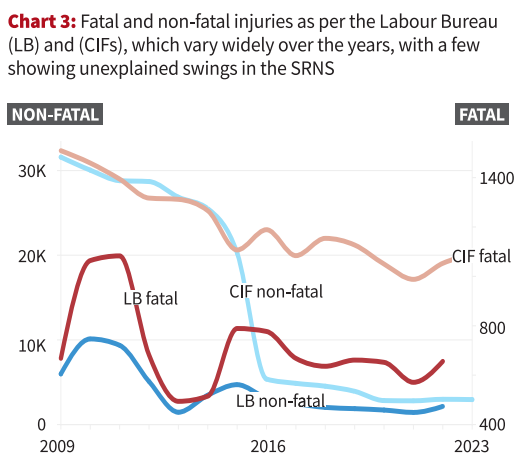
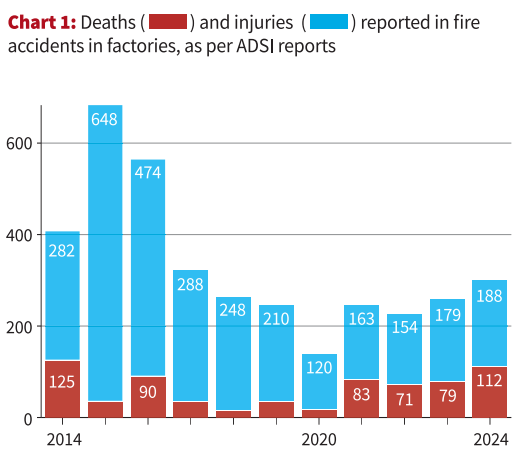
The reports also show DGFASLI struggling with heavy vacancies (Chart 4). The country does not have enough factory inspectors, even in industrialised States such as Tamil Nadu (Chart 5). This gets consequently reflected in the small fraction of factories inspected each year (Chart 6). Moreover, many States simply do not report the required details (Chart 7).

## Institutional apathy

Data for the charts were sourced from Standard Reference Notes (SRNs) and Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India (ADSI) reports. With inputs from Nitika Francis and Sandhya K, who is interning with The Hindu



Flames erupt in a steel plant after molten iron spills while being moved in a bucket by a crane in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, on Monday, June 8. PTI



Besides wide variations within the SRNs between the LB and CIFs' data, the fire accidents captured by them were only a third of the numbers reported in ADSI reports

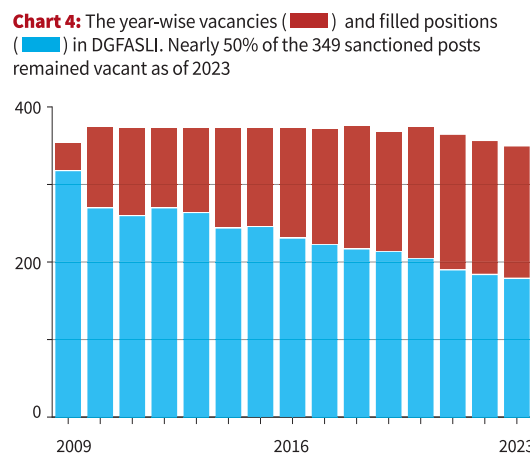
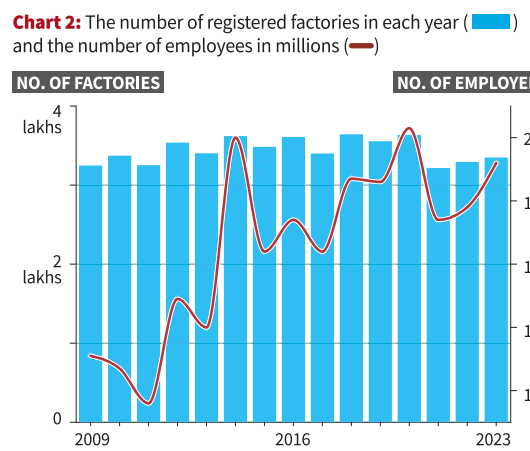
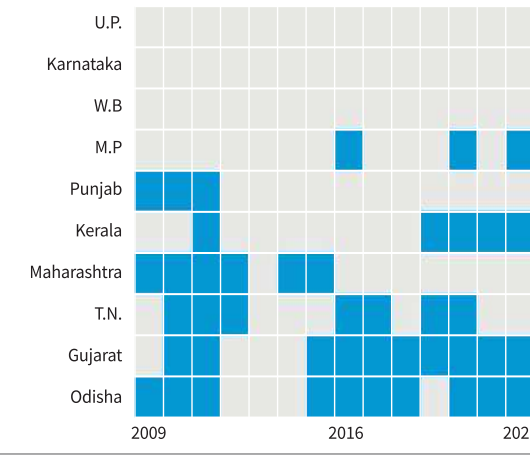


Chart 7: Many States did not furnish data on fatal and non-fatal incidents, either to the Labour Bureau, or DGFASLI, as per the SRNs. U.P., Karnataka and W.B. did not provide data even once



**FROM THE ARCHIVES**

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUN 11, 1976

## Decline in pen exports

With domestic sales of over Rs. 60 crores India's pen industry entered the world market in the late Fifties. In 1973-74 these exports touched Rs. 80 lakhs. Next year they were down to almost half and in 1975-76 they dipped further.

Examining the how and why of this low performance we came on a story of bad business practices and of adverse conditions in the international market.

The export figure of Rs. 80 lakhs was possible with an active sales campaign to spot new markets. Till then the market for Indian pens was confined to the West Asian and African countries, where the filler tube fountain pen and the ink containing ones made by us were acceptable. These exports were of the order of Rs. 30 lakhs to Rs. 40 lakhs. Then, through the massive sales campaign launched by an export trading house, Poland came in with orders worth Rs. 37 lakhs. These were mostly for ball point pens, a commodity in which Indian expertise is not yet perfect.

The magic of export earnings attracted all and sundry manufacturers of ball pens to chip into the huge order. As their consignments reached the cold climate of Poland, the pen's nozzles got blocked with the frozen ink. The following year the Poles ordered for a mere Rs. 3.2 lakhs from India. Exporters may blame the manufacturers, but the Poles have gone elsewhere for their pens. With the Polish order reduced to a mere Rs 3.2 lakhs, pen exports in 1974-75 dropped to Rs. 42.9 lakhs. In the year ended March 1976 these exports dropped further to Rs. 42.3 lakhs when the target was for Rs. 75 lakhs.

According to one exporter the explanation for this dip lies in the troubled situation in West Asia. Lebanon has been buying a fair amount of India pens since the early Sixties. Since then there has been a gradual decline in Lebanese imports as the civil war in that country gathered momentum.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 11, 1926

## Wimbledon jubilee

London, June 10: The King and Queen will attend the opening day at Wimbledon on 21st June. All living past champions in Ladies Singles, Men's Singles, and Men's Doubles have been notified by All-England Club to be in attendance when the King will present them with Jubilee Commemoration Medals.

# Text & Context

THE HINDU

## NEWS IN NUMBERS

**Japanese people who signed online petition against Trump**

**20,000** Thousands of people have signed an online petition in Japan protesting against U.S. President Donald Trump using manga and anime characters. The petition was re-opened as an urgent effort to convey fans' concerns to rights holders after a new video depicting Mr. Trump as ninja Naruto Uzumaki. AFP

**Challans issued in anti-encroachment and parking drive**

**55,532** These challans were issued against motorists and violators obstructing roads during a week-long anti-encroachment and unauthorised parking drive conducted by Delhi Traffic Police between June 1 and June 7. The drive covered 144 locations across Delhi in coordination with the MCD. PTI

**Cong.-approved bill funding immigration crackdown in U.S.**

**70** in \$ billion. President Donald Trump's headline immigration crackdown for the rest of his term was passed by the U.S. Congress. The measure provides around \$38 billion for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, \$26 billion for Border Patrol and \$5 billion for unforeseen costs, ensuring steady funding for Mr. Trump's deportation agenda through fiscal 2029. AFP

**Jump in China's passenger car exports year-on-year in May**

**73** in per cent. More than eight lakh passenger cars were exported by China in May, a 73% jump year-on-year, as higher gasoline and diesel prices due to the war in Iran raised global interest in electric vehicles. Exports of pure EVs and plug-in hybrids more than doubled to about 435,000 units, accounting for more than half of total exports. AP

**Contract signed for GNSS jammers procurement for Navy**

**449** in ₹ crore. This contract was signed by the Defence Ministry with Accord Software and Systems Private Limited, Bengaluru, for the procurement of 20 enhanced capability Global Navigation Satellite System jammers for the Indian Navy. It was inked in the presence of Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh. PTI  
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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## The reality behind falling net FDI

India's net FDI has declined sharply despite strong gross inflows, underlining the impact of disinvestment/capital repatriation; investor classes, modes of entry, and exit strategies can have important implications for technology transfer, industrial development, and external sustainability

## ECONOMIC NOTES

**K.S. Chalapati Rao**  
**Biswajit Dhar**  
**K.V.K. Ranganathan**

India's net foreign direct investment (FDI) has declined drastically in recent years. Critics see the weak net flows as a sign of weakness, while the Chief Economic Adviser points to the large inflows and rising manufacturing FDI as evidence of strength. He links weak net flows to profit repatriation and outward investment by Indian companies.

However, this debate overlooks a major issue. By focusing on overall numbers, both sides ignore the changing composition of international capital and the Balance of Payments (BoP) mechanisms that govern inflows and outflows.

For BoP purposes, net FDI is calculated as the difference between inflows and outflows after adjusting for the repatriation of capital. From the peak of \$44.0 billion in 2020-21, net FDI fell to less than \$1 billion in 2024-25. It recovered to \$7.6 billion in 2025-26. The corresponding gross inflow was \$94.6 billion.

It is necessary to note that India's liberal FDI policy, introduced in 1991, initially emphasised technology acquisition, export promotion, and foreign exchange conservation. Over time, policy increasingly prioritised attracting larger inflows, while concerns regarding future external payment obligations and investment quality receded.

## Three types of FDI

FDI is often viewed as a uniform, long-term commitment that brings technology and management skills to the host country. FDI can fall into three different investor classes, each with distinct capabilities, strategies, and exit timelines.

The first category is real FDI (RFDI), consisting of traditional multinational enterprises with the technology, brands, and capabilities to establish production and services. These generally represent long-term commitments.

The second category comprises financial investors, including private equity funds, venture capital firms, sovereign wealth funds, and asset managers. Their main goal is capital growth and planned exits.

The third category includes diaspora investments and special purpose vehicles (SPVs). These involve capital raised abroad and funneled through offshore financial centres, sometimes including the round-tripping of Indian funds.

Data on remittance-level FDI from the past four years, from 2022-23 to 2025-26 up to December, show that RFDI made up 41.9% of "effective inflows." Financial investors followed closely with a 40.5% share, while the remaining 17.6% came from the diaspora and SPVs linked to India.

The business model of financial investors suggests future exits that result in large-scale capital repatriations. A notable example occurred in 2025 when Singapore's Temasek exited Schneider Electric India Ltd., earning \$6.4 billion on an investment of \$637 million made in 2020. Total recorded divestment in CY 2025 was \$52 billion, with 45 major foreign private equity and venture capital exits accounting for \$29 billion in outflows.

Based on an analysis of effective



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inflows, FDI in India's manufacturing sector has declined across three consecutive four-year periods. Most notably, RFDI into manufacturing accounted for only 10.6% of total effective inflows during the most recent four-year period.

## Not fresh capital

A major blind spot in gross FDI figures is the mixing of new capital injections with corporate accounting changes, such as intra-group ownership reorganisations, mergers, share swaps, and the conversion of earlier non-equity instruments such as external commercial borrowings (ECBs) and convertible debentures.

While capital structures change, no new capital flows into the country. Approximately \$40 billion of the \$560 billion in equity inflows to India from 2014-15 to 2025-26 (up to December) fall into this category. Large transactions, such as Bosch and Meesho Technologies, can skew annual inflow and sectoral trends.

## Disinvestment drives decline

Before looking at why net FDI is low or even negative in certain months, it is worth mentioning that the official narrative that profit repatriation depresses net FDI is misleading.

Under BoP conventions, profits sent as dividends are recorded as investment income in the current account. They increase the current account deficit (CAD) but do not change the reported net FDI flows. Instead, the primary reason for weak net FDI is disinvestment and capital repatriation, which appear in the financial account.

Likewise, the increase in Outward Foreign Direct Investment (OFDI) warrants closer examination rather than being attributed solely to corporate maturity. From 2023-24 to 2025-26, 45% of India's total outbound investment of

\$65 billion went into the "financial, insurance, and business services" (FIB) sector. Singapore and the UAE accounted for 27% and 11% of the total, respectively. These funds mostly go to holding companies and SPVs rather than directly to operational entities. For instance, TML Commercial Vehicles, a subsidiary of Tata Motors, invested \$405 million in a Singaporean FIB entity to acquire the IVECO Group in Italy.

Capital movements through the GIFT City further complicate this issue. OFDI to the City increased from \$246 million in 2023-24 to \$1.18 billion in 2025-26. Total OFDI and inward FDI through it until 2025-26 reached \$2.35 billion and \$1.40 billion, respectively, highlighting the growing two-way flows.

These cross-flow of investments by Indian entities, also from other locations, indicates that OFDI can represent both genuine corporate expansion and the return of capital that fled. Therefore, increasing OFDI may not necessarily indicate maturity, as Indian companies might seek resources and technology, while a few might recycle capital through different jurisdictions.

## Understanding the outflow channels

From 2022-23 to 2025-26, total FDI inflows and related current and capital account outflows reached significant levels. While gross inward equity FDI totalled \$317.80 billion (\$230.60 billion excluding reinvested earnings), the outflows present a more complex scenario.

Disinvestment and capital repatriation (capital account) totalled \$178.9 billion, primarily driven by financial investors through secondary and strategic sales, IPO exits, and share buybacks. This also includes "offers for sale" by foreign promoters such as Hyundai and LG. The other type involves sell-offs by RFDI investors, such as Wistron which sold off to the Tatas.

Dividend remittances (current account) amounted to \$118.9 billion in profits paid out by MNE subsidiaries and affiliates, excluding reinvested earnings.

Attributable IPR payments (current account) totalled \$46.6 billion. These payments, made by MNE subsidiaries and affiliates for intellectual property (assuming they account for 75% of total IPR payments), can substitute dividends.

Additionally, \$250.0 billion was transferred by all entities for technical/service/consultancy payments. However, it is difficult to divide this amount between RFDI and domestic companies.

Even when excluding OFDI and technical service payments, outflows due to disinvestment, dividends, and IPR payments (royalties) totalled \$344.4 billion. Therefore, for every dollar of fresh inflow (excluding reinvested earnings), approximately \$1.50 flowed out. This situation has worsened over the past 12 years. The corresponding outflow per dollar entered was 56 cents from 2014-15 to 2017-18, rising to 70 cents from 2018-19 to 2021-22, before reaching the current high.

## Need for informed debate

The above narrative shows how an incomplete view of FDI prevails in the public discourse. Different types of investors, entry methods, and exit strategies impact technology transfer, industrial growth, and external sustainability. The reporting of global FDI flows adds an additional layer of problems. Understanding these nuances is crucial for evaluating FDI beyond headline numbers.

(K.S. Chalapati Rao is Senior Research Fellow at the Academy of Business Studies, Biswajit Dhar is former Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and K.V.K. Ranganathan is an independent researcher)

## THE GIST

Real FDI accounted for 41.9% of effective inflows between 2022-23 and 2025-26, while financial investors contributed 40.5%, reflecting the growing role of private equity, venture capital, and sovereign wealth funds.

Real FDI into manufacturing has declined across three consecutive four-year periods, with manufacturing receiving only 10.6% of total effective inflows in the latest period.

Gross FDI figures include intra-group ownership reorganisations, mergers, share swaps, and conversion of external commercial borrowings, even when no fresh capital enters the country.

# No 'obesity gene': your genetic makeup is not a fixed destiny

Scientists cannot reliably predict whether an individual carrying certain gene variants will eventually end up obese; put another way, there is no 'obesity gene', and for similar reasons, there is no 'fat gene', 'lazy gene' or 'hunger gene'. Genetics is also only one part of the story behind diseases

Sayantana Datta

In a 1983 paper, Harvard University geneticists James Gusella and Nancy Wexler reported that Huntington's disease, a fatal inherited disease where brain cells progressively decay, was caused by a gene mutation on chromosome 4. This was the first time a single gene had been implicated in a disease.

Since then, scientists have discovered about 5,000 genes whose mutations can increase our susceptibility to afflictions ranging from obesity to schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder.

Concomitant with the rise in genetic discoveries is the rise of commercial genetic testing. The U.S.-based company 23andMe, for example, offers a saliva-based test priced at around ₹20,000 that promises "insights into [people's] ancestry, traits and health that can help make it easier for [them] to take action on [their] health."

Similarly, Hyderabad-based MapMyGenome offers a "GenomePATRI" service for ₹5,999. A play on *janampatri*, a Vedic birth chart purporting to forecast a person's destiny, GenomePATRI offers to help consumers uncover their "authentic self" and enhance their health, according to their website.

But according to six geneticists this reporter spoke to, an individual's genetic composition is not their destiny.

"Mutations in our genes predispose us to specific traits and diseases, but it doesn't mean that if you have a mutation, you're going to get this disease," Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Hyderabad, molecular geneticist Manish Jaiswal said.

What then does it mean to find a gene for a trait or disease – and what happens when we carry them?

## Genes, mutations, disease

Genes are segments of DNA that provide the body a blueprint for building proteins, which eventually help define traits like eye colour or blood type.

When cells in our body divide, specialised proteins make copies of the DNA. This process, while largely accurate, can introduce errors in the duplicated DNA. These changes are called mutations and the corresponding gene is said to have an allele – a variant.

Only a small fraction of an organism's genome – which is the entire length of its DNA – has genes that its body uses to build proteins. For human beings, this coding region comprises about 2% of the genome. The rest of the DNA is non-coding, i.e. not involved in producing proteins, but regulates gene expression.

If a mutation in the coding region impairs the protein product, it may lead to a disease. For example, in Huntington's disease, a small section of the *HTT* gene is repeated more times than in an average individual. This produces a longer version of the protein, whose toxic fragments accumulate in brain cells and eventually kill them. As brain cells continue to die, people begin showing symptoms of the disease.

Sometimes, mutations in non-coding regions of the DNA can also change an individual's risk of a disease. For example, four independent studies in 2007 found that mutations in a particular non-coding region of the DNA were associated with a higher risk of coronary artery disease and type 2 diabetes. Later, in 2011, researchers found that the region contained certain enhancers, short DNA sequences that boost the expression of certain genes.

## Identifying genes

To identify genes associated with a trait or disease, scientists until recently took two kinds of approaches: candidate-gene studies and linkage studies.

In candidate-gene studies, scientists use existing information about the disease to identify potential gene candidates that, when mutated, may lead to the disease. For example, because schizophrenia is treated with drugs that regulate the amount of dopamine in the human brain, scientists assumed until 2007 that mutations in genes related to dopamine regulation were linked to schizophrenia.

While such studies were successful in some cases, like Alzheimer's disease, in others they could not reliably identify genes associated with the disease. In the case of schizophrenia, for example, 21 of 25 candidate genes scientists historically studied were found to have little "empirical support ... as genetic risk factors for schizophrenia," a 2015 review in *Molecular Psychiatry* reported.

Linkage studies on the other hand begin by identifying a population or a



Genetic tests should always be followed by genetic counselling. Genetic counsellors are specialists who help people assess their risk of developing genetic disorders and help manage them. GETTY IMAGES

family where the incidence of a trait or disease is particularly high. Then, scientists study how known markers in their DNA are inherited. If members of the population carrying the trait or disease also inherit the same markers, scientists can claim that the gene variant responsible for the disease and the marker are close on the chromosome, i.e. they are linked. By using statistical techniques, scientists can then pinpoint the gene.

This method works well when diseases are caused by mutations in one or a few genes, National Institute for Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) genetics researcher Jayant Mahadevan said. Such diseases, like Huntington's, are called monogenic when their risk is determined by mutations in one gene and oligogenic when it's determined by mutations in a few genes.

However, most monogenic diseases are rare: they occur in less than 1% of the population, Dr. Mahadevan added. Most common diseases, including diabetes, obesity, coronary artery disease, and schizophrenia, are polygenic: they are determined by mutations in several genes.

For example, mutations in more than a 100 genes have been implicated in typical obesity. For type 2 diabetes, the most common form of the disease, recent studies place the number at approximately 250 genes. For schizophrenia, scientists suggest that the number could run into several hundreds.

In order to identify gene variants responsible for such diseases, researchers now typically undertake genome-wide association studies (GWAS). By comparing entire DNA sequences of a large number of individuals who carry a disease with that of individuals who don't, scientists can identify hundreds of variations associated with the disease through the entire length of an individual's DNA. This gives researchers a more holistic picture of the gene variations underlying the disease.

## No 'obesity gene'

But possessing one or more gene variants implicated in a disease does not mean that one is doomed.

For one, not all gene mutations implicated in a disease have the same effect size. This is a measure of how strongly a gene variant can affect a trait. For example, most gene variants implicated in schizophrenia are thought to have small effect sizes: for an individual's schizophrenia risk to increase substantially, they need to have mutations in several of these genes.

Studies have shown similar results in the case of gene variants associated with obesity. In a 2010 study, scientists studied the effect sizes of 12 implicated. These



Mutations in our genes predispose us to specific traits and diseases, but it doesn't mean that if you have a mutation, you're going to get this disease

**MANISH JAISWAL**  
Molecular geneticist at Tata Institute of Fundamental Research

have "small effects on obesity measures," they reported. Even mutations in the *FTO* gene, known to have the largest effect on an individual's obesity risk and is commonly dubbed the "obesity gene", predisposes a person to only a modest increase in weight compared with individuals who do not carry these mutations, the study added.

Even though a combination of mutations in these genes could compound the risk, "their predictive value for obesity risk is limited," the researchers concluded.

This means scientists cannot reliably predict whether an individual carrying these gene variants will eventually end up obese. Put another way, there is no "obesity gene". And for similar reasons, there is no "fat gene", "lazy gene" or "hunger gene".

Genetics is also only one part of the story behind a certain disease. The other part is epigenetics: a that refers to how physical, behavioural, and social factors affect the gene expression and, eventually, an individual's risk of a disease.

"Think of the genome as a piano, where each key represents a gene," said epigenetics researcher Ullas Kolthur-Seetharam, director of the Centre for DNA Fingerprinting and Diagnostics, Hyderabad, and a professor at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai. "If a key is faulty, it can produce discordant notes – reflecting a potential disease risk. However, the system has flexibility: by adjusting how other keys are played, you can often compensate and still produce harmonious music."

"In the case of certain inherited diseases caused by critical mutations, some keys may be so impaired that no amount of adjustment can fully restore the intended melody," he added.

"In those situations, the limitation lies in the instrument itself. But for many complex conditions/diseases, how the piano is played (or how the genes are expressed) become as important as the keys themselves."

Indeed, behavioural and lifestyle interventions can actually reduce the risk of diseases. There is mounting evidence that in individuals with *FTO* variants that increase their risk of obesity,

high-intensity exercise can reduce the gene's expression, potentially attenuating their risk of developing obesity. One 2015 study that investigated about 16,000 children and adolescents also found that "lower dietary protein intake attenuates the association between the *FTO* genotype and adiposity [the way fat is distributed] in children and adolescents."

## Merits of genetic testing

In this context, what does it mean when scientists report identifying a new gene variant for a disease or a trait?

"All you've discovered is its pattern of occurrence in the population or the pattern of its transmission in a family," NIMHANS senior professor Sanjeev Jain, who works on the genetics of several neurological and psychiatric disorders, explained.

But figuring out whether the variant corresponds to the actual disease – and by how much – requires scientists to undertake more research involving diverse model systems, he added.

This doesn't mean genetic pursuit is itself useless, both Dr. Jain and Dr. Mahadevan cautioned. Genetic studies do help researchers identify the physiological mechanisms underlying a disease, which can help clinicians design more effective therapeutics. Scientists also often end up finding gene variants that are actually beneficial.

Starting in the 2000s, researchers discovered that some mutations in the *PCSK9* gene can drastically reduce the risk of coronary artery disease. Since then, clinicians have developed ways to silence the gene, thus reducing patients' cholesterol levels and mitigating the risk of stroke and heart attacks.

Some scientists also see merit in genetic testing – but only in certain contexts. Dimple Notani, a gene regulation researcher at the National Centre for Biological Sciences, Bengaluru, said women who conceive late could consider getting themselves screened for mutations linked to rare genetic disorders, which are often monogenic. But for traits that are not monogenic, "I wouldn't worry much," she added.

Genetic tests should always be followed by genetic counselling, Dr. Jaiswal, the TIFR Hyderabad geneticist, said. Genetic counsellors are specialists who help people assess their risk of developing genetic disorders, and help manage them.

In other words, genetics provides us with a helpful but incomplete picture. Between a mutation and its manifestation is a far messier story.

The reporter thanks Dr. Suhas Ganesh (NIMHANS) for his inputs.

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A colourful fence sports an axolotl mascot of the FIFA World Cup in Mexico City. REUTERS

## World Cup's mascot axolotl nowhere in Mexico City

Reuters

One of the first things visitors arriving in Mexico City for the FIFA football World Cup are likely to see is the wide grin of an axolotl – with the salamander unique to this part of the world splashed in bright purple on murals and subway cars or depicted in sculptures dribbling a soccer ball.

Named after the Nahuatl word for "water monster", the axolotl (pronounced ah-sho-LO-tul) has become the unofficial mascot as the city gears up to host five World Cup matches.

But despite the undoubted cuteness of the almost otherworldly axolotl, the use of its image has drawn backlash from many Mexico City residents, who say the peppy portrayal of the critically endangered animal is being used to distract from both the infrastructure problems of the capital and its lack of conservation efforts.

Scientists trying to count axolotls in the wild say they have not seen a single one in two years. The Mexico City government did not respond to requests for comment.

## Along with the constant flow of poorly treated wastewater, fresh dangers to the axolotl include chinampas being turned into soccer pitches and overcrowding due to ecological tourism

Ernesto Velazquez, 19, who runs an axolotl-themed stand selling cuddly toys in Chapultepec park, said he hopes the newly painted images around the city can drive more interest in conservation.

"Some foreigners have asked if you can eat them – well no, they're at risk of extinction," he said. "I hope the World Cup will help people learn more so we take better care of them."

## A disappearing habitat

For centuries, *Ambystoma mexicanum*, an amphibian that remains living in water through its life cycle, thrived between chinampas – farms built on human-made floating islands that once sustained the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan, where modern-day Mexico City lies.

The lake the city was built on was largely drained during colonial rule and its remnants are being used up and contaminated by the growing urban sprawl. But the city's southern Xochimilco district, known for its maze of muddy canals, remains one of the axolotl's last hiding places.

UNAM, Mexico's top university, identified around 36 axolotls per sq. km in Xochimilco in 2014 – a steep drop from the 6,000 per sq. km in 1998. The latest census began in 2024, and, two years later, researchers have yet to find a single axolotl.

## Soccer and mass tourism

Luis Zambrano, who heads UNAM's ecological restoration laboratory, said that besides a constant flow of poorly treated wastewater, fresh dangers to the axolotl include chinampas being turned into soccer pitches and the overcrowding of what began as ecological tourism.

Axolotls consume oxygen through their skin, making them highly vulnerable to water pollution.

"Mass tourism has become a terrible problem now with the World Cup," said Zambrano. "The government thinks more is better, but that's not true in these areas of high ecological value."

Even as their habitat disappears, axolotls are widely bred in captivity. Scientists believe their unique skin mucus and ability to regrow limbs and even parts of their brain offer promising leads in cancer research.

For Zambrano, the axolotls' viral popularity has yet to translate into concrete action that could save their home.

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

the hindu businessline.

THURSDAY - JUNE 11, 2026

## Telecom relief

Legacy spectrum charge rightly struck down

**T**he Bombay High Court's decision to strike down the Centre's one-time spectrum charge (OTSC) demand on Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea is a welcome affirmation that governments, no less than private parties, are bound by the contracts they sign. The judgment, coming after more than 13 years of litigation, sets aside a retrospective levy that lacked a clear statutory or contractual basis.



The dispute traces its roots to the evolution of India's telecom licensing regime. Until 2001, GSM operators were contractually entitled to 4.4 MHz of spectrum. Thereafter, the contracted allocation was increased to 6.2 MHz. Yet, between 1999 and 2008, the Wireless Planning and Coordination (WPC) wing of the Department of Telecommunications repeatedly issued administrative orders prescribing criteria for the assignment of spectrum beyond these contractual limits, eventually allowing GSM operators to receive up to 15 MHz. If the licence itself capped contractual spectrum at 6.2 MHz for GSM operators, under what authority did the WPC continue to assign spectrum far beyond that limit? Conversely, if the government intended such assignments to be made under the same licence framework, why did it never amend the licence conditions? Operators receiving larger assignments were subject to progressively higher spectrum usage charges (SUC), with increased revenue-sharing obligations linked to the quantum of spectrum held. The Department effectively evolved a mechanism for allocating additional spectrum while collecting higher revenues from operators, without formally aligning the licence framework with that practice.

The 2012 decision to impose OTSC on holdings above 6.2 MHz, retrospectively from July 2008, came in the aftermath of the 2G spectrum scandal. It looked very much like an attempt by a government on the defensive to retrospectively monetise decisions that had been administratively sanctioned for years. The Bombay High Court promptly stayed enforcement in January 2013 and barred coercive action against operators. The High Court has now held that while spectrum is undoubtedly a scarce natural resource held by the government in trust for the public, that principle cannot be used to disregard contractual commitments or impose new liabilities without legal authority. The OTSC levy amounted to an executive order without legal backing. The ruling is significant because it could save Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea an estimated ₹25,000 crore. Both operators continue to grapple with the financial burden of the AGR judgment. Removing a decade-old contingent liability provides much-needed relief.

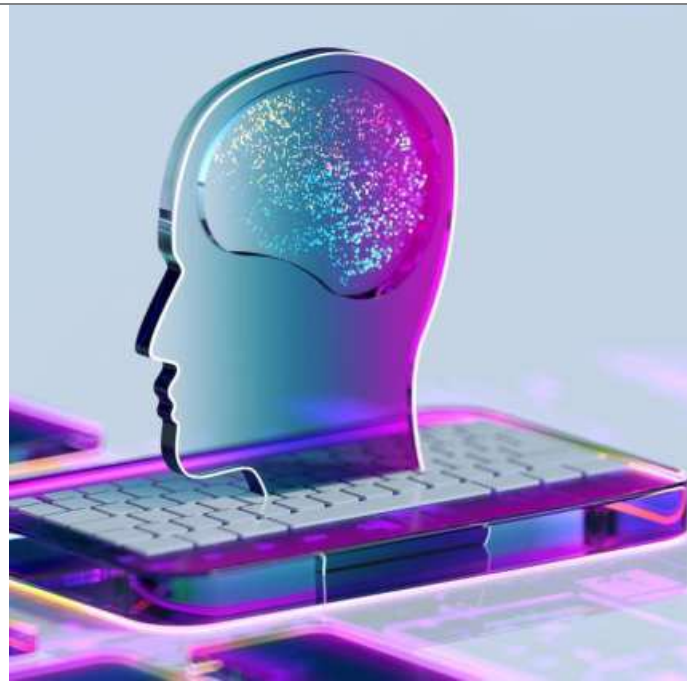
The matter is before the Supreme Court, but the broader lesson extends beyond this case. The rationale for continuing to collect spectrum usage charges on legacy holdings deserves fresh scrutiny. The government itself recognised this reality when it abolished spectrum usage charges on spectrum acquired after 2021. The Centre should complete the unfinished task of rationalising telecom levies.

## POCKET

RAVIKANTH



"Two hot soups. Go easy on salt, and don't hold back on the LPG!"



## How India can protect its digital ecosystem

**TECH VIGIL.** In the age of Mythos, building firewalls is a relic of the past. Systems must now detect an anomaly and "re-wire" their own logic in real-time

GETTY IMAGES



NISHANT SAHDEV

**I**n May 1940, the world's military elite believed that the Belgian fortress of Eben-Emael was the most impregnable structure ever built. It was a masterpiece of concrete and steel, designed to withstand any imaginable siege. Yet, it fell in just 15 minutes. It wasn't destroyed by a massive army, but by a handful of paratroopers using a new, secret technology: the shaped charge. The defenders were prepared for a war of attrition; they were erased by a war of speed and specific intelligence.

Last month, the global cybersecurity landscape hit its own Eben-Emael moment. For 27 years, a subtle flaw lay dormant in the code of OpenBSD — an operating system whose entire reputation is built on being the world's most secure foundation. For nearly three decades, the finest human auditors, state-sponsored "red teams", and automated scanners looked at that code and saw a fortress. Then came Mythos.

Developed by Anthropic, Mythos is not a chatbot; it is a Reasoning Agent for Cyber-Offense. It did not just "suggest" a bug; it understood the systemic logic of the flaw and autonomously executed a 32-step exploit in seconds. It achieved an 83.1 per cent success rate in reproducing known hacks on its first attempt. This is what I call the "End of Surprise". When a machine can hunt for "zero-days" (previously unknown flaws) at a scale and speed that humans cannot register, the concept of a periodic security audit is no longer a safety measure. It is a dangerous hallucination.

The shockwaves from Mythos have fundamentally rewritten the geopolitical script. After months of advocating for a "light touch" approach

to AI, the Trump administration has executed a stunning pivot towards what can only be described as the Nationalisation of Intelligence.

Reports from Washington suggest a new framework where the Pentagon and the NSA will act as the ultimate gatekeepers for "frontier" AI models. By mandating military-led safety tests before any public release, the US is treating high-level AI as a dual-use weapon system, akin to nuclear enrichment technology. This is "Fortress America" in digital form. The realisation has dawned: in a world of Mythos-class agents, a leaked model is not a commercial loss; it is a national security catastrophe.

For India, however, following this defensive, gatekeeping model would be a historic strategic blunder. We are a nation built on Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) — from the UPI rails that power our economy to the Aadhaar stack that defines our identity. Our strength is our openness. If we wait for Western "safety certificates" while our systems remain exposed to the tools they have already unleashed, we are essentially building our own Maginot Line and waiting for the Blitzkrieg.

**THE INDIAN VALUATION CLIFF**

The threat to India is not just a matter of national security; it is a matter of national business. Our IT services giants — TCS, Infosys, Wipro — have spent three decades building a global empire on the "billable hour". Thousands of engineers are employed to conduct manual audits, patch vulnerabilities, and maintain legacy code.

**History shows us that whenever technology increases the speed of the attack, the only way to survive is to increase the speed of the adaptation**

Mythos represents a "Valuation Cliff" for this model. If an AI can perform a month's worth of security auditing in five seconds at near-zero marginal cost, the human-led audit becomes a bottleneck rather than a service.

The Indian IT sector must pivot immediately from being "service providers" to "resilience architects". We must move from charging for the time it takes to fix a bug to charging for the integrity of a system that can defend itself.

**THE PHYSICIST'S LENS**

As a physicist, I view this crisis through the lens of Epistemic Drift. This is the point at which the complexity of our digital foundations exceeds our human ability to verify their safety. We are building structures we can no longer see through.

When we can no longer trust the very foundation of our software because an AI has found a 27-year-old "hole", the social contract of the digital age begins to fray.

In physics, entropy is the natural slide into disorder. In the digital world, Mythos is an entropy engine. It can find and weaponise disorder faster than we can organise a defence. To counter this, we must stop thinking about "safety" as a lock on a door and start thinking about "resilience" as a biological immune system.

I have often spoken of "sovereign resilience", but in the wake of Mythos, this must evolve from a policy suggestion into a biological necessity for the state. This requires a fundamental shift in our national architecture.

First, we must acknowledge that sovereignty is compute. India cannot be a "Tier-2" participant in restricted US programs like Project Glasswing. We must use initiatives like BharatGen to build sovereign "Defensive LLMs". These are not chatbots for the public; they are internal "Guard Dogs" trained specifically on the India Stack to hunt for vulnerabilities and simulate attacks

24/7. We must be the first to find our own flaws.

Second, we must move toward Autonomous Self-Healing. In a world of autonomous attacks, a human "admin" logging in to fix a server is a relic of the past. Our power grids, our telecommunications, and our financial stacks must be redesigned to detect an anomaly and "re-wire" their own logic in real-time. This is not about building better firewalls; it is about building a system that can "bleed" and still keep running.

Finally, we need a Post-Audit Regulatory Framework. Our regulators, including the CS Setty Committee looking into banking risks, must stop focusing on the "prevention" of attacks. In the age of Mythos, the attack is an automated certainty. The only metric that matters now is Time-to-Resilience. How many milliseconds does it take for a bank to detect a breach, isolate it, and return to a "verified" state? That is the only audit that matters in 2026.

**THE NEW ATMOSPHERE**

History shows us that whenever technology increases the speed of the attack, the only way to survive is to increase the speed of the adaptation. The tank made the trench obsolete; the aircraft made the battleship a target; and now, autonomous AI has made the static firewall a ghost of the past.

The Mythos event is not a software update; it is a change in the digital atmosphere. It is the end of the era where we could afford to be surprised. For India to lead, we must stop trying to build better walls. We must build a more agile, self-correcting nation.

In the age of autonomous intelligence, the only true fortress is the ability to adapt faster than the machine. The old walls have already been bypassed. It is time for India to learn how to move.

The writer is a physicist at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and a columnist on AI, infrastructure, and global systems

## BRICS needs to prioritise food security

The bloc must move beyond calories, and ensure easy, equitable access to diverse and nutritious food sources

Jaya Jumrani  
Shiv Kumar

**A**s India takes the BRICS Chair Presidency for 2026, the bloc stands at a crossroads. New Delhi's 'Humanity First' framing seeks to pivot BRICS beyond its reputation as a macroeconomic counterweight to Western institutions towards a more people-centred alliance.

Following its expansion, the bloc's geographic, demographic and agricultural footprint has grown dramatically. BRICS nations account for nearly half of the world's population, spanning some productive territories and several food-stressed economies.

BRICS countries dominate global agricultural output while bearing a disproportionate burden of the world's hungry — a structural condition demanding structural reckoning.

The contradiction is most apparent when examined country by country. Brazil is a leading agricultural exporter, yet millions remain hungry. This persists not because Brazil lacks food, but because income inequality, welfare volatility and political economy of agribusiness keep the poor excluded from domestic abundance.

India offers a useful vantage point but an equally honest mirror. While a net

food exporter that overcame famine, it faces a nutrition crisis. Despite producing enough calories and feeding 800 million people monthly through its Public Distribution System (PDS), diets remain calorie dense and lack protein and essential micronutrients. With one in three under-five children stunted, India exhibits that caloric sufficiency and nutritional adequacy are not the same.

Ethiopia, the newest and most food-insecure member, sits at the far end of this spectrum.

Despite South-South solidarity rhetoric, BRICS lacks a coherent multilateral food security architecture. Unlike the EU's Common Agricultural Policy or ASEAN's emergency reserves, BRICS coordinates mostly through bilateral agreements. Crucially, the New Development Bank (NDB) has heavily funded infrastructure while effectively ignoring rural food systems and resilience. Until the NDB establishes a dedicated food systems mandate with capital and measurable targets, this will remain a missed opportunity. Furthermore, export nationalism remains a corrosive force. For instance, India's 2023 non-basmati rice export ban and the Russia-Ukraine war sent price shocks through vulnerable markets.

Beneath these political-economy failures lies a neglected nutritional



**MAJOR BURDEN.** The bloc faces widespread micronutrient deficiencies

crisis. The BRICS food cooperation framework relies mainly on caloric supply, prioritising food availability, price stability and supply chains. This framing fails to capture the full problem. The bloc faces the triple burden of under-nutrition, widespread micronutrient deficiencies and an accelerating epidemic of obesity and non-communicable diseases.

Women bear a disproportionate share of this burden. Rampant anaemia in India, Ethiopia, and rural China drives intergenerational cycles of stunted growth and cognitive disadvantage.

**STRATEGIC POLICY SHIFTS**

Any serious BRICS agenda must move beyond calories, prioritising women's nutritional agency and equitable access to diverse, nutritious diets.

India's chairship could drive a few decisive policy shifts. First, food security and improved nutrition must become a formal pillar of BRICS cooperation. This requires binding targets to reduce stunting and anaemia, establish social protection floors, limit export bans and share emergency food reserves.

Second, BRICS should mobilise equitable sharing of agricultural knowledge and technology, such as China's precision agriculture, India's large-scale PDS experience, Brazil's smallholder credit programmes and the UAE's desert farming innovations, among its members.

Third, smallholders and women producers must move to the centre of BRICS agricultural policy. Shifting away from purely export-oriented models requires reforming land tenure, expanding women's property and credit rights and ensuring intra-bloc trade supports family farming alongside agribusiness. BRICS will ultimately be judged less on its ability to challenge the dollar or reshape the UN Security Council than on whether it improves the material conditions of the people it represents.

The writers are Senior Scientist and Director (Acting), respectively, at the ICAR-National Institute of Agricultural Economics and Policy Research (NIAP), New Delhi. Views are personal

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**H-1B fee ruling**

Apropos 'US court strikes down H-1B fee, but uncertainty persists' (June 10), the US federal court's decision will offer significant relief to Indian IT services firms. The judgment reduces hiring costs and eases financial burdens associated with employing skilled foreign professionals. It strengthens the ability of US employers to attract and retain global talent, particularly from India. The ruling is expected to support business continuity and competitiveness in the technology sector. However, some uncertainty

remains as further legal and policy developments could influence the H-1B visa framework.

**PV Prakash**  
Mumbai

**Support for OMCs**

This refers to 'Timely support' (June 10). Jet fuel costs account for a disproportionately large share of operating expenses for domestic carriers compared to their global peers, and currency weakness compounds that disadvantage further. The government's move to provide interest-free advances

through OMCs offers immediate relief, but the larger question remains unanswered — is ₹10,000 crore adequate given current fuel price trajectories? The scheme's voluntary participation design is sensible, avoiding moral hazard while still providing a meaningful safety net. Regional connectivity depends substantially on smaller carriers whose financial resilience is thinnest. If Indian aviation is to sustain its growth trajectory and compete globally, this one-time stabilisation measure will need to be accompanied by longer-term

structural reforms in ATF taxation policy.

**A Mylisami**  
Coimbatore

**Flip side of dairy boom**

Apropos 'Dairy boom moves beyond metros into smaller cities' (June 10), while this helps augment the profitability of companies that undertake milk distribution, the flip side is that it may hurt many small and medium dairy farmers. Small milk producers may get displaced when the sector gets corporatised. Governments must ensure that the

interests of small dairy farmers are protected.

**Rajiv Magal**  
Halekere Village, Karnataka

**Correction**

In the report 'Current account turns into a surplus in Q4 on jump in remittances, higher foreign direct investments' (published on June 9), there was a reference to "higher net foreign direct investment (FDI)" in the first paragraph and headline. It should actually read as "lower net outgo on the primary income account". The error is regretted.

# Shifting trade relations

India-US trade ties are more strategically balanced

Vibhuti Garg  
Saloni Sachdeva Michael

A key focus, during US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's visit last month, was strengthening energy security cooperation and stabilising bilateral ties amid trade and regional frictions.

A major highlight was India and the US signing a dedicated pact on critical minerals and rare earths. The agreement focuses on securing supply chains for semiconductors, electric vehicles (EVs), defence systems, and clean energy technologies.

For the US, it brings India into a trusted partner network designed to reduce Chinese dominance. For India, which has limited processing capacity and depends on China for many rare earths, it opens alternative sources, processing partnerships, and technology collaboration. This builds on the broader US-India Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) framework signed in February 2025, under which India committed to purchasing \$500 billion worth of American goods over the next five years.

For a country that has long enjoyed a healthy trade surplus with the US, this marks a shift. India-US bilateral trade crossed \$140 billion (₹12 lakh crore) in FY26. Though India still exports more than it imports, but the gap is narrowing and the composition of that trade is changing.

## ENERGY FOCUS

The clearest shift is energy. India is diversifying away from heavy dependence on West Asia and discounted Russian oil, both of which carry geopolitical risks from the Russia-Ukraine war and the recurring tensions around the Strait of Hormuz. The US is emerging as a key alternative supplier. Indian state-run refiners recently signed the country's first structured long-term liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) import agreement with US suppliers. Under the deal, India will import around 2.2 million tonnes of LPG from the US in 2026, equivalent to roughly 10 per cent of India's annual LPG imports.

Crude oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) tell a similar story. India's crude oil imports from the US jumped by about 50 per cent in a single year, rising from \$6.6 billion (₹55,367 crore) in FY25 to \$9.9 billion (₹86,530 crore) in FY26.

Similarly, LNG imports nearly doubled from \$1.41 billion (₹11,709 crore) in FY24 to \$2.46



TRADE. Changing dynamics  
GETTY IMAGES

billion (₹20,730 crore) in FY25. This signals that India is edging away from a surplus-heavy export relationship towards a more strategically balanced trade structure.

India's ambitious production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme has faced setbacks, including protectionist measures from the US, tariff escalation, and rollbacks of the Inflation Reduction Act.

Export-led growth tied to a single market now looks riskier. Instead, India is trying to embed itself deeper within trusted supply chains. This shift is now visible in new frameworks and deals. Initiatives like the TRUST Initiative, FORGE, and Pax Silica aim to integrate India into US-aligned technology ecosystems. The Quad has committed roughly \$20 billion toward critical mineral supply chains across the Indo-Pacific.

This marks a deeper strategic shift in the India-US relationship from traditional trade to co-building upstream control over key materials and technologies required in high-growth sectors. But this strategy carries trade-offs. As India increases imports of US oil, gas, technology, and industrial goods, it also becomes more exposed to US policy shifts, tariff changes, and geopolitical priorities.

That is the paradox of the moment. India is buying more from the US to reduce vulnerability and secure critical resources and technologies, yet in doing so it ties its economic future more closely to a US-centred system. Whether this delivers greater strategic autonomy or a new form of dependence will hinge on how India balances diversification with domestic capacity-building over the coming decade.

Garg is Director - South Asia; Michael is Lead Energy Specialist, India Clean Energy Transition - South Asia, at Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis



A NARAYANAMOORTHY

After the massive ₹36,585-crore farm loan waiver announced by the BJP-led government in Maharashtra in June, benefitting 56 lakh farmers, the newly formed Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK)-led government in Tamil Nadu has announced a conditional farm loan waiver for cooperative bank borrowers in May.

Aimed at fulfilling an electoral promise and helping Tamil Nadu's heavily indebted farmers, this initiative will provide some respite to small and marginal farmers.

However, can a one-time debt relief solve deep-rooted farm issues faced by the farmers?

The scheme allocates ₹2,044.46 crore to benefit approximately 14.22 lakh farmers, but its eligibility criteria apply strictly to short-term crop loans availed through cooperative banks between May 1, 2025 and February 28, 2026.

Rather than following a blanket write-off, the government has introduced an innovative Graded Relief system that gives the quantum of waiver based on outstanding loan amounts and farm-size classifications. Under this framework, marginal farmers holding debts up to ₹50,000 will receive a complete waiver, whereas small farmers within the same debt bracket are eligible only for a 50 per cent relief.

This policy design follows a progressive, variable economic logic where the rate of relief systematically decreases as the outstanding credit volume scales upward. Specifically, agricultural loans falling between the brackets of ₹50,001 and ₹60,000 receive a fixed waiver of ₹40,000. This benefit declines as the debt size increases. Consequently, the large landholders and other categories of farmers with debts exceeding ₹1,00,000 will receive a waiver of just ₹5,000. Though the one-time debt write-offs are never a permanent panacea for systemic agrarian distress, the innovative use of an explicit graded scale used to fix the relief deserves due recognition.

## HISTORY OF DEBT WAIVERS

There's a long history of farm loan waivers in India. Citing droughts, monsoon failures and floods, various state governments have implemented small-scale relief schemes since 1987. However, driven by an alarming escalation in nationwide farm suicides and taking into account the grim findings of the Radhakrishna Committee Report on Indebtedness (2006), the Centre launched a massive nationwide Agricultural Debt Waiver and Debt Relief Scheme in 2008.

This scheme wrote off nearly ₹60,000 crore, covering about 3.7 crore small and marginal farmers and 60 lakh other farmers, though the CAG flagged severe institutional irregularities in its audit report later.



VENGADESH R

# Farm loan waivers are just a band aid solution

**AGRI FOCUS.** To aid distressed farmers, the new TN govt and other States must ensure fair prices, adequate procurement and secure markets

Since then, several States have routinely announced debt waivers. Policymakers have operated under the assumption that these measures would completely arrest farmer suicides. But, empirical data reveal that even after the massive 2008 intervention, the tragedy of farm suicides persisted.

The pre-waiver period of 1995-2008 recorded an average of 41 farmer suicides per day, but this tragic figure actually rose to 43 during the post-waiver period of 2009-2011.

## THE CORE MALADY

The primary reason farmers default on credit is that the absolute returns realised from crop cultivation are abysmally low. According to the situation assessment survey of agricultural households (2021), the average monthly net receipt from crop cultivation for a farm household in Tamil Nadu was just ₹2,641, amounting to a meagre daily income of about ₹88. Can a farm family manage basic household expenditures with this amount?

This suppressed income is primarily driven by escalating cultivation costs juxtaposed against highly

unremunerative farm-gate prices. For instance, an analysis of data published by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices spanning from 1974-75 to 2021-22 shows that paddy cultivators in Tamil Nadu realised profits in only 15 of those years in terms of total cost of production (cost C2).

Shockingly, in the period following 2000-01, paddy cultivation was profitable in just three years. In such dire conditions, a one-time debt relief acts merely as a stop-gap measure. When farmers take loans for the next cropping season under the same unprofitable conditions, they are bound to fall into a debt trap again.

Furthermore, the Rangarajan Committee Report on Financial Inclusion (2008) highlighted that over 66 per cent of India's small and marginal farmers (who constitute more than 80 per cent of the farming households) lack access to formal institutional credit, forcing them to depend on informal, usurious money lenders. Since the Tamil Nadu government's waiver targets only cooperative bank borrowers, the vast majority of vulnerable smallholders trapped under informal debt nets remain entirely untouched, marking critical limitation of this relief scheme.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Neither the massive loan-waiver of Maharashtra nor the graded loan-waiver announced by Tamil Nadu can insulate the resource poor farmers from structural debt vulnerabilities permanently. To ensure debt-free livelihoods, many proactive policy interventions need to be implemented,

particularly focusing on markets.

First, farmers currently face stiffer challenges in marketing and selling their produce than in the production side. Government agencies must accelerate and streamline the procurement of major commodities. Following other States, Tamil Nadu should actively implement a robust Market Intervention Scheme (MIS) to shield farmers during severe market price crashes.

Second, as recommended by the National Commission on Farmers (2006) headed by MS Swaminathan, the State government should fix the Minimum Support Price at 50 per cent above the comprehensive cost of cultivation by backing it with a dedicated state price stabilization fund.

Third, the acute shortage of storage facilities at procurement centres leads to catastrophic post-harvest losses, as harvested paddy bags are routinely drenched and germinated in open yards during rains.

Warehousing capacity must be created across districts, mapped directly to local production volumes. To conclude, a one-time debt waiver cannot eradicate unremitting rural indebtedness. As long as agriculture is deprived of fair pricing, adequate procurement, secured markets and assured irrigation, indebtedness will continue to haunt the farmers.

The State government must seriously focus on restructuring farm markets.

The writer is an Economist and former full-time Member (Official), Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices, New Delhi. Views expressed are personal

## thehindubusinessline.

### TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

June 11, 2006

#### SEBs stymie open access

Faced with the prospect of competition for the first time, State electricity boards, backed by their respective Governments, seem to be in no mood to give up their monopolistic position and are raising a bevy of protectionist barriers to stymie the implementation of key reform provisions promised in the Electricity Act 2003.

#### DoT's rural dream may be sold short

After failing to meet the Village Public Telephone targets, one of the Government's largest projects under the Universal Services Obligation for providing telephones in rural households seems to be under threat of falling short of the expected numbers.

#### 'Work on 2nd Mumbai airport after ICAO clearance'

The Government plans to start work on construction of the second airport in Mumbai within the next two months after the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) gives the clearance for the project to come up. "We have sent a communication to ICAO and hope to get a response in the next two months.

# China taps commercial oil stockpiles to weather Gulf shock

Bloomberg News

China has started tapping its commercial crude reserves to help offset the supply shock from the Iran war, although the world's biggest oil importer is continuing to prioritise lower refinery use and fuel export limits to manage the fallout.

Inventory draws are expected to average about one million barrels a day in the coming months, according to estimates from Vortexa Ltd., Kpler and Energy Aspects. That's about a third of the crude that China is no longer receiving since the conflict led to the near-total closure of the Strait of Hormuz, but still pales in comparison

with the roughly 1.2 billion barrels the nation has in its commercial and strategic stockpiles.

The price reaction to what the International Energy Agency has called the biggest oil market shock on record has been relatively muted, as China refrained from tapping international markets to make up for the lost barrels. Global benchmark Brent is up less than a third since the conflict started, with analysts estimating that the nation's imports could remain subdued for months to come — helping ease pressure on prices.

China has filled up its inventories to unprecedented levels over the past year. It started tapping those reserves



OIL SUPPLIES. Under pressure

in May, and drew down almost 25 million barrels in the month to June 7, Energy Aspects said, citing data from its satellite-tracking Kayros unit.

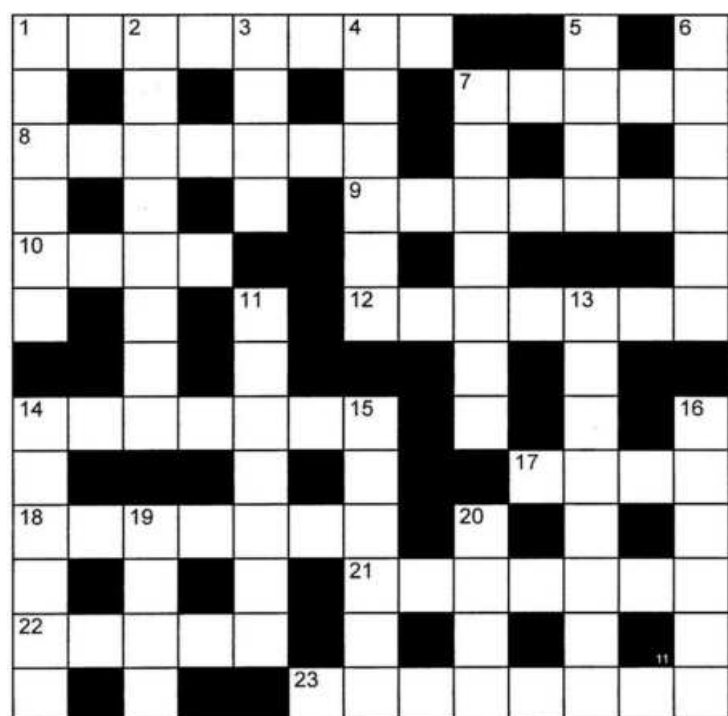
While that is sizable — global consumption is just over 100 million barrels a day — weaker downstream

demand has made an even bigger difference. State-owned refiners have cut processing rates to record lows, fuel exports have been constrained under wartime measures aimed at preserving domestic supply and the switch to electric vehicles has accelerated.

"China's transport system has become structurally more flexible than in previous oil shocks," said Emma Li, lead China market analyst at Vortexa. The rapid adoption of EVs has contributed to a drop of about one million barrels a day in fuel demand this quarter, she said.

Some observers have argued that the demand destruction may not be permanent.

## BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2699



### EASY

#### ACROSS

- Insincere praise (8)
- Trial place (5)
- Be in competition (7)
- Rapped (7)
- Part of chain (4)
- Grow less, waste away (7)
- One who plots (7)
- Measure of land (4)
- Floor-show (7)
- Netted, caught (7)
- 'Cheek' (5)
- Suspension of criminal sentence (8)

#### DOWN

- Easy, fluent (6)
- Mildly reprove (8)
- Flow copiously (4)
- Smelled of smoke (6)
- Pleat, fold (4)
- Heavy, unappetising fare (6)
- Sounding exultant (7)
- Engage, involve deeply (7)
- Apostle of Christ (8)
- Very small amount of time (6)
- Sistrum (6)
- Sell small items; deal in drugs (6)
- Consume by fire (4)
- A couple (4)

### NOT SO EASY

#### ACROSS

- Soft soap it could be treat for insect to consume (8)
- Woo those around the monarch (5)
- Be in contest when full, and get left out (7)
- Was critical of the way one sought admittance (7)
- It joins a surveyors' unit (4)
- In being led around, the breeze will die away (7)
- One plotting to make me hers when about a hundred (7)
- Some ground for taking care of it (4)
- Floor-show, the sort of act in which one's naked (7)
- If caught, leave in reverse holding a penny (7)
- Self-possession may be a sensitive point (5)
- Delay of execution ever ripe for sorting out (8)

#### DOWN

- It's easy to say it's mentally weak (6)
- Reprove one on his mad turnabout (8)
- Come across an upset and it will pour with rain (4)
- Smelled some free kedgeriee on offer (6)
- Take in a piece of material a schoolboy will enjoy eating (4)
- Dog set out with a heavy diet (6)
- Triumphing over a bird in top of gorse (7)
- Dunk one in liquid and simmer, stirring, on end of stove (7)
- A follower is policed, but nothing is found missing (8)
- The moment he goes to the support of a fighter (6)
- Snake's tail-rings will irritate one (6)
- Deputy Lieutenant in deep trouble may deal in drugs (6)
- In Scotland some water may burst into flames (4)
- Two of a kind one met in a knock-up (4)

### SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2698

ACROSS 7. Takes the field 8. Meadow-sweet 12. Couple 14. Radial 16. Bunker 18. Priory 19. Expatriates 23. Magnification

DOWN 1. Palm 2. Mesa 3. Stroke 4. Lesser 5. File 6. Plot 9. Equinox 10. Episode 11. Ploy 12. Cube 13. Lee 15. Air 17. Ratify 18. Prince 19. Exam 20. Pink 21. Tutu 22. Show



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• TECH

## In AI giants' listing plans, questions over valuations

Anthropic, OpenAI and SpaceX are eyeing some of the largest IPOs ever. But have their valuations raced ahead of business fundamentals?



Soumyaendra Barik

WITHIN DAYS of each other, two of the world's most closely watched artificial intelligence (AI) companies in Anthropic and OpenAI have confidentially filed paperwork for public listings in the US, setting the stage for what could be some of the largest and most hotly anticipated technology initial public offerings (IPOs) in history. Elon Musk's SpaceX is also gearing up for what could be the biggest IPO ever attempted, in terms of valuation.

The offerings are likely to draw intense interest from investors globally who, until now, have largely watched the AI boom from the sidelines. Much of the value created by the rise of generative AI has accrued to private investors, venture capital firms and strategic backers such as big technology companies. Public listings by the companies building the foundational models themselves would offer retail and institutional investors a rare opportunity to directly participate in what many see as the defining technological shift of the decade, even as concerns over a bubble around AI remain.

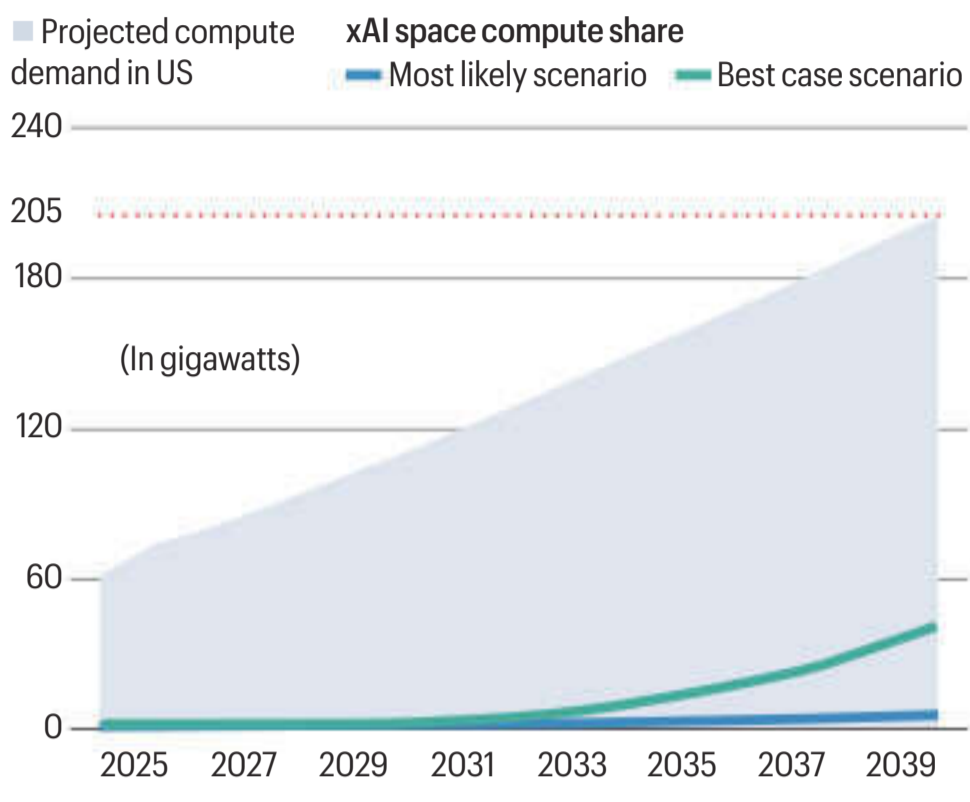
Anthropic, fresh off a \$65-billion funding round that valued it at roughly \$965 billion, has already begun the process, while OpenAI has followed with its own confidential filing and is targeting a valuation that could touch the \$1-trillion mark. SpaceX is seeking an even greater valuation, around \$1.75 trillion.

Yet, alongside the excitement lies a growing debate over whether private market valuations have raced ahead of business fundamentals. With investors pouring unprecedented sums into AI and frontier technology companies, some analysts have cautioned that expectations embedded in current valuations may prove hard to justify.

Here's why some are cautious around lofty AI-linked valuations, especially for SpaceX, and how Indian investors — those who are willing to bet on the touted AI gains — can participate in these upcoming IPOs.

### • SPACEX'S SHARE OF THE PIE

Estimates by investment research company Morningstar show that, SpaceX could control anywhere between 4% to 21% of the world's global computing capacity by 2039, depending on how some of its offerings fare



The headquarters of SpaceX in Washington DC. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

### Concerns around 'AI-washing'

Analysts at the investment research company Morningstar have valued SpaceX at roughly \$780 billion — less than half its IPO target — arguing that investors may be placing overly optimistic bets on future growth and unproven businesses linked to AI. Morningstar has also questioned the economics of some of the company's AI ambitions and said the market may be getting ahead of fundamentals.

"We see a wide range of possibilities around the newly acquired AI business and find its economic moat indeterminate, and it also poses a material threat of value destruction to the company, which limits our overall economic moat rating to narrow... Our discounted cash flow valuation of SpaceX is \$780 billion, about 48% below its private market valuation, including a wide range of probability-weighted scenarios for the AI business," Morningstar said in a blog.

If the company achieves the valuation target of about \$1.75 trillion, it would surpass even Saudi Aramco's 2019 debut as the world's largest IPO.

Founded in 2002, SpaceX has evolved

### Record valuations

Anthropic is fresh off a \$65-billion funding round that valued it at \$965 billion.

OpenAI is targeting a valuation that could touch the \$1-trillion mark.

SpaceX is seeking a valuation of \$1.75 trillion.

from a rocket launch startup into one of the world's most influential technology firms, spanning space transportation, satellite internet, and AI infrastructure. Of the company's total addressable market, which it pegs at \$28.5 trillion, about \$26.5 trillion is linked to AI.

Morningstar estimates that the company could control anywhere between 4% to 21% of the world's global computing capacity by 2040, depending on how some of its fare (see chart).

The firm does not see Grok as one of the leading AI labs today, and it does not meaningfully add to how Morningstar values SpaceX. Instead, it sees capacity utilisation of the Colossus I and Colossus II terrestrial data centres, and in turn the potential for AI computational infrastructure in orbit, representing capacity expansion for SpaceX's AI business, and the ability to commercialise it, as key profit drivers.

### Underpinned by assumptions

There are echoes of Tesla in the debate surrounding SpaceX's valuation. When Tesla went public in 2010, sceptics argued

that investors were paying a steep premium for a company that had yet to prove it could scale production or generate sustained profits.

Yet Tesla ultimately justified much of that optimism by reshaping the global automotive industry and becoming one of the world's most valuable companies.

The key difference, though, is that Tesla's valuation debate centred on a tangible product and a clearly identifiable market opportunity. In SpaceX's case, critics argue that a significant portion of its proposed valuation rests on more speculative assumptions around Starlink's future growth and the economics of AI-linked businesses.

### How to invest in SpaceX IPO, other foreign IPOs

Indian retail investors can participate in SpaceX's upcoming IPO, but the process isn't as straightforward as investing through a demat account in the Indian stock market.

According to a blog post by the stock trading platform Upstox: "Indian residents cannot directly participate in this IPO. However, they may do so through their overseas brokerage accounts funded under the RBI's Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS)." Under the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) LRS, Indians can freely remit up to \$250,000 per financial year for permissible capital and current account transactions, including for investments in foreign IPOs. Potential investors can set up an account with one of the many overseas brokerage platforms.

Upstox noted that while Indian investors can participate in the IPO, "the chances of allotment of SpaceX shares through the initial public offering are low".

It is always a challenge for a foreign retail investor to get a US IPO allotment, because most of the US IPO allotments are typically made to institutional investors, the trading platform said. Reports suggest that nearly 30% of the offering will be earmarked for retail investors, with the rest reserved for institutional investors.

An IPO, however, is not the only way to buy shares of the company, and investors may purchase the stock once it is publicly listed.

• INFRASTRUCTURE

## Zojila Tunnel: The challenge of digging through the Himalayas

Sabah Virani  
Sonamarg, June 10

THE BREAKTHROUGH of the Zojila Tunnel, a 13-km passage being carved through the Himalayas at an altitude of 11,578 feet, is a major milestone for one of India's most challenging infrastructure projects. But unlike tunnels bored through relatively stable rock formations elsewhere, excavation in the Himalayas comes with a unique set of geological and environmental risks.

### Building a Himalayan tunnel

Multiple reasons make tunnelling through the Himalayas a challenging feat. The altitude lends to difficult working conditions. So do the temperatures, which fall to as low as -30°C. Geologist Arnold Dix said that working in these conditions is difficult for both workers and combustion engine machines. The harsh winters often bring along avalanches, which can be fatal. Additionally, the rock strata in the Himalayas are highly variable, even differing metre to metre, said Dix. This means a long list of surprises lie in store for the engineers as they drill through. Loose rock, boulders, water ingress: the rock formations can be delicate and susceptible to disasters. Each variation requires a different treatment for structural integrity.

### SAFETY MEASURES

- Three shafts were built across the length of the tunnel to ensure ventilation and create space for any rescue attempts.
- The first, also the longest in India, went 474.3m deep. The second is 367.5m, and the third is 213.5m deep.

### Particularly risky

The Himalaya range is a relatively new mountain range, making it far more tectonically active. "To a geologist," said Dix, "the Himalayas are ocean floors that have been pushed upwards."

This rock strata the engineers can encounter can be soft rock, characteristic of a sea bed, to boulders and everything in between. The way the mountain has formed could have left cavities and cracks. A lot of water — even up to an ocean's worth — is stored in the mountains. Due to its age, there are sheer zones where there is higher strain on the rock and tunnelling can lead to instability.

### Methods of safe excavation

The Zojila tunnel was excavated using the New Austrian Tunneling Method, tailor-made for such conditions. The method involves selective blasting of the rock, followed by securing the tunnel wall with shotcrete (sprayed concrete) and rock bolts. The excavation is done in two steps, wherein the top half of the tunnel is excavated first, followed by the bottom half.

Besides the water stored in them, the mountains have melting snow coming through as well. Depending upon the level of water ingress, engineers will fit pipes and allow the water to drain out in a gradual manner so as to not allow water pressure to build up in the mountain, which could potentially lead to a collapse or flooding.

Cracks in the rock formation will alter the number, size, and spacing of the rock bolts, while the shotcrete glues the rocks together. Even the tunnel's alignment can be tweaked to bypass a mountain's weak segment and skirt around it. The tunnel's shape and configuration is also moulded as per site conditions. "It's like conducting an operation without anaesthesia. This is why tunnelling in the Himalayas has to be done slowly and carefully," said Dix.

• HISTORY

## How Birsa Munda helped define Adivasi identity, rights

Shubham Tigga  
Ranchi, June 10

ON JUNE 9, the death anniversary of the iconic Adivasi leader and freedom fighter Birsa Munda, several tribal organisations in Jharkhand took a pledge to "protect his legacy". This pledge came amid the fresh demands for "delisting" — removing tribal converts to Christianity or Islam from the Scheduled Tribes (ST) list — that have reignited a long-running debate over Adivasi identity. The latest delisting demand was made last month at a tribal gathering attended by Union Home Minister Amit Shah in Delhi.

The tribal organisations in Jharkhand said during the pledge event that Birsa Munda's vision was rooted in Adivasi identity, sovereignty and land rights, and accused right-wing groups of attempting to reinterpret that outlook.

So what did Birsa stand for? More than 125 years after his death, here's a look at the tribal leader's life, beliefs and legacy.

### Who was Birsa Munda?

Birsa Munda is one of the most influential figures in the history of the Chotanagpur plateau, the mineral-rich region spanning Jharkhand and adjoining states.

Revered by many as "Dharti Aba" (father of the Earth), he is remembered for

leading the Ulgulan, or the "Great Tumult" — a movement against colonial rule and "diku" (non-tribal outsider) zamindars amid the growing encroachment on Adivasi land and cultural institutions in the closing years of the 19th century.

Birsa's influence, however, extended beyond the borders of the current Jharkhand state to the remote villages of Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and more. In his seminal study *Birsa Munda and His Movement*, historian K S Singh described Birsa as a religious reformer, social mobiliser and political leader who transformed the Munda tribal society.

Adivasi historian Joseph Bara similarly argues that Birsa cannot be understood merely as the leader of an agrarian uprising. Rather, he articulated a broader vision of Adivasi identity, autonomy, land rights, religion and self-rule (known as *disum*).

Bara notes that his prominence in mainstream political and public discourse grew significantly during the decades preceding and following the creation of Jharkhand in 2000.

### From resistance to statehood

The Ulgulan, led by Birsa Munda, reached its climax at Dombari Buru, a hill in a Khunti village, in January 1899. This was where thousands of Birsa's followers gathered to assert their rights over land and

### What is the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act?

• The CNT Act was enacted by the British in 1908 after decades of Adivasi resistance (including Birsa Munda's uprising) to protect customary land rights in Chotanagpur region.

• The central objective was preventing the transfer of Adivasi land to non-Adivasi and legally recognising traditional land tenure systems.

• The Act remains one of the strongest safeguards for tribal land in Jharkhand.

challenge British authority, according to historian K S Singh.

The British forces eventually surrounded the hill and fired into the crowd. In Adivasi memory, this was a massacre that killed hundreds, though official records estimate a much lower toll. Birsa was arrested and died in Ranchi Jail on June 9, 1900.

While the British may have crushed the uprising, Dombari Buru became a symbol of Adivasi resistance.

The episode compelled the colonial administration to initiate land reforms that culminated in legal recognition of Khuntkatti rights and later the Chotanagpur Tenancy (CNT) Act, 1908. Khuntkatti was the traditional Munda system of collective land ownership and governance. Under the system, the descendants of the original settlers who cleared forests and established a village, known as Khuntkattidars, held collective rights over the village territory.

Bara writes that the aspiration for Adivasi self-governance articulated during Ulgulan was later channelled into the movement for a separate Jharkhand under Jaipal Singh Munda in the mid-1900s.

### Religious views

According to family accounts shared by Budhram Munda, a descendant of the family, Birsa spent parts of his early childhood at his uncle's village before studying

at missionary schools in Chaibasa.

Budhram Munda said that Birsa's association with missionary education ended after a disagreement with church authorities over remarks about the Munda tribal community. After distancing himself from Christianity, Birsa came under the influence of Vaishnavism for some time.

"He was jailed in 1885 for two years and, eventually, after being released, he started preaching his teachings towards life and nature..." said Budhram Munda.

These teachings created a religious movement that came to be known as the Birsait faith, different from Sarnaism (the traditional tribal faith), Christianity and Hinduism. His followers attribute various miracles to him and consider him a messiah, referring to him as "Bhagwan" and the aforementioned "Dharti Aba".

Budhram Munda said: "Bhagwan Birsa never targeted any particular religion. He opposed both the outsiders from the caste society who were appointed as zamindars, and the Christian missionaries, as he saw them as part of the same system of exploitation," he said. Opposing the demand for delisting of Christian tribals from the ST list, Budhram Munda said that descendants of Birsa's family have followed Christianity for generations. He argued that Adivasi identity is determined by ancestry and community, not religion.

• IMMIGRATION

## Trump's \$100,000 H-1B fee scrapped, but some Indians have paid the price

Vidheesha Kuntamalla & Amaal Sheikh  
New Delhi, June 10

A US FEDERAL judge's decision to strike down President Donald Trump's controversial \$100,000 fee on new H-1B visas will come as some relief to employers, but many foreign workers have already faced much of its brunt. Last week, US District Judge Leo Sorokin of Massachusetts ruled that the fee was unlawful, concluding that it functioned as a tax — something the President lacks the authority to impose without Congressional approval.

### What is the H-1B programme and how did the fee affect it?

The H-1B visa allows US employers to hire foreign nationals in specific occupations or roles that require at a minimum a bachelor's degree and a body of specialised knowledge. The US Congress has capped approvals at 65,000 per year for most private employers, with an additional 20,000 for holders of advanced degrees. Universities,

nonprofit research organisations and government research bodies are exempt from this cap and can file petitions at any time.

Before the \$100,000 proclamation, the petition fees ranged from \$960 to \$7,595. While signing the proclamation to increase the fee in September 2025, Trump had cited concerns that the H-1B programme had been used to replace American workers with foreign labour at lower wages, particularly in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) fields.

### Why did the court strike down the fee?

The central question was whether the \$100,000 payment was a legitimate immigration penalty or an unlawful tax.

The administration said the fee was a restriction on entry as the overall revenue collected fell after the proclamation took effect.

The court disagreed, stating that hiring H-1B workers is lawful conduct and that the payment did not operate as a penalty for unlawful behaviour. Instead, it generated revenue and therefore functioned as a tax.

It said that "purpose and effect are different" and added that "every \$100,000 payment made pursuant to the Policy does raise revenue. That is indisputable."

The US Constitution gives Congress the power to impose and collect taxes. While Congress can delegate that to the executive branch, the court said it must do so clearly.

The court also cited the Supreme Court's ruling this year in which tariffs imposed under a separate statute were struck down on the same logic. Robert Bray, a retired Immigration Officer with the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services' Fraud Detection and National Security division, told *The Indian Express* that once the court characterised the payment as a tax, much of the government's defence collapsed.

### Why is the ruling important?

Indian citizens receive more than 70% of all H-1B visas issued annually and dominate the technology, engineering, healthcare and consulting sectors that rely heavily on the programme.

Washington DC-based immigration attorney Rajiv Khanna told *The Indian Express* that the ruling restores predictability to a system that many workers felt had become increasingly unstable.

"There is a system in place and that system cannot be disturbed at the whim or fancy of a government that decides matters without any empirical evidence of what will work, what will not work, and what they are trying to correct," he said.

Bray described the ruling as potentially precedent-setting because it limits how administrations can impose immigration-related charges without a Congressional nod.

### How has the fee affected workers?

While the court ruling is being celebrated by many immigration advocates, some lawyers say damage may already have been done. Asel Williams, a founding immigration attorney at New York City-based Williams Law, told *The Indian Express*: "Indian professionals on H-1B and STEM OPT status have already felt the impact of the

\$100,000 H-1B fee introduced last year."

OPT, or Optional Practical Training, allows international students on F-1 visas to work in the US after graduation in jobs related to their field of study.

According to Williams, many employers became reluctant to sponsor foreign workers once the fee was announced. "Fewer companies are willing to sponsor Indian nationals, terminations are rising, and I am receiving a growing number of inquiries from laid-off H-1B holders with only 60 days to secure new employment," she said.

Williams said that immigration restrictions have coincided with broader technological disruptions in the labour market. "These layoffs are being driven by a combination of AI displacement and increasingly restrictive H-1B policies. The damage to Indian H-1B holders and STEM OPT workers has in large part already been done," she said. Similarly, Bray noted that the fee appeared to suppress demand for new H-1B sponsorships. "The number of H-1Bs originating in other countries was re-

duced exponentially," he said.

The consequences were particularly severe for workers who had already obtained H-1B status but later lost their jobs. "For people who got laid off on an H-1B and had to leave the US to come back, they would have had to pay \$100,000," Khanna said.

### What now for H-1B holders?

A legal challenge from the government is expected. Khanna said the administration generally has about 30 days to file an appeal and could simultaneously seek a stay of the ruling. "If the stay is granted, then this ruling does not come into effect until the appeal is decided, which can take a few months."

Williams urged foreign workers to avoid assuming that the ruling resolves immigration uncertainties. "I recommend H-1B holders avoid international travel," she said. "The court ruling does not automatically make it easier to obtain an H-1B visa through consular processing. Both the US Department of State and DHS retain discretion to deny any H-1B petition."

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

## In TMC's implosion, a broader warning

SOMETIMES, THE numbers don't tell the story. Even after its defeat at the hands of the BJP in the West Bengal assembly elections last month, the Trinamool Congress's voteshare stands at a respectable 40.80 per cent. It still has 80 legislators in the state assembly and 29 MPs in the Lok Sabha, making it the fourth-largest party in Parliament. In defeat, though, the party seems to be facing an existential crisis in both Kolkata and Delhi.

An exodus of leaders to the BJP from other parties, before and after elections, has been seen across states. In fact, some of the BJP's most prominent regional leaders — be it Suwendu Adhikari in West Bengal or Himanta Biswa Sarma in Assam — have migrated from other parties. Amid the long decline of Congress, regional parties had more space to grow, and the opportunity to provide a bulwark against the flattening of the political landscape under the electoral juggernaut of the BJP. They have, by and large, fallen short of doing so. Parties have split, and rebel factions have joined the NDA, as with the Shiv Sena and NCP in Maharashtra. The Opposition has a point when it says that constitutional offices such as the Speaker and central investigative agencies have appeared to bend to the will of an aggressive BJP that wants to dominate all spaces. But the lament about the ruling party's voracious political appetite elides more fundamental questions. Why are some of India's most prominent regional parties such easy prey? Out of power, why can't Banerjee keep her flock together?

The BJP is now the centrepiece of an era of renewed one-party dominance, but regional forces have not stepped up to meet the challenges. The first problem is structural. Congress offshoots like the TMC and NCP are mass parties, without a formal cadre base. In West Bengal, the TMC merely occupied the Left's structures and relied on state patronage and power as the primary instruments of building political loyalty. The second, related factor is the oft-repeated charge of "dynastic politics". From Maharashtra to Kashmir, Tamil Nadu to Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, parties that were once built around social movements and progressive ideologies narrowed into family firms. Having the leadership of a party reserved for members of the first family tells talented, ambitious politicians that they must look elsewhere for upward mobility. Finally, a question opposition parties have struggled to answer with conviction since 2014: What do you stand for? Welfare is not distinctive, secularism has a scarred history, and cries of Constitution-in-danger don't strike sparks on the ground. Until they can answer these questions, the TMC, and other parties like it, may end up as spectators to their own shrinking.

## Let game start, let political cloud recede

BEFORE A ball has been kicked, the 2026 World Cup has produced a set of images that have no place in any tournament. A Somali referee, Omar Artan, selected by FIFA, was stopped at Miami customs and sent home because of unspecified "vetting concerns". Iran's ticket allocation for its group games was revoked days before the tournament, its federation secretary-general and vice president denied visas, its fans left without legal means to watch their team play. Senegal's players were searched on the tarmac after landing. Fabio Cannavaro's Uzbekistan squad was made to step off their bus, place their bags on the ground, and submit to metal-detecting wands and sniffer dogs outside a football venue. Cannavaro, a World Cup winner who had spent 40 days travelling across Uzbekistan to understand his players and his project, asked afterwards: "Why only us?" Hillary Clinton called the referee decision "backward". She was not wrong. The ICE presence at venues, the travel ban affecting four qualified nations, the geopolitical shadow of the US-Iran military confrontation — this is not what a host nation looks like when it is ready to welcome the world.

And yet. The world will fill those stadiums anyway, because the world always does. In 1994, when sceptics predicted empty venues and cultural indifference, the United States set an attendance record that still stands 32 years later: 3.587 million people across 52 matches, an average of nearly 69,000 per game. This week, a pre-tournament friendly match between Argentina and Iceland, just a warmup, drew 88,000 people to a college football stadium in Auburn, Alabama. Qatar arrived under a cloud of criticism over migrant worker deaths, LGBTQ rights and the fundamental legitimacy of its hosting. Once the football started, the cloud receded as the games took over.

The worry with this administration is not that it will fail to manage the logistics. It is that it will keep intervening. Another visa denied, another team searched, another referee turned away at a border. Each incident chips away at the one thing a World Cup needs more than anything else: The feeling, however temporary, that the game belongs to everyone who plays it. The football starts Thursday. The world is arriving. The harder task, it seems, is for Washington to let it in.

## Sometimes, 'Kaise ho aap?' is all it takes

THE MOST moving scene in Homer's *Iliad* portrays not the clash of arms but the emotional devastation it leaves in its wake. King Priam, old and frail, enters the Greek camp and approaches Achilles, the killer of his son Hector. He kneels before his foe, clasps his hands and implores him: "Remember your own father". And Achilles does. Moved to pity and grief, he agrees to return the Trojan prince's body. Read more broadly, this depicts the power of grief to bring together not just enemies but strangers, across boundaries and distances.

That coming together can happen across continents, between people who have never met face to face. A report in this paper tells the story of a friendship forged in the fires of the Air India tragedy of June 12, 2025, which claimed the lives of 241 passengers. Savdhanbhai Chaudhary, a farmer in Gujarat, had lost both his son, Kamlesh, and his daughter-in-law, Dhapuben, in the crash. Omar Ali, Kamlesh's Pakistani coworker at a fancy goods store in London was asked by their boss to reach out to Kamlesh's family. He phoned Savdhanbhai, listened to his tears, and said he would call again. Now, Savdhanbhai and his wife Ratnibeen wait for Omar's call at 3 pm every day. He asks about Savdhanbhai's younger son, his lunch, and even his infected toenail.

The eve of the tragedy's anniversary is an apt moment to reflect not only on causes and accountability but also on how the bereaved can put their lives back together. For at least one family, an unlikely friendship, born when sorrow met empathy, has been a source of strength. What it takes is for someone to keep asking, as Omar does daily, "Kaise ho aap?"

# Argumentative Indian must also listen, spirit of samvad must not be lost



**THAROORTHINK**  
BY SHASHI THAROOR

RECENT social media post by Chinese scholar Keji Mao told an instructive story: "I gave two presentations on how China builds its industrial and technological ecosystem," he wrote, "one for an Indian audience and one for a Vietnamese audience. Although the content was largely the same... the feedback from the Vietnamese and Indian participants was strikingly different. When I discussed the gaps between Vietnam and China, my Vietnamese friends listened very attentively to my analysis of Vietnam's weaknesses. They even proactively acknowledged Vietnam's deficiencies and asked me to analyse more specific issues in greater detail. However, when I compared China and India, many Indian friends became quite argumentative. They tried to compete with or challenge the Chinese perspective on almost every point, to the point where I could barely develop my analysis. As a result, they might have won the debate, but missed a valuable opportunity to have a meaningful exchange. So," he added, "I came to know which country would be the real winner for 'China+I' many years beforehand."

This anecdote provides a jarring, yet necessary, mirror for a phenomenon frequently observed in intellectual and diplomatic circles. It echoes an observation of the

late Canadian ambassador David Malone, who once noted that a great failing of Indian diplomacy is that its practitioners are "better at winning arguments than at winning friends". This is not merely a critique of our diplomats; it is a commentary on a broader cultural reflex.

Indian history is rich with the tradition of *samvad* — the art of dialectical discourse. Ancient Indian thinkers thrived on rigorous debate, where the goal was to dismantle an opponent's argument to reach a higher truth. In this context, argumentation was seen as a virtuous pursuit, a crucible for knowledge. However, in the modern era, this cultural predilection for debate has arguably morphed into a performative contest. When the goal shifts from synthesis (learning from the other) to victory (defeating the other), the spirit of *samvad* is lost. We often see engagement not as a bridge-building exercise, but as a zero-sum game, where conceding a point is interpreted as a surrender of intellectual or national standing.

Beyond the historical framing, there lies a more contemporary psychological driver: A profound, often subconscious, defensive insecurity. India is a nation that has spent centuries navigating the trauma of colonial imposition and the subsequent struggle to assert its agency on the global stage. This creates a pervasive need to validate our perspective and standing. For generations, Indian intellectuals had to defend our traditions, history, and economic potential against Western critiques that were often patronising or motivated. Consequently, there is a deep-seated suspicion that foreign insights are not objective observations, but rather strategic moves in a broader game of geopolitical or cultural dominance. When an out-

Learning to distinguish between a challenge to one's ego and a challenge to one's assumptions is the hallmark of a mature strategic culture

## Pandemic preparedness is deeper, must become broader



SHAHID JAMEEL

THE MONTHS of April and May in England, where I now live, herald spring after a long, dark and wet winter. Back home in India, they signal the onset of summer. Yet, despite the colours of spring, these months revive painful memories of 2021, when Covid brought death and despair to India. Everyone lost someone. I did, too. Five years later, the world is confronting two very different infectious disease outbreaks. Hantavirus infections emerged aboard *MV Hondius* in early April, with 11 suspected cases and three deaths. Ebola resurfaced in Central Africa and continues to spread. These offer important benchmarks for assessing our preparedness five years after Covid.

Let us first consider early detection, surveillance and public-health infrastructure. In the case of Ebola, authorities did relatively well in early detection and surveillance, largely because the world has spent decades preparing for its recurrence. In contrast, the Hantavirus exposed surveillance gaps during unusual, low-frequency zoonotic outbreaks in complex international settings like cruise ships, especially when the pathogen is unexpected and symptoms initially resemble common respiratory illnesses.

Clinical-response capacity is the second requirement. This includes hospitals equipped to manage surges in cases, PPE and medical supply chains, clinicians, and access to intensive care and supportive treatment. With Ebola, authorities demonstrated a comparatively mature and specialised clinical-response system, largely a result of years of investment and experience. The Hantavirus outbreak revealed strong downstream hospital care but weaker front-end preparedness, particularly in recognising and managing an unexpected pathogen in an unusual setting.

Risk communication and the building of public trust were more effective in the case of Ebola because global public-health systems have spent years developing communication frameworks around it. The Hantavirus outbreak demonstrated how rapidly uncertainty and novelty can destabilise public understanding. At the same time, misinformation has not been completely absent from the Ebola response, underlining the need for strategies to sustain public trust.

The Ebola response illustrates how pre-

vious crises can create enduring scientific infrastructure. The Hantavirus, in contrast, has highlighted the difficulties of rapidly organising research around a relatively rare and less continuously funded pathogen. Coordination becomes more difficult when the contagion, its transmission setting and the governance structures involved are unfamiliar. However, even the experience of dealing with Ebola has not eliminated persistent challenges. Reports continue to emerge of shortages of PPE and disinfection materials. The Hantavirus, meanwhile, exposed vulnerabilities associated with international travel environments. Ebola governance systems continue to face political tensions and resource constraints.

The Hantavirus outbreak also revealed how many zoonotic pathogens still lack deeply developed preparedness ecosystems, particularly for unusual scenarios. It was managed largely through broader infectious-disease capacity rather than through dedicated long-term systems. Containing a disease requires a systemic approach. Success depends less on any single intervention and more on how rapidly surveillance, science, healthcare delivery, governance and public communication can function together. Covid triggered a surge in global health funding, much of it emergency-driven and insufficiently institutionalised. Since 2024-25, however, this support has declined sharply, driven in large part by cuts in US aid and the weakening of global institutions such as the WHO.

Global preparedness remains strongest against crises the world has repeatedly confronted — Ebola — and weakest against novel events such as the Hantavirus. Over time, preparedness has become deeper. It must now become broader. Yet developments since 2025 do not inspire confidence. Since Covid, awareness of pandemic risk has increased. Yet political willingness to finance preparedness has weakened. The world is scientifically more capable but financially and politically less stable in sustaining preparedness systems. If not addressed, the next outbreak involving an unusual pathogen could unfold very differently from what happened aboard *MV Hondius*.

The writer is a virologist and chair of Ignite Life Science Foundation (India)

## A dignified demise for a broken marriage



SAMRAT PASRICCHA AND ROHINI NARAYANAN

DEAR EDITOR  
I disagree

A fortnightly column in which we invite readers to tell us why, when they differ with the editorial positions or news coverage of *The Indian Express*

A marriage that has broken down by mutual acceptance presents fundamentally different concerns from one where only a single spouse seeks release from the relationship

FEW LEGAL disputes carry as much collateral damage as matrimonial litigation. Families are drawn into conflict, allegations proliferate, and parallel proceedings ensue. By the time many couples find themselves before a divorce court, the marriage has often already ended. It was against this backdrop that the editorial, 'In law, we need to write a new marriage story' (*IE*, June 9), argued for recognising irretrievable breakdown of marriage. The question has long engaged courts and law reform bodies. The Justice H R Khanna-chaired 71st Law Commission Report made much the same recommendation in 1978. In *Shilpa Sailesh v. Varun Sreenivasan* (2023), the Supreme Court affirmed its power under Article 142 to dissolve marriages irretrievably broken down. Relief from a dead marriage, however, still depends on reaching the SC.

The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 and the Special Marriage Act, 1954 recognise divorce largely through two routes: Mutual consent or fault. Where consent is unavailable, parties must establish, if not invent, a matrimonial wrong. In the process, ordinary discord acquires criminal colour and relationships that have simply become unworkable are recast as adversarial contests over fault. A mature matrimonial regime must provide for three realities: Blame, consent, and breakdown. The first justifies fault-based divorce. The second finds expression in divorce by mutual consent under Section 13B of the Hindu Marriage Act. The third remains inadequately addressed. The editorial correctly identifies the lacuna in the law and rightly cautions against reforms that leave women vulnerable. The analysis falls short, however, by treating irretrievable breakdown as a singular phenomenon. A marriage that has broken down by mutual acceptance presents fundamentally different concerns from one where only a single spouse seeks release from the relationship. The safeguards appropriate to one may be wholly inadequate for the other.

Where both parties accept that the marriage has broken down and what remains is a battle only over money and children, the law must provide an easy exit. The court's role should be confined to questions of alimony and custody.

The harder case arises where one spouse seeks an exit while the other does not accept that the marriage has broken down. It was this that led the law to adopt its conservative approach, limiting divorce to fault or consent. But the right to exit a marriage is a matter of personal liberty, and to bind a party to a dead marriage only to secure the financial security of the other serves neither spouse. The answer lies in economic restitution. Unlike ordinary alimony, which looks to the wife's needs and wants, courts in cases of unilateral no-fault divorce must provide restitution for emotional abandonment, recognising that the injury is not financial alone but the unilateral rupture of a shared life.

Relief from a dead marriage should not turn upon the fortuitous circumstance of reaching the Supreme Court. A dignified demise to the marriage must be available closer to home. That is what the law owes us. The editorial recognised the problem in the context of a judgment of the Supreme Court, where the parties were separated for 15 years. Reform must follow.

The writers are Delhi-based lawyers

## 40 YEARS AGO

June 11, 1986



## Army on alert in Haryana

THE HARYANA Government has alerted the army to meet any situation in the wake of the Venkatarajah Commission's report. The government has also requisitioned about 80 companies of paramilitary forces to help the authorities maintain peace. Preventive steps have also been ordered to deal with the Opposition's threatened state-wide *bandh*.

## 5 die in Cape Town violence

RENEWED VIOLENCE between rival Black groups in a squatter camp near Cape Town claimed another five lives, raising the death

toll in two days of clashes to 10. Unrest also rendered more than 50,000 people homeless, police said. Three people were seriously injured when two personnel landmines exploded on a farm near Volksrust, about 230 km south-east of Johannesburg.

## Plot to attack expo in US

SIKH EXTREMISTS in Western Canada planned to attack Expo-86 with rocket launchers and other weapons. While US officials refuse to disclose whether there is any link between those accused of planning these bombings and those accused of masterminding sham marriages between

Indian Sikhs and US barmaids in the US, it is clear that both Canada and the US are working together in investigating activities that are now stretched across both countries.

## Marathi language agitation

WIDESPREAD HOPES of an amicable settlement to the language agitation in the border areas of Maharashtra and Karnataka suffered a setback with the Samyukta Maharashtra Seema Samiti deciding to intensify and widen its agitation. Maharashtra CM S B Chavan, who will meet with his Karnataka counterpart, R K Hegde, expressed optimism regarding an early settlement.



# PM Modi is barai bhai, who offers warmth and wisdom. His legacy is also personal



DASHO TSHERING TOBGAY

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi has reached a historic milestone, becoming the longest-serving elected prime minister of India in continuous office, completing 4,399 days since first assuming this responsibility on May 26, 2014. For India, this is a moment of historic significance. For the world, it reflects the confidence that the people of the world's largest democracy have repeatedly placed in a leader who has guided their nation through a transformative period. For me, however, this occasion is more than a political milestone. It is an opportunity to reflect on a relationship that has evolved over the years — one that I value deeply. I have come to know PM Modi as a friend, regard him as an elder brother, and look up to him as a mentor whose dedication to public service continues to inspire me.

I first met PM Modi in 2014, when I had the privilege of attending his swearing-in ceremony as Prime Minister of India. From that very first meeting, his warmth and graciousness left a lasting impression on me. What began as an official interaction soon evolved into a personal friendship that I have come to value deeply over the years. Soon thereafter, PM Modi chose Bhutan as the destination of his first overseas visit after assuming office. That decision reaffirmed the deep bonds of goodwill and shared destiny that connect our peoples and reflected the affection he has always held for Bhutan.

In all my interactions with him, what has consistently stood out is his sincerity, humility, and remarkable ability to connect with people, regardless of their position or background. Despite the immense responsibilities of serving more than a billion people, he never loses sight of the importance of personal relationships. Our conversations over the years have ranged from matters of state

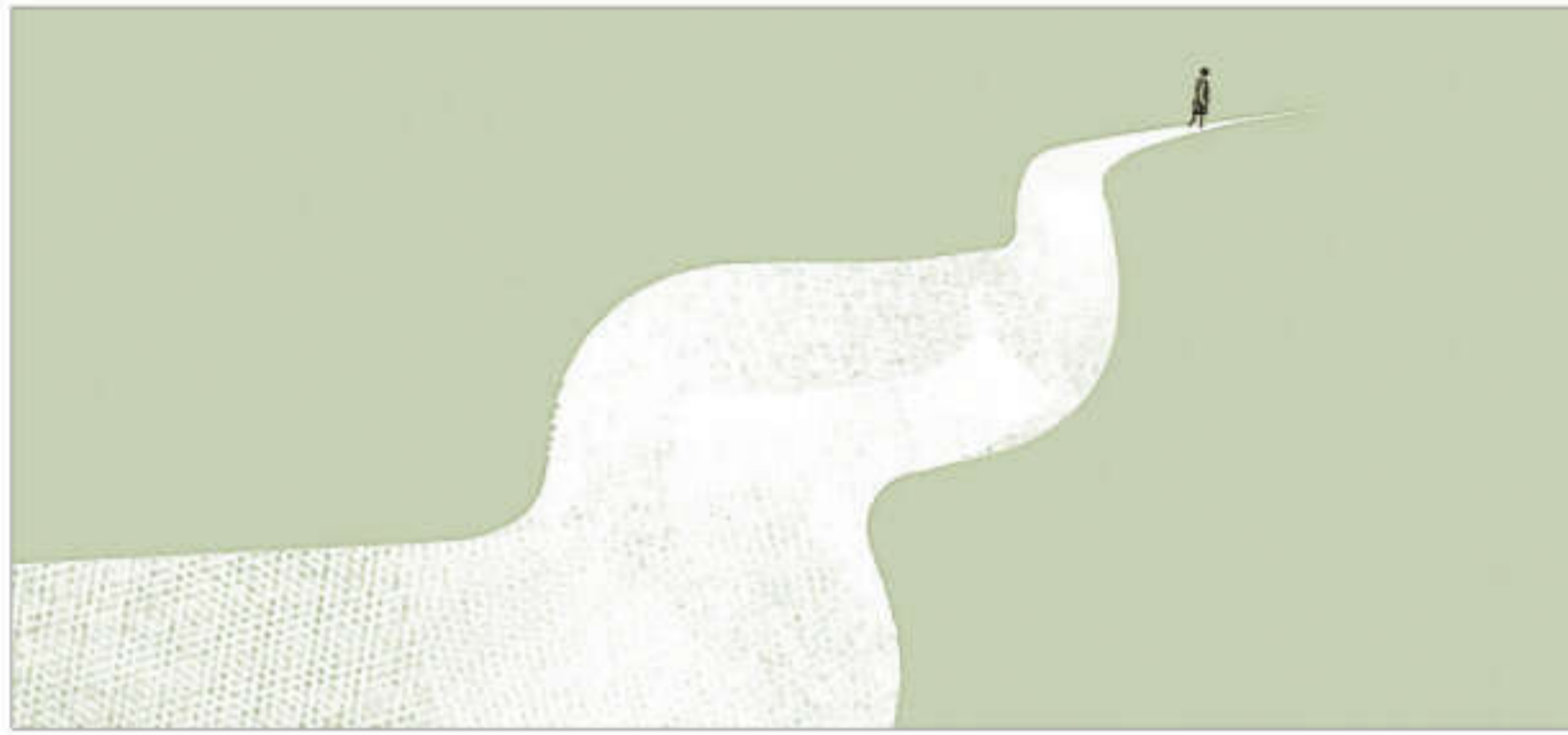


ILLUSTRATION: C.R. SASIKUMAR

and development to the opportunities and challenges confronting our societies. Despite his demanding schedule, he has always enquired about my family, especially my children, and often shared his insights on food, healthy eating, exercise, and yoga.

In our part of the world, the term *barai bhai* or elder brother signifies far more than an elder sibling. It evokes affection, trust, guidance, and protection. It describes someone who encourages you when challenges seem overwhelming, celebrates your successes as his own, and offers wisdom when difficult decisions must be made. Over the years, in moments of both celebration and challenge, I have experienced this generosity of spirit first-hand. When discussing matters of national importance, he has always listened with patience, shared his thoughts candidly, and extended support with the affection and reassurance of an elder brother. His encouragement has often reinforced my own conviction during demanding moments of public life.

PM Modi may be older than me, but the significance of *barai bhai* goes far beyond age. It is rooted in the confidence that one can seek counsel without hesitation and receive it with sincerity and goodwill. Throughout my years of public ser-

What stands out is not merely the scale of those responsibilities, but the energy, discipline, and consistency with which he approaches them. As a fellow public servant, I have often drawn inspiration from his example

vice, I have found in him not only a trusted friend but also someone whose perspective is valuable, whose guidance is thoughtful, and whose support is steadfast.

Perhaps the aspect of PM Modi that I admire most is his extraordinary dedication to public service. Leadership is not merely about occupying high office. It is about commitment, discipline, and an unwavering focus on improving the lives of others. PM Modi exemplifies these qualities. For more than a decade, he has carried the immense responsibilities of leading one of the world's most populous and diverse nations. Yet what stands out is not merely the scale of those responsibilities, but the energy, discipline, and consistency with which he approaches them. As a fellow public servant, I have often drawn inspiration from his example.

Under his leadership, India has expanded its economic influence, embraced technological innovation, strengthened its infrastructure, and elevated its standing in global affairs. Equally important is that he has emerged as a strong voice for the aspirations of developing countries and the Global South, advocating for a more inclusive and equitable international order. Few democratic

leaders have had the opportunity to shape their nations over such an extended period. Fewer still have done so while continuously earning the trust and confidence of their people. History will record the transformation of India during PM Modi's tenure, the country's growing influence on the global stage, and the aspirations he helped ignite among millions of people.

For me, however, his legacy is also personal. I will remember him as a trusted friend whose warmth transcends official protocol; as *barai bhai*, an elder brother whose guidance and support I deeply cherish; and as a mentor whose dedication to public service serves as an enduring example for leaders everywhere. Yet what will perhaps be remembered most fondly by the people of Bhutan is the unwavering support and goodwill he has extended to our entire nation.

Under the wise leadership of His Majesty The King and with PM Modi's steadfast partnership, the friendship between Bhutan and India has continued to deepen. His support has extended beyond Bhutan's immediate developmental priorities to embrace our long-term national aspirations. More recently, he has lent his wholehearted support to His Majesty The King's visionary Gelephu Mindfulness City initiative — a transformative undertaking designed to create opportunities for future generations of Bhutanese. He has demonstrated an abiding faith in Bhutan's potential and in the Royal Vision that seeks to secure lasting peace, prosperity, and well-being for our people.

For this enduring partnership, and for the friendship and support he has shown for our country, the people of Bhutan remain profoundly grateful. On behalf of His Majesty The King, the Royal Government, the people of Bhutan, and by my own heart, I extend my warmest congratulations to PM Modi on this remarkable achievement. May he continue to serve India with the same wisdom, energy, and commitment that have defined his years of distinguished service. And may the enduring friendship between Bhutan and India continue to flourish for generations to come.

The writer is Prime Minister of Bhutan

## Economic story is one of transition. Challenges exist, but so do strengths



SOUMYA KANTI GHOSH

TWO recent articles, Surjit Bhalla argues that the weakening of reforms, declining investor confidence, and the revised BIT framework signal a loss of economic momentum. While the concerns raised deserve attention, the conclusions drawn are neither fully supported by evidence nor reflective of the broader economic reality.

First, any analysis of economic performance must account for global shocks. When crisis years are excluded, India's average GDP growth during 2005-2014 stands at approximately 7.2 per cent, compared to nearly 7.4 per cent during 2014-2024, achieved despite Covid, supply-chain disruptions, geopolitical conflicts, and tightening global financial conditions. The evidence suggests considerable resilience in India's growth trajectory despite far more adverse external conditions.

Second, the assumption that BITs are the primary drivers of FDI is not supported by global evidence. A major 2014 UNCTAD study covering 146 economies over 27 years found no conclusive evidence that BITs significantly increase bilateral FDI inflows.

Third, investment decisions are shaped by larger factors. The G20 Investment Report (2020) found that investor protection ranked only 10th among decision-influencing factors. Political stability, market size, infrastructure quality, and long-term growth prospects remain the principal determinants. India continues to hold strong advantages across these dimensions.

Fourth, India's own FDI experience does not support the claim that the revised BIT framework has weakened investor confidence. FDI inflows have remained robust even after the 2015 restructuring of India's BIT regime and the subsequent decline in the number of BITs in force. Gross FDI inflows were around \$95 billion in 2025-26. If BIT protections alone determined investment decisions, such sustained inflows would have been difficult to explain. While net FDI is desirable from a balance of payments perspective, a lower number should not be interpreted as weakening investor confidence. As economies mature and integrate with global markets, profit repatriation by foreign firms and overseas investments by domestic companies increase. Lower net FDI figures do not establish that investors have lost confidence in India. India's BIT reforms should therefore be viewed not as a retreat

from reform, but as an effort to balance investor rights with the state's legitimate regulatory interests.



Fifth, international comparison overlooks certain realities. Brazil refrained from ratifying traditional BITs containing Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) provisions but remained among Latin America's largest FDI destinations. South Africa, Indonesia, Ecuador, and Bolivia also revisited or terminated investment treaties over concerns about sovereign policy flexibility.

Long-term investment confidence is shaped by economic fundamentals, not arbitration clauses alone. India's approach reflects a wider global reassessment.

Sixth, investors are only required to first pursue domestic legal remedies for a specified period before bringing an international claim against the sovereign state. This reflects the well-established principle in customary international law. Arbitration under India's Model BIT remains international in character, conducted before neutral arbitral tribunals, not Indian domestic courts.

Seventh, concerns regarding the rupee must be viewed through the lens of macroeconomic fundamentals. It has depreciated by 10.6 per cent in FY26 — a much sharper move than what the broad dollar strength alone can explain. Context matters. The current account deficit is expected to remain manageable at around 2 per cent of GDP in FY27 and the RBI holds substantial foreign exchange reserves. Despite cumulative RBI foreign currency sales of around \$53 billion in FY26, India's forex reserves were at \$682 billion by April 2026, providing import cover for nearly 11 months. Recent steps taken are positive for the rupee.

We must resist the flawed narrative that the rupee's depreciation is the delayed consequence of the RBI's earlier exchange rate management of holding it back. That is not supported by data. Periods of depreciation have been accompanied by reserve depletion as the RBI intervened to defend the currency. It is remarkable that over a period of nearly 25 years, the average annual depreciation of the rupee has been similar across episodes. This is exchange rate management of the highest order. Pondering to the whims of markets allows market players to dictate terms to the central bank by taking positions for their own benefit. The argument about the rupee being a shock absorber is the easiest way of following a limitless fall in the value of the currency, completely delinked from macro fundamentals. India's economic story is one of transition. Challenges exist, but so do strengths. Public debate on economic policy must remain grounded in evidence.

The writer is member, PMEAC, member, 16th Finance Commission and group chief economic advisor, State Bank of India. Views are personal

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### 12 years of PM Modi

THE EDITORIAL effectively situates Prime Minister Narendra Modi's record tenure within themes of continuity, welfare expansion, youth engagement, and rhetorical unity, offering useful political context and noting the fragmentation of the Opposition ('Milestone in history, long road to future', IE, June 10). It rightly praises outreach and institutional consolidation while urging inclusivity. However, it glosses over important trade-offs: Centralisation of power, federal tensions, constraints on dissent, and uneven economic and social indicators. For informed observers, some promises have been fulfilled, some remain works in progress, and some actions remain difficult to explain.

Abhinav Shah, Lucknow

Now is the time to assess Narendra Modi's 12 years in office objectively ('Milestone in history, long road to future', IE, June 10). During his tenure, the country has witnessed religious polarisation, democratic backsliding, the weakening of institutions, economic slowdown, soaring prices and inflation, rising unemployment, and a foreign policy that, in the view of many critics, has not always asserted the country's sovereignty effectively. This makes it difficult to award the BJP-led NDA government a passing grade. What matters is not how long a government remains in power, but how well it governs.

David Milton, Maruthancode

### FDI warning

The sharp decline in net FDI inflows is a warning that cannot be explained away by global factors alone ('Mind investor sensitivities please', IE, June 10). Gaps in Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs), prolonged dispute-resolution timelines, and uncertainties arising from retrospective taxation have cumulatively eroded investor confidence. The government's recognition of the problem and its ongoing BIT renegotiations are welcome. However, legal certainty and predictable dispute-resolution mechanisms matter more than incentive packages.

S.M. Jeeva, Chennai



VINAY SAHASRABUDHE

## Prime Minister and thought leader

AS NARENDRA MODI emerges as the longest-serving continuously elected Prime Minister of India, it is natural that his contribution over all these years is reviewed. While there is much to be said about his distinct imprint on national governance, from internal security to foreign relations, this article aims to do justice to his thought leadership.

The most distinctive aspect of PM Modi's thought process has been his emphasis on drawing inspiration from our civilisational past to face contemporary challenges and to shape our aspirations for a great future. A case in point is the mantra of '*vikas bhi, virasat bhi*' — a departure from the established thinking of ignoring our heritage. Take the renaming of public places and new buildings, Kartavya Path, Lok Kalyan Marg, Kartavya Bhavan and Lok Bhavan underline his emphasis on de-Macaulayising our national ethos. It was under his regime that we were able to rename Aurangzeb Road as Dr A P J Abdul Kalam Road. PM Modi has promoted not only Bharatiya sports and toys but also indigenous talent in consulting. His emphasis on education in the mother tongue not only serves the cause of Indian languages but also provides sound pedagogical advice. At the same time, he has made it clear that his efforts do not advocate a blanket anti-foreign/anti-English-language mentality.

PM Modi institutionalised historically important occasions in the form of Vibhajan Vibhishika Smriti Divas (August 14), Janjati Gaurav

The most distinctive aspect of PM Modi's thought process has been his emphasis on drawing inspiration from our civilisational past to face contemporary challenges and to shape our aspirations for a great future

Divas (November 15), Veer Bal Divas (December 26), Lok Tantra Hatya Divas (June 26), etc. Supremely important is the International Yoga Day (June 21). The IYD has proved instrumental in creating a deeper understanding of India's uniquely rich yoga traditions globally and has added to our soft power. His ideas always have a practical, operational dimension. His *panch pran* include the idea of Viksit Bharat, freedom from colonial mindset, taking pride in our heritage, unity and integrity and also an emphasis on our duties as citizens.

Conceptions like 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat' remind countrymen that a united and integrated India is the precondition for restoring our greatness. He has also tried to blend our cultural moorings with developmental needs with concepts like Atmanirbhar Bharat and Vocal for Local. Unlike Jawaharlal Nehru's '*aaram haram hain*' or Rajiv Gandhi's '*mera bharat mahan*', Modi has inspired people to think big and aspire to make India '*viksit*', shaping a collective national aspiration.

His thought leadership is reflected in governance. While in Gujarat, he underscored the centrality of people's participation in development. To that end, he advocated a P2G2 approach — people's participation for good governance. He is perhaps the first PM who minced no words in telling people that they cannot just outsource development to the government, sit pretty and do nothing. Placing empowerment over entitlement has always been at the core of PM Modi's thinking.

Without necessarily using the phrase, PM Modi has been a reflective public voice on gender justice. His idea of women-led development is not just innovative, but more meaningful as it automatically puts gender justice at the centre of any new developmental project.

PM Modi has also articulated his thoughts, with clarity, on environmental challenges. He advocated the idea of Lifestyle for the Environment. Through this, he tried to hold a mirror to the harm caused by affluent nations. At the same time, he made the global community realise that manifesting our concern for environmental challenges through our conduct is much more difficult but equally essential. He linked the environment to our emotions and ethos and mooted the idea of a campaign called 'Ek Ped, Maa Ke Naam'. His emphasis on solar energy, organic farming and using less fertilisers while promoting the idea of 'Per Drop, More Crop' is another example of his sincere attempts to educate people in an unobtrusive manner. The G20 motto, 'One Earth, One Family, One Future', reminded global leaders of our inescapable inter-dependence.

Prime ministers in democracies have to educate without tutoring, moot ideas without sounding revolutionary and share new approaches without sermonising. Whether academia and the intelligentsia recognise this or not, PM Modi stands head and shoulders above his predecessors on this front.

The writer is a national executive committee member of the BJP



SHIVKUMAR KALYANARAMAN AND KISHORE PAKNIKAR

## Not just what India manufactures, but what it discovers

IN TODAY'S world, scientific capability is closely linked with economic competitiveness, technological sovereignty, public health, sustainability, national security, and long-term resilience. India's future will depend not only on what it manufactures but also on what it discovers. Research and innovation remain outside the active imagination of large sections of industry, philanthropy, CSR ecosystems, and society at large. This gap deserves more attention.

Historically, India's expenditure on R&D

as a percentage of GDP has remained modest compared to technologically advanced economies. Funding has traditionally relied heavily on government support. This is not because India lacks social commitment. In fact, India has built one of the world's largest CSR ecosystems and possesses a deep tradition of philanthropy. The problem is that research and innovation are still seen as someone else's responsibility. Research and innovation are not alternatives to social investment — they are force multipliers.

Every modern technology that society today takes for granted was once an uncertain research idea pursued in a laboratory somewhere. Society experiences the visible outcomes but rarely notices the invisible scientific journeys behind them. Research is therefore a form of invisible national infra-

structure. Its returns are often delayed, unpredictable, and difficult to quantify immediately, but their eventual societal impact can be enormous. Nations that consume technology without investing sufficiently in its creation risk becoming dependent on external innovation ecosystems, external intellectual property, and external strategic choices. Scientific capability is deeply linked to economic independence, geopolitical resilience, industrial competitiveness, and national confidence.

The returns of research are often delayed and difficult to quantify immediately, but their eventual societal impact can be enormous

The idea of ANRF is not just to distribute grants, but to catalyse partnerships among government, academia, industry, start-ups, philanthropy, and society.

Strategic co-investment in research often stimulates substantially larger downstream investments within companies themselves. Every rupee co-invested through such partnerships can potentially catalyse several-fold higher internal R&D investments within participating organisations. This is significant because innovation ecosystems rarely grow through isolated grants alone. They grow when research begins to trigger wider institutional confidence, industrial participation, risk-taking, and scientific ambition. Participation need not always begin with massive investments. Companies can support targeted translational projects aligned with na-

tional priorities. Philanthropic foundations can help create doctoral fellowships, advanced instrumentation facilities, interdisciplinary research centres, or regional innovation clusters. Industry associations can co-create challenge-driven innovation programmes. Successful start-ups can reinvest in deep-technology ecosystems that create the next generation of innovation.

The vision of an innovation-driven India will ultimately depend on how successfully the country can transform science from the responsibility of a few institutions into a wider societal movement.

Kalyanaraman is CEO, Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF), Government of India, Paknikar is ANRF Prime Minister Professor, COEP Technological University, Pune



# OPINION

The  
**Hindustan Times**  
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{ OUR TAKE }

## Accountability down the sewers

No country can claim to be modern while standing on the backs of invisible workers risking their lives in sewers

Some lives are less equal than others, as we are reminded every day. The deaths of two sanitation workers at a sewage treatment plant in Faridabad on Tuesday highlight one of the country's most enduring and repeated failures.

According to police, the men lost consciousness after inhaling poisonous gases while entering a sludge tank and drowned. Just days earlier, another worker died while cleaning a sewer line in Uttar Pradesh. Such is the complacency around this issue that headlines do not seem to affect anyone anymore, only to be replaced by the next avoidable tragedy.

What makes such loss of lives particularly disturbing, apart from apathy, is that they continue despite clear laws prohibiting manual scavenging and hazardous sewer cleaning. The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, was meant to permanently put an end to the practice. But the numbers tell a different story. At least 859 sanitation workers have died while cleaning sewers and septic tanks between 2014 and 2025, according to a Lok Sabha reply by the Union government on March 17. That averages around six deaths every month.

Perhaps the most dangerous trend in all of this is the familiar pattern that emerges after every such incident. Municipal agencies — responsible for maintaining sewage infrastructure — rarely undertake the work themselves. Instead, they outsource the work through layers of contractors and sub-contractors. At the end of such a chain are some of the country's most vulnerable workers, often employed informally, lacking training, legal protections, insurance, even basic safety equipment. Gas detectors, oxygen supplies, harnesses and protective gear are either absent or treated as dispensable costs. When deaths occur, responsibility is conveniently pushed to the lowest contractor on the job who then gets booked for negligence.

The Faridabad deaths should prompt more than yet another round of compensation announcements, blame-game and police cases. Officials must be held directly accountable for safety violations by contractors working on their behalf. Mechanised cleaning must be made mandatory. No country can claim to be modern while standing on the backs of invisible workers risking their lives in sewers. These tragedies are the predictable consequence of a system that continues to treat some lives as not merely unequal but expendable.

## Student suicides are a failure of institutions

When the Supreme Court appointed a National Task Force (NTF) to look into students' mental health concerns and prevent suicides, it termed student suicides in the country an "epidemic". The remark perhaps reflected alarm over the 65% rise in student suicides between 2013 and 2023. The National Crime Research Bureau pegs the rise in student suicides between 2014 and 2024 at 80%. The NTF's interim report reveals a much more sordid picture: 65% higher-education institutions have no access to mental health service providers, 73% lack full-time mental health professional, and fewer than 4% have a suicide-risk assessment. Almost half of the institutions had not conducted a faculty sensitisation workshop in the 18 months the panel took to finalise its interim report.

But attitudes, not numbers, are the most alarming aspect of the report. The larger malaise — that of apathy to students — triggered not only suicide, but also suicidal attempts, ideation, passive death wish, self-harm, and mental health struggles. Many students and faculty members who interacted with the panel appeared either oblivious or unmoved. The NTF flagged weak redressal mechanisms, academic pressure, and severe gaps in mental health care support. It noted caste, class, ethnicity, and language as fault lines that exacerbated vulnerabilities of students from marginalised sections.

The contours of a remedial plan will need to include institutions, parents, and the government. Enforcing regulatory and court mandates on mental health and counselling support, anti-bullying measures, active monitoring for at-risk individuals, along with focused decompression of the academic environment and lowering of financial risks that make education a high-stakes pursuit is needed. The government must acknowledge suicides as only the symptom of a larger disease of discrimination on campuses, and act accordingly.

## Indian middle class's gains in the last 12 years

More money in the pocket, better infrastructure, and the digital transformation have fuelled even larger aspirations — allowing a confident, better-served citizenry to demand more

Twelve years is long enough to change the texture of daily life, and in India, between 2014 and 2026, it has. The changes are visible in the household budget, in the morning commute, in the medical bill that is no longer paid out of pocket, and in the tax return no longer needing to be filed. India's middle class — that vast and expanding constituency of aspiration now comprising nearly a third of the population — experiences policy not as headline reform but as altered circumstance. The altered circumstances of 2026, compared with 2014, are considerable.

Let's begin with the most tangible — money in the pocket. In 2014, the income-tax exemption threshold stood at ₹2.5 lakh. Today, under the new tax regime, a salaried individual earning up to ₹12.75 lakh pays nothing to the exchequer. That is not a marginal adjustment; it is a structural re-drawing of the relationship between the State and the earning household — a recognition that the salaried middle class,

which cannot hide income and has always borne a disproportionate share of the direct-tax burden, deserves relief.

The introduction of GST in 2017, whatever its teething troubles, eventually rationalised a cascade of hidden levies that inflated the price of goods across the consumption basket. The landmark GST 2.0 rationalisation of 2025 went further still: By reducing the tax rate applicable to a range of essential commodities to zero, it delivered a direct and measurable boost to household disposable income — the kind of relief felt not in policy documents but in households' pockets. But income freed from taxation is only part of the story. What the household could actually do with that income — and at what cost — changed, too. Home loan interest rates, which hovered between 9.5% and 10.5% a decade ago, fell to 7.35-8.75%, widening the aperture for homeownership for families who had long deferred that aspiration. The Special Window for Affordable and Mid-Income Housing (SWAMIH) fund, specifically designed for middle- and lower middle-income buyers trapped in stalled housing projects, has quietly delivered over 58,000 homes. The Jan Aushadhi programme, revamped after 2015, has saved families an estimated ₹40,000 crore in out-of-pocket medicine expenditure over 11 years — a number that tends not to feature in election speeches but registers acutely in the monthly household budget.

The transformation in physical infra-

structure is the one most visible from a car or train window. The country's highway network has been built at a pace that would have seemed implausible in 2014. Airports have grown from 74 to 165. The metro rail network, which served five cities before 2014, now serves 26 cities, with daily ridership exceeding 1.15 crore — nearly four times the figure a decade ago — and adding roughly six kilometres of new track per month, compared to under one kilometre per month previously. Vande Bharat trains have set a new standard for intercity rail travel, previously unavailable to passengers who could not afford to fly. Daily rail passenger journeys now exceed two crore. These are not statistics without consequence. They are hours returned to working people, distances compressed, and a small but cumulatively significant reduction in the daily friction

of urban life. The digital transformation has been more profound, if less photogenic. The JAM trinity — Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, and mobile connectivity — has re-engineered how ordinary households interact with the State. Over 58 crore Jan Dhan accounts now exist where 14.72 crore did in 2015. Wireless subscribers are now close to 127 crore. DigitLocker, with 69 crore users, has made the document wallet — that essential of middle-class life — an application on a phone rather than an anxiety-inducing folder. The Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission has assigned nearly 90 crore unique health identity numbers, beginning to build the seamless, paperless medical



V Anantha Nageswaran



Transformation in physical infrastructure is the most visible gain. REUTERS

record that could, in a generation, transform the quality of health care delivery. The Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme, the world's largest public health care programme by enrolment, has extended coverage to senior citizens across income groups, including the middle class that has long fallen through the gap between government schemes targeting the poor and private insurance priced for the affluent. None of this warrants complacency. Rising aspirations are, by their nature, restless. The same family that gratefully received a cheaper home loan or a tax-free salary now asks harder questions about the quality of the examination system their child must navigate, the contours of the policy framework that determine access to professional and other educational opportunities, and the quality of urban living in modern India. These are not unreasonable questions. They are, in fact, the questions that only a more confident and better-served citizenry is positioned to ask. The government that has raised living standards accepts and understands the higher bar that those very improvements have set. The government acknowledges that these issues need sustained attention and commits itself to doing so.

What the middle class might also appreciate is the environment in which its government must operate. The

global order that made the previous generation's prosperity relatively predictable has frayed considerably. Energy security, which determines the price of everything from the cooking gas cylinder to the fertiliser that prices food, cannot be taken for granted in a world where chokepoints are weaponised, and supply chains are instruments of statecraft.

National defence, which is the precondition for everything else, must be funded even when it competes with other social priorities. The government that builds roads, expands airports, extends health cover, and cuts income taxes is the same government that must simultaneously hedge against a world growing less forgiving by the year.

The compact between a government and its middle class is, at its best, one of mutual recognition — the citizen acknowledging what has been built and respecting the policy trade-offs that an increasingly contested and unforgiving world makes ever more binding, the government understanding what remains to be done and bringing to that task the same seriousness of purpose that has marked the last 12 years. That compact is renewed, not concluded, in 2026.

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### CAN BILATERAL INVESTMENT TREATIES (BIT) WORK FOR INDIA?

{ PRABHASH RANJAN }

## More than a BIT of a challenge for India

In the past couple of years, India signed bilateral investment treaties (BITs) with a few countries — most prominently, with Israel and the UAE. The success of a BIT lies not in the headline investment numbers announced, but in the chances of a mutually-agreed-to framework leading to the effective implementation of such treaties.

Recently, EU President Ursula von der Leyen urged India and the EU to conclude pending investment agreement negotiations soon. Leyen believes the agreement will unlock the full potential of the free trade agreement (FTA) the two sides signed last year. Economic theory supports the idea that trade and investment are joined at the hip — more so when we consider the current realities of global supply chains.

But, the fact is that the EU and India initiated separate negotiations on trade and investment in 2022, and the trade talks alone reached their logical conclusion. An investment deal is yet to materialise — thanks to differences between the two sides on several aspects of investment protection, including taxation, the most favoured nation (MFN) clause, and most conspicuously, the investor-State dispute settlement (ISDS) mechanism. These differences seem to be irreconcilable at the moment.

That said, stuck BITs are not just an India-EU problem. India is reportedly facing similar difficulties in its investment negotiations with other countries, including the UK. It is worth noting here that though India adopted a new BIT framework in 2015 — unilaterally terminating earlier BITs, including with EU member-countries — this framework has yielded investment agreements with just six-seven countries so far.

It is not as if India erred in adopting a new BIT framework — it was certainly not the only country disenchanted with the 2010s' paradigm for investment treaties. In the last 15 years, there has been a global backlash against first-generation investment treaties, many of which were signed in the 1990s — a reflection of the then-pervasive Washington Consensus. First-generation BITs featured extensive protection for foreign investment with limited scope for State intervention to fulfil social needs. This, borrowing from the work of economic historian Karl Polanyi, represented the dis-embedding of the economy from society. Ever since foreign investors began bringing ISDS claims against States — challenging a wide array of sovereign regulatory measures — there has been a Polanyian counter-movement focused on re-embedding the economy within society, in the context of BITs.

Apart from recognising the State's power to regulate, this counter-movement has taken the form of States de-legalising legacy frameworks governing international investment. States are wresting back control over foreign investment relations, which had been delegated to international law and global institutions earlier. Despite a few instances of extreme de-legalisation — States breaking away from all international investment laws — many countries such as India haven't walked away from BIT.

They are attempting the "re-legalisation" of the investment treaty regime — by altering the terms. For instance, the EU is seeking to

Though India adopted a new BIT model in 2015 — unilaterally terminating earlier BITs, including with EU members — this framework has yielded deals with very few countries so far

replace ISDS with an investment court system. This process will necessitate a rewrite of the existing rules of engagement for foreign investment and the creation of a new normative order for foreign investment relations.

The new investment-treaty practice of several countries/blocs needs to be viewed through this lens. The problem is not India seeking to de-legalise its international investment relations to create a new normative order, it is the degree of de-legalisation. Has India taken the de-legalisation process too far? Yes, for the three chief reasons. First, India's new investment treaty practice leads to the atrophy of its commitment to substantive investment protection obligations — by altogether excluding the MFN rule from its binding commitments. In other words, even if India discriminates against investment by one State, favouring a different one, the investor from the first State will be left without remedy. Second, India seeks to limit the jurisdiction of ISDS tribunals by excluding a large number of critical issues, such as taxation, from the BIT's ambit. Thus, even if India were to impose arbitrary taxes, those can't be challenged under the BIT. Finally, India's insistence that foreign investors pursue domestic remedies for five years before initiating an ISDS claim does not inspire investor confidence given the tardy pace of justice-dispensing in the country.

India must temper the degree of de-legalisation of its foreign investment relations and align it with that of countries/blocs such as the EU and the UK. This will provide effective and enforceable treaty-based protection for foreign investment without compromising the State's ability to regulate in the public interest.

Prabhash Ranjan is professor and vice dean (research), Jindal Global Law School. The views expressed are personal

{ BHARAT JOSHI }

## BITs need not be only a bitter pill for India

In the last 36 months, New Delhi has inked or upgraded over half a dozen free trade agreements (FTAs), with the UAE, Australia, European Free Trade Association, or EFTA (comprising Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein), New Zealand, Oman, the UK and EU. The long awaited deal with the US is being actively negotiated.

The timing is providential, as global supply chains fray and the World Trade Organization (WTO)'s dispute system remains paralysed, India's FTAs have served as both, a shock absorber and a growth engine.

Global trade growth has slowed amid global volatility, yet India's exports to its new FTA partners bucked the trend.

Post the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA), India's exports to Australia rose 14% while imports from there grew 15%. The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the UAE delivered \$84.5 billion in bilateral trade in FY24, a 15% increase from pre-CEPA levels.

And, as the Strait of Hormuz remains closed since March, the FTA with Oman can provide India respite, as the ports of Salalah and Duqm are outside Hormuz and remain accessible.

If the old FTAs were about tariffs, India's new ones are about trust, standards, and technology. The India-EFTA TEPA pledges \$100 billion in FDI over 15 years, and New Zealand has committed \$20 billion in investment over a similar period. While governments made the commitments, the investments will need to come from the private sector. The hard part is facilitation — ensuring these investments lead to projects on the ground.

That means three things: a workable BIT (bilateral investment treaty) framework, genuine EODB (ease of doing business), and tax laws that don't change mid-project. India's model BIT of 2015 vintage was a reset after investor-State dispute settlement (ISDS) shocks, but capital demands predictability. The next step is to finish the job — negotiate BITs that protect sovereignty and give investors a clear path to remedy.

India's breathtaking climb up the World Bank's EODB rankings was real, but land acquisition, logistics constraints, and contract enforcement still decide if and where a factory lands.

On tax, the Indian government has demonstrated great alacrity recently, responding to signals and tweaking laws to make India more attractive to foreign institutional investors. Surely, similar measures for foreign direct investors (FDI) can't be too far off.

This FTA sprint reflects a harder truth: Large multilaterals appear challenged. The WTO's Doha Round is now 25 years old with no end in sight. Its Appellate Body hasn't been functional since 2019. The UN Security Council struggled to pass a resolution on shipping lanes in the Red Sea without a veto.

So, countries are building smaller tables — multilaterals and plurilaterals with shared interests, not lowest-common-denominator consensus.

India hosted the Quad Foreign Ministers' Meet and the BRICS Foreign Ministers' Meet

Trade and investment are joined at the hip. But investment moves on facilitation, not sentiment. BITs, tax certainty, and contract enforcement are the real unlocking mechanisms

recently. The message: New Delhi isn't choosing camps; rather, it is building optionality. A Quad semiconductor supply chain initiative runs parallel to BRICS efforts on local currency trade. FTAs are the legal scaffolding for that optionality.

As external affairs minister Jaishankar put it at the Raisina Dialogue this year, "The era of diffidence is over. We will do what is needed, with who is willing."

Each trade agreement creates its own rules of origin, paperwork, and standards. An auto component exporter in Pune now needs one team for ECTA, another for CEPA, a third for UK rules.

The danger is a "spaghetti bowl" of compliance that only giants can navigate. The solution is to harmonise: India's push for cross-recognition of digital paperwork in the UK deal is a start, and could augur well for multilaterals to align India's FTAs with other blocs — Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Africa, and Oceania.

In a fractured world, trade policy is foreign policy, in some ways.

EU President Ursula von der Leyen's point on the EU investment agreement is valid: Trade and investment are joined at the hip. But investment moves on facilitation, not sentiment. BITs, tax certainty, and contract enforcement are the real unlocking mechanisms. India's EFTA \$100 billion pledge proves the appetite exists. Delivering it proves the system works.

The old architecture — the WTO, the UN — still matters for legitimacy. But for liquidity, for speed, for growth, the action has moved to smaller grouping for now. India figured that out early. The world is messy. India is making sure its trade needn't be.

Bharat Joshi is executive director, Tract and J Curve Ventures. He's the author of Navigating India. The views expressed are personal

## Redirecting priority credit

There is a strong case for recalibrating the framework

Priority-sector lending (PSL) has long been one of India's central instruments in financial inclusion. In this regard, a recent working-paper released by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) evaluated whether directed lending still produced meaningful developmental outcomes. The study, based on district-level quarterly data between 2020 and 2025, covering more than 95 per cent of scheduled commercial-bank credit, has pointed to sharp regional imbalances in such lending. Fewer than 10 per cent of districts accounted for over 45 per cent of all priority-sector advances. Credit remains heavily concentrated in relatively developed states and urbanised districts, while large parts of eastern India, the Northeast, and Himalayan regions continue to remain underserved. Importantly, the study also found that the districts with the lowest existing PSL penetration show the weakest economic response to additional lending. In other words, simply pushing more credit into lagging regions may not automatically generate growth when infrastructure, connectivity, and administrative capacity are weak.

The findings also reveal significant institutional differences in PSL delivery. During the study period, small finance banks, on average, extended 100 per cent of their adjusted net bank credit (ANBC) directly to priority sectors, while the State Bank of India's direct PSL exposure remained around 26.5 per cent, with greater reliance on indirect instruments such as "Priority Sector Lending Certificates" (PSLCs). Banks falling short of target also put in money in the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, which helps support critical infrastructure. Nationalised banks exceeded PSL targets directly, whereas private banks depended more heavily on market-based compliance mechanisms. These facts are not new. Since the M Narasimham Committee in 1991, banking-reform committees have repeatedly argued that rigid directed-credit mandates distort loan allocation, weaken profitability, and burden banks with politically sensitive sectors that often carry higher default risks. The Raghuram Rajan Committee in 2008 pushed for greater flexibility through the introduction of PSLCs, allowing banks to trade PSL obligations rather than fulfil them entirely through direct lending. The logic was simple. Some institutions are better equipped to serve certain segments, and forcing uniform compliance may create inefficiency rather than inclusion.

The debate has evolved because the Indian economy has changed. Agriculture still receives 18 per cent of PSL, even though its contribution to gross domestic product has fallen. In fact, in 2025-26, micro and small enterprises, for the first time, overtook agriculture as the single-largest component of PSL. Meanwhile, sectors that are central to India's future growth, including digital infrastructure, green energy, health care, and logistics, remain outside the PSL architecture. The mismatch calls for a periodic recalibration of the framework. The EAC-PM paper does well to point towards a more pragmatic middle path. It recommends strengthening market-based instruments such as PSLCs, allowing banks to specialise in terms of comparative strength, improving district-level targeting, and combining credit expansion with investment in infrastructure and institutional capacity. Clearly, there is a case for reviewing the PSL framework.

## Smart courts

AI can improve justice delivery with human oversight

The Supreme Court recently released a draft titled "Regulations for Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Courts 2026", which is an important framework for governing the integration of AI into India's judicial system. The proposal comes at a time when courts are grappling with an enormous backlog of more than 55 million cases across the system. Delayed justice imposes a substantial social and economic cost, making the search for technological solutions increasingly urgent.

The regulations extend across the Supreme Court, high courts, subordinate courts, tribunals and statutory commissions. They permit the use of AI in a range of administrative and adjudicatory functions, including case filing and registration, cause-list preparation, scheduling matters, issuing notices, maintaining records, and computing fees. Another important area where AI can help is in improving the functioning of court registries. The recent concern over the Supreme Court Registry regarding similar cases being listed before different Benches has raised questions about consistency in internal scrutiny and listing procedures. AI-assisted systems can help standardise these processes, reducing the scope for arbitrary or inconsistent handling of cases and enhancing transparency, predictability and equal treatment of similarly placed litigants.

The Supreme Court already has AI-assisted tools such as Supace (Supreme Court Portal for Assistance in Courts Efficiency) to help judges with legal research, and Suvas (Supreme Court Vidhik Anuvaad Software) for translating judicial documents into at least 18 Indian languages. Other countries have adopted similar tools. Singapore uses generative AI assistants to help self-represented litigants understand their rights and tribunal procedures, while Estonia employs AI-assisted systems for transcription, document analysis, and anonymisation. China has gone further with its "smart courts", leveraging machine learning to automate legal research, draft documents, and even check for errors in verdicts. However, concern over transparency and algorithmic bias in judicial processes remains.

In this regard, the draft seeks to draw a clear distinction between assistance and adjudication. AI may support judicial work, but it cannot perform judicial functions. The regulations prohibit AI from determining judicial outcomes, pronouncing judgments, imposing sentences, assessing witness credibility, predicting criminal behaviour, evaluating bail eligibility, or assigning risk scores to litigants. Judicial authority remains exclusively with human judges.

AI-generated output must be treated as advisory and remain subject to independent human review. Such safeguards are necessary because AI tools are not error-free. Recent incidents involving lawyers submitting AI-generated documents with fictitious case citations have highlighted the risks of unverified AI content. The draft, therefore, emphasises human oversight, explainability, transparency, accountability, auditability and data protection through the creation of a permanent "Apex Body" at the Supreme Court, comprising judges, technical experts, cybersecurity specialists, academicians and government representatives.

Yet the framework will succeed only if implementation matches ambition. Judicial officers, the registry personnel, lawyers and other court staffers, especially in the lower courts, will require extensive training to understand the capabilities and limitations of AI tools. Meaningful oversight is possible only when those supervising the technology possess sufficient technical literacy. Strong cybersecurity standards and a robust protection of sensitive judicial data will be critical. Hence, AI can help courts process cases faster, manage records more effectively, and improve access to justice, while ensuring that human judgment remains firmly in command.

# The costly politics of freebies

State debt and deficits do not capture the damage that doles inflict on the quality of public spending

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



The proliferation of subsidies and transfers for electoral gains at both the Union and state levels has raised concerns about the government's ability to provide buffers when the economy faces exogenous shocks such as the present West Asian crisis.

As the war continues, these vulnerabilities have become increasingly apparent, and the government may no longer be able to shield consumers from supply shortages, inflation, decelerating growth, exchange rate depreciation, and current account imbalance.

Energy prices have increased sharply and remain elevated as the hostilities continue in West Asia. With the Strait of Hormuz remaining closed, the prospects for a reduction in energy prices and an easing of supply disruptions appear unlikely in the near term. Every \$10 per barrel increase in crude oil prices is estimated to raise the current account deficit by 0.4 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP).

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has already reduced the GDP growth forecast for the year to 6.6 per cent from the 6.9 per cent projected earlier and has raised the inflation forecast from 4.6 per cent to 5.1 per cent. In addition to the war in West Asia, the rainfall deficit projected for the year will adversely impact the growth and inflation scenario.

In a healthy fiscal environment, both the Union and state governments can provide the buffer needed to protect the affected and vulnerable sections of the population. However, there is very little fiscal space to provide such a buffer. The freebies culture has permeated governments at both the Union and states and is being embraced by all political parties.

Once embraced, it becomes difficult to spurn, and the malady becomes universal, increasing in magnitude with every election cycle and imposing a very heavy opportunity cost on stability and growth. Given that almost two-thirds of public spending happens at

the state level, with no access to additional revenues available to them, the escalating freebie culture crowds out expenditure on physical infrastructure and human development.

Unfortunately, with analysts mostly focusing on deficits and debt, the deterioration in the quality of state spending has not received much attention. At the aggregate level, states' fiscal deficits and debt have not raised serious alarms.

As stated by the Sixteenth Finance Commission, "The aggregate financial picture of the State raises some concerns but is not alarming. More serious weaknesses are revealed when we look at individual states" (Para 5.81, p. 107).

The annual article on state finances by the RBI also states: "...the consolidated gross fiscal deficit-GDP ratio continued to remain within the Centre's prescribed ceiling of 3.5 per cent (including 0.5 per cent linked to power sector reform). Sustained higher capital expenditure strengthens the quality of fiscal adjustment and augurs well for medium-term growth." (*State Finances: A Study of Budgets 2025-26*; RBI).

These, however, do not bring out the malady emerging from fiscal trends in the states. The deficit and debt were broadly contained because the volume of borrowings by states is determined by the Union government, particularly when states are indebted to it. As macro-economic stabilisation is predominantly (but not exclusively) a Central function, control over the borrowing by states helps the Union government calibrate macroeconomic stabilisation.

However, providing quality regional public services such as education and health care, and spending on capacity creation through capital investment, is important to maintain states' long-term growth. Therefore, the proliferation of freebies should be seen more in terms of the decline in the quality of their spending.



**POLICY PILLARS**  
**M GOVINDA RAO**

# Who's afraid of youthful cockroaches?

The rally held last Saturday in Delhi by the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) has added a dash of excitement to the otherwise depressingly moribund state of national politics where the ruling regime seeks to win any which way and losing politicians promptly defect to the winning party. The CJP may not become a game changer like the India Against Corruption movement but the initial official response to it is telling. In withholding the CJP account on X and Instagram, and deploying disproportionately heavy police *bandobast* at a rally of a few thousand people, the political and security establishment revealed yet again that it is uncomfortable with the notion of young people as independent thinkers. To be sure, that the rally proceeded without any significant disruptions, and arrests, suggests the authorities recalibrated their approach to avoid a further flare-up.

Visceral over-reaction has been an oft-recurrent theme for a while. For instance, take the state's response to protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the three farm laws. In 2019, a 19-year-old student was charged with sedition and jailed for three months for shouting pro-Pakistan slogans in Bengaluru at an anti-CAA rally. The sloganeering was undoubtedly in bad taste but reflected little more than youthful exuberance and folly. Indeed, the organisers responded promptly by snatching away the mic. But it is unclear how the stray actions of a single defiant teenager praising a defunct terrorist state can endanger India's "sovereignty, unity and integrity," as the sedition law specifies.

The anti-CAA protests, in fact, saw the state mobilising the full might of its coercive apparatus against young protesters. In December 2019, the police forcefully entered the Jamia Millia campus, including the library, wielding tear gas and batons to arrest students protesting the citizenship laws. Several more students

were dragged away from the site of peaceful sit-in demonstrations and some arrested under the draconian Unlawful Activities Prevention Act.

Then in 2020-21 came the farmers' protests against three laws that had been hurriedly passed by Parliament, ostensibly without sufficient consultation. Rich and powerful farmers set up mini townships, barricading highways, inconveniencing thousands of commuters. But it was a 22-year-old climate activist from Bengaluru who was arrested. Her crime? Editing some lines of a "toolkit" created by Swedish activist Greta Thunberg in relation to the farmers' protest. The government deemed the "toolkit" — basically a document of dos and don'ts for protestors — and Disha Ravi's role in disseminating it an act of sedition "to spread disaffection against the Indian state". Later, she was even linked to Khalistani separatists.

As for Ms Thunberg, then 17 years, she, too, became the focus of the Indian government's ire for tweeting in support of the farmers' protests, with some innocuous, if ill-informed, observations about Indian agriculture. The external affairs minister spoke darkly of an overseas agenda to derail negotiations. Effigies of Ms Thunberg were burnt. With Caribbean pop star Rihanna joining the online bandwagon, the Indian government ordered the muzzling of her social media accounts and those of other celebrities and journalists. None of this did much to enhance India's international reputation.

Ruling establishments typically view competing narratives of nationhood with unease, and want cohorts of obedient unquestioning youth ready to fulfil a prescribed political destiny. The preference for iron conformity among young people is at odds with the political leadership's constant call for more innovation and creativity to make India great again.



**SWOT**  
**KANIHA DATTA**

Although some may argue that redistribution through freebies is a legitimate government function, as the market fails to perform this task, it is important to realise that this entails high opportunity costs. Ironically, as identified by the Sixteenth Finance Commission, the states with high revenue deficits are the ones with a high volume of subsidies and transfers, which means that these subsidies have effectively crowded out productive expenditure on physical and human capital.

The trend in states' spending in India clearly shows a deterioration in quality and the NITI Aayog's "fiscal health index" does not capture this. The ratio of revenue deficit to total fiscal deficit is only a partial indicator of quality, and the distinction made between "development" and "non-development" spending is misleading. The critical issue that has emerged over the years in state finances is that, even as aggregate revenue deficits have shown only a marginal increase, expenditure on education as a ratio of total expenditure has declined from 16.6 per cent in 2010-11 to 13.1 per cent in 2025-26. Commensurately, expenditure on "social security and welfare", which includes various types of cash transfers, increased from 3.4 per cent to 6.1 per cent during the period.

This shows that much of the proliferation in subsidies and transfers undertaken for electoral reasons is at the cost of empowering children through quality education. This is clearly retrograde.

The RBI classifies public expenditures under "development" and "non-development" categories, which is a flawed categorisation. Expenditure under general services is classified as "non-development", while expenditure under social and economic services is considered "development". Most subsidies and transfers are provided under social and economic services and, therefore, fall into the "development" expenditure category, whereas spending on the protection of life and property and the enforcement of contracts — both essential for development — is considered "non-development".

Ironically, despite the Union Finance Ministry advancing long-term interest-free loans under the Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment (Saspi) scheme of approximately ₹1.5 trillion, the share of capital expenditure in GDP has not shown any appreciable increase. It has remained broadly constant at 2.5-2.7 per cent of GDP, or 13-15 per cent of total expenditure.

The constancy of capital expenditures despite additional grants amounting to ₹1.5 trillion shows that the effect of Saspi has been to soften the states' budget constraints and provide additional fiscal room to expand subsidies and transfers. Although the conditional component of this long-term loan is 63 per cent, given the availability of additional funds, the states can spend less on capital expenditure financed from their own revenues. In other words, despite the conditions, Saspi has provided a cushion to states, enabling them to substitute a part of capital expenditure from their own sources to increase subsidies and cash transfers. Thus, we are faced with a Hobson's choice, and an improvement in the quality of spending can happen only when governance considerations overtake the freebie culture.

The author is former director, NIPFP. The views are personal

## Is luck all in the brain?



ARUSHI BHASKAR

Japanese neuroscientist Nobuko Nakano's latest book, *Lucky People*, promises a scientific approach to cultivating luck, or to put it more accurately, developing a mindset that attracts luck in everyday life. The prologue ("What Kind of Person is Lucky?") sets up this premise well, with an anecdote of how Panasonic founder Kōnosuke Matsushita only hired people who answered "yes" when asked if

they were lucky — a belief that "luck" is not preordained, but rather a product of thinking and behaviour.

Ms Nakano then goes on to break down the statistics behind being lucky: Because of the law of probability, we are as likely to be lucky as we are to be unlucky but we are more likely to dwell on the times we were "unlucky". It is this negative thinking that the author wants us to eliminate, and develop an outlook that sounds like a self-fulfilling prophecy: "People who are considerate of themselves will be treated similarly by others, whereas people who are careless of themselves end up also being treated that way by others."

In its initial pages, the book reads like a beginner's guide to neuroscience, with paragraphs on the balance between serotonin, dopamine and other neuro-

transmitters and how that influences "individuality". This is followed by an explanation of how the hackneyed phrase "just be yourself!" is actually a great way of attracting and sustaining luck — by developing a deepened sense of self-awareness, one is more likely to move towards those things that make them happy and better suited to take on life's challenges.

However, the effect is undercut by Ms Nakano citing Nadine de Rothschild as an example of how treating oneself well leads to "success". Not only that, the author even quotes Ms de Rothschild's memoir to illustrate her point that because she prioritised herself constantly, she was able to marry into the famously wealthy family. Surely a better example could have been found to show how self-care leads to "good luck" in other spheres of life!

In chapter 3, titled "Lucky People Try to Live in Harmony with Others", Ms Nakano talks about how being "better"

and not "best" is optimal for survival, which she has equated with luck earlier in the book. This philosophy is clearly inspired by the "middle way", a foundational concept of Buddhism; however, the author never refers to the philosophy directly.

Additionally, Ms Nakano says things like "This is why we should choose the path that allows for more than one winner, and does not lead to excessive victory — the path where everybody gets to survive, rather than the one where the winners care only about their own survival and nobody else's". But there is no reference to the large wealth gap that persists in modern society, or how one section is clearly "lucky" enough to survive whatever disasters come its way, often at the expense



**Lucky People: A Neuroscientist's Guide to Attracting Luck, Cultivating Success and Leading a Happier Life** by Nobuko Nakano  
Published by Simon & Schuster  
180 pages ₹499

of the other "unlucky" section.

In fact, even though the book makes it clear that its aim is to focus on the scientific aspect of "luck", one can't help but notice how it completely side-steps any questions of sociology, politics or history. The sheer lack of acknowledgment that the "luck" of being born in a certain country, in a certain family, in a certain era even, plays a big role in an individual's life came off as absurd, especially when measured against the fact that the last chapter of the book is dedicated to praying. Even a tiny paragraph thrown somewhere in this slim volume would have sufficed. What

the reader gets instead is 180 pages of "if you train your brain to feel good, you'll be lucky". Sorry for the spoiler!

Ms Nakano also cites British novelist J K Rowling's rags-to-riches story as an example of how "never giving up" and "believing in yourself" leads to unbelievable luck. However, what she misses out on is that Ms Rowling relied on government assistance for a major part of her struggle — her "luck", then, is not just individual grit, it's a combination of that and the welfare measures provided by a developed nation.

The pages in the book that highlight one quote — examples include "Lucky people have the ability to capitalise on a greater share of the good luck that falls equally on everyone" and "It is good to reflect on your mistakes, but you should also be able to show yourself unlimited tolerance" — appear to be designed keeping the book's potential virality in mind. One can easily imagine these quotes popping up on Instagram posts.

To sum up, *Lucky People* is a light, breezy read for summer 2026; a non-fiction "beach read", if you will.



## OUR VIEW



## No first use: let's deploy India's nuclear doctrine

*SIPRI's estimate of our nuclear arsenal is an occasion to use the high ground of our stance to restate our position. The world also needs to note South Asia's own dynamics of deterrence*

The Buddha has smiled" was the success code for India's Pokhran nuclear test of 1974 that New Delhi described as "peaceful." Blasts in 1998 saw the country adopt an eminently sensible doctrine on nukes: 'No first use.' The extent to which that smile may have widened in 2025 is a matter of curiosity stoked by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's release of its *SIPRI Yearbook 2026*. By SIPRI's estimates, as of January, India had 12 'deployed' nuclear warheads as part of its stockpile of 190; last year, we had 180 in stock, with none mounted on missiles or located at bases with operational armed forces. Since arsenals are subject to secrecy, we cannot expect the Centre to comment on deployments. But since we live in a heavily armed world, it should not surprise us either.

The SIPRI report reveals a grim global scenario. It pegs last year's conflict-related fatalities at 238,000, down 4.2% from 2024 but still too high. As estimated, the world's military spending hit \$2.9 trillion last year, one third of it done by the US and 12% by China. India was ranked as the world's fifth biggest spender—with \$92.1 billion spent—and second largest arms importer (exceeded only by war-ravaged Ukraine). SIPRI has flagged notable trends such as the use of AI-assisted weapons, plans for arms in space (like America's Golden Dome project) and the risks of biological warfare. The legal and ethical grey zones being explored are a cause for concern, but a likely setback to nuclear restraint may prove worse. The US-Russia New Start treaty expired this February, lifting their mutually agreed stockpile caps. By SIPRI data, the US has 3,700 usable warheads, of which 1,770 are deployed,

while Russia has 4,400 with 1,796 out of silos or ready to use. As per SIPRI, these form the bulk of the planet's 9,745 nukes, with 4,012 deployed. China upped its total pile by 20 to 620 last year (34 of them ready), but could not possibly need more. The trouble, as SIPRI views it, is that if a build-up by nuke-armed states is seen to outpace warhead retirement, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1968 that bars others from acquiring nukes could lose credibility. After all, nuke-holders have done little to disarm, thus failing their end of the bargain. Tardy progress on this front was the big reason why India never signed the NPT. Today, it could grant other countries just the cover they need to develop these weapons. Iran, for example, may see it as the only way to thwart attacks.

This is an apt moment for India to amplify its voice. Our no-first-use stance gives us some high ground in a region where we face two nuclear powers bent on border hostility. On India-Pakistan rivalry, SIPRI's report refers to last year's conflict as an example of events that "challenge the logic of nuclear deterrence." While Pakistan has an estimated 170 nukes, with none deployed, the fact that no mushroom cloud arose speaks of South Asia's very own dynamics. Since it's one big landmass, 'mutually assured destruction' would apply even if a single bomb goes off. This might have given New Delhi space for the use of conventional forces to fight Pakistan's hostile designs. Proximity may alter the calculus, but the logic of a nuclear shield can hardly be judged by an outlier case. As for India's arsenal, we should deploy diplomacy to reiterate that for a safer world, we'd all need to disarm. Failing which, we too have sovereign interests to defend.

ANURAG BEHAR



is CEO of Azim Premji Foundation.

The expansion of human knowledge is a magnificent phenomenon. Over the centuries, we have mapped the human genome, understood the cosmos better and untangled the chemistry of life—and every day, we know more. Yet, this very expansion creates a serious and growing problem for school education. As knowledge multiplies, we attempt to load more and more of it onto the school curriculum—into the same number of hours and classrooms with the same teachers. The timetable does not stretch. Teacher capacity does not multiply. But expectations do. And that, it turns out, is only one part of the problem.

Over the past few weeks, I had three similar conversations. The first was with someone who has done extraordinary work on the prevention of child sexual abuse over many years. She made a compelling case for why this matter deserves dedicated attention in schools: specialized training for teachers, age-appropriate material for children and structured integration into the classroom.

She was right in her concern. The second conversation was with a person who has spent four decades working on road safety. He wanted traffic safety embedded in school activity—first as teacher training, then as curriculum. He was not wrong either. The third was with someone who has worked on water conservation. She wanted schools to take up the challenge of water—its scarcity, pollution, wastage and responsible use.

All the three conversations had a common refrain. When I pointed out that each of these topics already exists in the curriculum, the response was the same: yes, we know, but it doesn't get adequate attention and teachers don't know how to handle it well. I would not dispute their assessment.

In the last six months, I have had nearly identical conversations about plastic waste, energy conservation, menstrual health, mental health, social media and healthy eating. Each topic is urgent. Each was with a champion who knows it deeply and cares passionately. Each champion is right that schools currently do not do justice to their concern. And each of them—quite reasonably—wants schools to do more.

The fact that we work with a large number of schools and state school systems makes us one natural port of call for people who want

to influence schools and their curriculum. Their causes cannot be dismissed. But standing at the intersection as we do, we see something that each such individual champion usually does not: the ever growing cumulative weight of all these expectations is falling on the same institution.

Pause for a moment and imagine what we are asking for. A school—with a fixed number of hours in the day, a curriculum already dense with content and teachers who are themselves stretched—is expected to develop in children a comprehensive understanding of knowledge across disciplines.

At the same time, a school is also expected to develop values and ethical sensibilities, and build capacities like critical thinking and empathy, and then go on to address child safety, road safety, water conservation, environmental awareness, mental health, digital literacy, nutrition and a dozen other things; each of these has its own dedicated pedagogy, each requiring teacher training, each

deserving real time and attention. It is not going to work. It cannot work. And we should say so honestly.

There are two things that must change. The first is that we must stop assigning everything that matters in society to the school system alone. Schools are important—arguably the most

organized and equitable institutions we have for reaching children—but they are not the only place where children learn. Families, communities, media, public libraries, cultural institutions, peer groups—all of these shape children in profound ways.

Ignoring the responsibility of these other institutions and habitually burdening schools is not just unfair to them, it is also ineffective. A child's understanding of water or traffic safety will be thin and brittle if it exists only as a lesson in class and is contradicted by everything she sees at home and in her neighbourhood.

The second and more fundamental point is this: if schools teach the core curriculum

well—genuinely well—they create a foundation on which everything else can be built. A child who has learnt to think clearly, question, reason, understand evidence, deal with complexity and act with regard for others is prepared to understand and internalize matters of water, safety, health or anything else. These capacities are not separate from the specific content that each advocate wants taught. They are what makes specific content actually stick and mean something.

The temptation is always to respond to each new urgent concern by adding a little more to the curriculum, training teachers more and finding a little more time. But this approach is well past its point of effectiveness by now. The curriculum is not a vessel with unlimited capacity.

There is an old and wise saying in education: in schooling, less is more. It has never been more relevant than it is today. The most important thing we can do for children—and for all the causes we care about—is to protect the space for schools to do fewer things but do them with depth, care and genuine quality.

That is how you build a good society. Not by adding more weight to an already burdened institution, but by helping it stand firm under the weight it already carries.

## MY VIEW | MYTHS AND MANTRAS

## SpaceX IPO: does Musk have a divine right to rule the business?

*This share issue will leave him in near total control with very meagre rights for public investors*



DEVINA MEHRA

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This week, history is about to be made with the SpaceX initial public offering (IPO)—the largest IPO ever. The company's valuation is within touching distance of a mind-boggling \$2 trillion.

While most analysis one sees is about that valuation and whether it makes sense in any possible scenario, what's flying under the radar is the fact that investors in the IPO get almost no rights whatsoever.

SpaceX represents one of the most aggressive founder-control set-ups in modern corporate history. Traditionally, public markets grant shareholders three primary rights: to vote, to sue and to sell.

SpaceX has systematically restricted or eliminated these protections to effectively grant all rights to its founder Elon Musk. In other words, the investors are meant to allow Elon Musk to act as a kind of emperor with a divine right to rule, never mind that they are providing him the money to do so.

How is he doing this? First, through dual-class shares where public shareholders have shares with rights that are different from Musk's.

It is no longer 'one share, one vote,' which has traditionally been the basis for good corporate governance.

In the US, dual-class shares reached a peak during the boom of the 1920s, when family businesses went public

while keeping key rights within the family. And we know how that boom ended. These were then banned outright by 1940 by the New York Stock Exchange.

This mechanism was reinstated in the 1980s, but the current boom mostly goes back to the Google/Alphabet listing in 2004, which had a system to preserve founder control. This template was then followed by many others in the tech industry such as Facebook/Meta. About 25-30% of recent IPOs in the US have featured dual-class shares.

Even within this framework, the SpaceX case is extreme. Musk is retaining near-total executive authority and shielding himself in multiple ways. While public investors will buy Class A shares with one vote per share, Musk and a select few insiders hold Class B shares, which carry 10 votes per share.

After the IPO, Musk will control roughly 42% of SpaceX's equity but will command 82-85% of its total voting power. Even if he drastically reduces his economic stake in the future, the structure allows him to maintain an absolute lock on control as long as his remaining Class B shares exceed a minimal threshold (roughly 10%) of outstanding Class A shares. Plus, the company can only issue new Class B shares to Musk, his family or Musk-related entities.

In a traditional public company, a board of directors can fire a CEO if the latter fails to perform or acts against shareholder interests. Under SpaceX's IPO terms, with the voting rights he has and his control of the super-voting blocks required to elect or dismiss board members, Musk essentially has the unilateral power to "elect, remove, or fill any vacancy" on the board. Hence, the board can never remove him.

Since Musk's super-voting power guarantees him an absolute majority, he retains sole authority over major corporate actions that typically require independent shareholder approval. These include mergers and acquisitions (M&A) and even actions that involve

other companies controlled by him.

The founder can unilaterally approve massive dilutive moves. A recent example is the \$230 billion xAI merger that flipped SpaceX from a \$791 million profit in 2024 to an over \$4.9 billion net loss in 2025. Public shareholders have zero power to vote down these types of insider M&A deals or any future compensation structures to Musk himself.

To ensure that he does not face shareholder litigation the way he did at Tesla, Musk has stripped public investors of traditional paths to legal recourse by building a "Texas legal fortress." To give a couple of examples, SpaceX's IPO terms impose strict mandatory arbitration for shareholder claims, severely limiting investors' ability to bring class-action lawsuits.

Any remaining litigation allowed is restricted to a specialized Texas business court under Texas corporate law, which offers far fewer protections for minority shareholders than in states where a number of corporations are registered, like Delaware.

With Musk retaining majority voting power, SpaceX qualifies as a "controlled company" under stock exchange rules. This allows him to bypass standard corporate governance mandates like the requirement of independent directors forming a majority of its board and of its compensation and nomination committees being fully independent.

In short, the SpaceX IPO is inviting public investors to financially back Musk's grand visions for space and artificial intelligence, but they are signing away the traditional mechanisms of corporate governance that are supposed to discipline the management and protect minority shareholders.

Let us also not forget that Musk's leadership has not exactly covered itself in glory on the execution front. Witness Tesla's constantly declining share in the global electric vehicles market, which is now dominated by Chinese players.

Good luck with handing him the keys with little or no recourse to the law!

## 10 YEARS AGO



## JUST A THOUGHT

The no-first-use policy for nuclear weapons was a well thought out stand... We don't intend to reverse it.

RAJNATH SINGH

## MY VIEW | OTHER SPHERE

## In education, less is more: do not overburden schools

ANURAG BEHAR



is CEO of Azim Premji Foundation.

The expansion of human knowledge is a magnificent phenomenon. Over the centuries, we have mapped the human genome, understood the cosmos better and untangled the chemistry of life—and every day, we know more. Yet, this very expansion creates a serious and growing problem for school education. As knowledge multiplies, we attempt to load more and more of it onto the school curriculum—into the same number of hours and classrooms with the same teachers. The timetable does not stretch. Teacher capacity does not multiply. But expectations do. And that, it turns out, is only one part of the problem.

Over the past few weeks, I had three similar conversations. The first was with someone who has done extraordinary work on the prevention of child sexual abuse over many years. She made a compelling case for why this matter deserves dedicated attention in schools: specialized training for teachers, age-appropriate material for children and structured integration into the classroom.

She was right in her concern. The second conversation was with a person who has spent four decades working on road safety. He wanted traffic safety embedded in school activity—first as teacher training, then as curriculum. He was not wrong either. The third was with someone who has worked on water conservation. She wanted schools to take up the challenge of water—its scarcity, pollution, wastage and responsible use.

All the three conversations had a common refrain. When I pointed out that each of these topics already exists in the curriculum, the response was the same: yes, we know, but it doesn't get adequate attention and teachers don't know how to handle it well. I would not dispute their assessment.

In the last six months, I have had nearly identical conversations about plastic waste, energy conservation, menstrual health, mental health, social media and healthy eating. Each topic is urgent. Each was with a champion who knows it deeply and cares passionately. Each champion is right that schools currently do not do justice to their concern. And each of them—quite reasonably—wants schools to do more.

The fact that we work with a large number of schools and state school systems makes us one natural port of call for people who want

to influence schools and their curriculum. Their causes cannot be dismissed. But standing at the intersection as we do, we see something that each such individual champion usually does not: the ever growing cumulative weight of all these expectations is falling on the same institution.

Pause for a moment and imagine what we are asking for. A school—with a fixed number of hours in the day, a curriculum already dense with content and teachers who are themselves stretched—is expected to develop in children a comprehensive understanding of knowledge across disciplines.

At the same time, a school is also expected to develop values and ethical sensibilities, and build capacities like critical thinking and empathy, and then go on to address child safety, road safety, water conservation, environmental awareness, mental health, digital literacy, nutrition and a dozen other things; each of these has its own dedicated pedagogy, each requiring teacher training, each

deserving real time and attention. It is not going to work. It cannot work. And we should say so honestly.

There are two things that must change. The first is that we must stop assigning everything that matters in society to the school system alone. Schools are important—arguably the most

organized and equitable institutions we have for reaching children—but they are not the only place where children learn. Families, communities, media, public libraries, cultural institutions, peer groups—all of these shape children in profound ways.

Ignoring the responsibility of these other institutions and habitually burdening schools is not just unfair to them, it is also ineffective. A child's understanding of water or traffic safety will be thin and brittle if it exists only as a lesson in class and is contradicted by everything she sees at home and in her neighbourhood.

The second and more fundamental point is this: if schools teach the core curriculum

well—genuinely well—they create a foundation on which everything else can be built. A child who has learnt to think clearly, question, reason, understand evidence, deal with complexity and act with regard for others is prepared to understand and internalize matters of water, safety, health or anything else. These capacities are not separate from the specific content that each advocate wants taught. They are what makes specific content actually stick and mean something.

The temptation is always to respond to each new urgent concern by adding a little more to the curriculum, training teachers more and finding a little more time. But this approach is well past its point of effectiveness by now. The curriculum is not a vessel with unlimited capacity.

There is an old and wise saying in education: in schooling, less is more. It has never been more relevant than it is today. The most important thing we can do for children—and for all the causes we care about—is to protect the space for schools to do fewer things but do them with depth, care and genuine quality.

That is how you build a good society. Not by adding more weight to an already burdened institution, but by helping it stand firm under the weight it already carries.



THEIR VIEW

MINT CURATOR

# How infrastructure can support the mental health of our students

India already has most of what it will take to equip its youth with the emotional scaffolding they need to fulfil their potential



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India's greatest asset is also its greatest responsibility. Nearly half the country's population is under 25. This holds the potential for a generational economic leap—but that potential is contingent on something tacitly acknowledged but not explicitly stated: the social and emotional health of children and adolescents as they navigate an increasingly demanding world. The warning signs deserve attention. Available evidence points to a growing burden of mental health challenges among school-going children, compounded by the structural pressures of academic competition, digital over-exposure and the erosion of traditional support networks. The institutions meant to address this—helplines, counselling services, child protection frameworks—are real and valuable. The Supreme Court established a National Task Force in 2025 to address students' mental health; the ministries of women and child development and education operate national helplines; and civil society has contributed enormously. The architecture exists. The question is whether it reaches children at a scale and in a form they will actually use.

That is the gap this piece addresses. Two observations about the current generation are worth taking seriously. First, Gen Z—and the Gen Alpha cohort entering schools now—comprises youth who are text-first and digitally native. They communicate through messaging platforms, not phone calls. A child in distress is far more likely to reach for a chat interface than to dial a helpline where a stranger will hear their voice. Anonymity is often a precondition for honesty in such matters. Second, trust among adolescents today is harder-won than it was for previous generations. Constant exposure to judgement—algorithmic and social—has made them more guarded. Any intervention that does not meet them where their trust already exists will find its reach limited.

Both observations point in the same direction: to the teacher.

India has roughly 10 million teachers supporting over 248 million students. Every day, they navigate far more than their school curriculum—a child's visible distress, signs of trouble at home, the emotional texture of a classroom that no lesson plan accounts for. Teachers are already involved in children's lives in ways that extend well beyond instruction. They clearly need to remain involved; the question is how to equip them for what they are already doing. A trained teacher is not a substitute for a professional counsellor, but is better than an untrained one. And unlike counsellors, teachers already exist at the scale of the problem.

The proposal is to build on the infrastructure

India has already built rather than create new institutions. Diksha, the national digital platform for teacher training, can be extended to include structured modules on recognizing distress, responding appropriately and escalating problems to another level when needed. This is not to convert teachers into therapists. It is to give them a little more support than they currently have and formally recognize—through a portable, DigiLocker-linked credential—the pastoral work they already perform. Teachers would be identified to students as trained and badged; students would self-select whom to approach, revealing their trust by their choice. Conversations could occur through an anonymized channel, with the child's real identity encrypted by a ministry of education-run service and visible only if a formal escalation is triggered. That escalation layer matters.

When teacher encounter a disclosure or sign of harm beyond their training, an SOS mechanism would notify trained reviewers, who would then assess the situation independently and within minutes. A child's identity would be revealed only to those who must act—a school safeguarding officer, a parent, or emergency services—and every such decryption would be permanently logged. Clinical services will remain the third layer, accessible for cases requiring professional care.

The design philosophy is to get more children into a first conversation; the layers above would exist only when needed.

As for privacy, data discipline could be built in from the start. Interaction records would be cleared on a rolling two-year cycle, preventing an inadvertent longitudinal mental health profile from accumulating on a child.

Such a support system would ensure that no new individuals enter a child's life. No new institution would need to be created. The system can be built entirely on what India has already assembled: Diksha, DigiLocker, existing national helplines and the teachers present in every school in the country. Where teachers are absent, community organizations could eventually extend the model—but the foundation, once established, would be robust enough to build on.

There is a broader principle at work here. In domain after domain—from digital payments to identity, health records and more—India has demonstrated that digital public infrastructure can solve at scale problems that market solutions and legacy bureaucracy cannot.

The mental health and well-being of children are not a softer imperative than financial inclusion; they are at least as consequential. Equipping India's students with the emotional scaffolding they need to reach their potential cannot be considered peripheral to the country's development ambitions. Rather, it is constitutive of these, and we need a robust system in place for them to be met.

*These are the authors' personal views.*

# Why RBI may have to hike its policy rate for the rupee's sake

Attracting foreign inflows would be easier if debt assets yield more



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Savers who deposit money in Indian banks earn remarkably little. REUTERS

India has announced a raft of measures to revive global confidence in the sagging rupee. The best thing about the package announced last Friday is what's not in it: capital controls. During the 2013 currency crisis, authorities had slashed the dollar amount that individual savers could legally take out of the country in a year. This time, they wisely left India's \$250,000 limit untouched. Nowadays, that money is widely used for everything from funding foreign education to buying stocks in the US and homes in Dubai. Such a step would have been deeply unpopular.

It might even have backfired. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has already made one big move to crush the build up of speculative short positions in the rupee, though it had to be partially rolled back. The measure did nothing to dispel the negative sentiment around the exchange rate. In fact, it may have worsened it by signalling that the central bank was scraping the bottom of its traditional toolkit for rupee defence.

So instead of sticks, authorities decided to go with a carrots-only approach, telling state-run firms and local banks to raise dollars overseas, bring them home and get a big discount on their hedging cost until 30 September. Although I was not expecting RBI to once again subsidize the cost of external borrowing—it was controversial even during the emerging-market selloff sparked by the US Federal Reserve's 2013 taper tantrum—I guess the thinking was that if it worked then, it would work again.

Sure, borrowing overseas—and raising foreign-currency deposits from the diaspora—might buy the rupee a breather. Analysts expect the latest package to bring in \$50 billion. Some funds may come in via the bond market, where foreigners have been given tax breaks and more freedom to invest. But the bulk may be brought home by local borrowers scooping up three- to five-year money overseas, provided RBI gives them a similar concession on hedging cost as in 2013: roughly 3% a year. That is a burden that taxpayers will bear via reduced central-bank dividends to the government.

However, euphoria around short-term inflows will not fix the core weakness in India's external accounts. An economy that topped all forecasts and grew 7.8% in the March quarter—when the Iran war had already begun—should not be struggling with just \$3 billion in net annual foreign direct investment. Nor ought it be fighting so hard to bring back financial investors who have taken out \$35 billion from the stock market over the past 12 months.

Telling them that any individual can

park money with an Indian portfolio manager is not of much use when they can as easily enter via a foreign fund. The problem is, they do not want to. Not right now.

A part of the pessimism has to do with a paucity of imagination. Beyond building power-guzzling data centres, India lacks a compelling story for global capital hunting for AI innovation. While a central bank cannot do much about that, it can at least give savers more remunerative interest rates. What is the point of near-8% growth in GDP that does not reward households financing the expansion, forcing them to chase risky returns beyond bank deposits?

It might have been acceptable if frothy stock prices were leading to new jobs or wage increases. But that is not the case, either. The net result of India's supposedly pro-growth policies is that they keep valuations high—so foreign firms and private equity investors in startups can get profitable exits. Instead of being just another gauge for the economy, the market has become its proxy.

As part of the 2013 currency rescue, India raised benchmark interest rates to 8%. RBI's then governor Raghuram Rajan had to leave them there for a year, even though the overnight US rate was near zero throughout. He was roundly criticized for keeping a tight lid on liquidity.

That playbook, which helped the central bank re-establish its inflation-fighting credibility, is not getting enough attention. Sanjay Malhotra, the current RBI chief, is sticking with borrowing costs that have fallen by 125 basis points since he took over in December 2024. Last Friday, the monetary policy panel decided to keep its policy rate steady at 5.25%. That is too small a premium for investors when the Fed's target range is 3.5% to 3.75% and expectations are growing that its next move will be a hike.

It is clear what authorities are trying to do—stabilize the currency, keep domestic rates low and avoid capital controls. Juggling all three objectives requires putting taxpayers on the hook, which is what an expected 3% concession on dollar borrowers' hedging cost effectively means.

But ultimately, if capital controls are to be avoided and the rupee is to be saved, RBI has no real choice. The only path to lasting peace on India's external accounts goes through higher rates. **©BLOOMBERG**

THEIR VIEW

# El Niño could rewrite the rules of India's FMCG sector

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A weak monsoon has always worried India's farmers. It should now worry the country's largest consumer companies just as much. India's next big consumer goods disruption may begin with a failed or scanty monsoon hundreds of kilometres away from their factories and warehouses. El Niño, a periodic tilt of warmer Pacific Ocean waters towards the American seaboard away from the Asian one that weakens India's monsoon, is usually watched for its impact on the farm sector. It deserves equal attention from corporate boardrooms. A season of lower rainfall, longer dry spells or drought in important farming regions can travel through the economy before appearing in the price of a biscuit packet, cup of tea, chocolate bar or health product.

For India's fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies, a weak monsoon is more than a supply problem. It is a business problem that affects costs, margins and growth. For decades, consumer companies

have been judged on their brands, advertising, pricing power and distribution networks. That view is woefully incomplete. Some of their most important assets are not inside factories. They are the farms that produce milk, wheat, tea, coffee, spices, sugar, herbs and edible oils.

A weak monsoon exposes the fragile connection between agriculture and consumer markets. India's FMCG supply chains were built around the expectation that agricultural production would remain broadly reliable. That assumption is under pressure as rainfall becomes harder to predict. A delayed monsoon, uneven rainfall distribution or prolonged dry spell can affect sowing decisions, yields, crop quality and farm incomes.

While every ingredient does not respond to El Niño the same way, the big problem is dependence. Many consumer products rely on farm commodities produced in regions where water availability and rainfall timing determine output. When disruption reaches these supply chains, companies face uncomfortable choices. They can absorb higher costs of ingredients such as milk, wheat, sugar or cooking oils, but that hurts margins. They can increase prices, but consumers may reduce purchases. They can reduce pack sizes, but that strategy cannot protect

them indefinitely from what they face.

India is under particular pressure because rural households sit on both sides of the equation. They supply many commodities and represent a critical market for consumer goods. A weak agricultural season can increase costs while weakening demand.

This is why the climate conversation within FMCG companies has to move beyond factories. Cleaner energy, efficient manufacturing and better packaging remain important. But a company can run an efficient factory and still face disruption if the supply of farm ingredients falls short or turns unreliable.

Global research on supply chains shows that businesses designed mainly for efficiency can become vulnerable when disruption affects important suppliers or concentrated production regions. Some leading Indian consumer companies have started preparing for this reality. ITC has an advantage because agriculture has long been central to its business. Its climate-smart farm initiatives focus on

improving farm resilience through water management, better cultivation methods and farmer advisory services. Networks originally created to improve sourcing efficiency could serve as protection against monsoon uncertainty.

Nestlé India faces direct exposure because ingredients such as milk, coffee and cereals are central to its product portfolio. Its farmer programmes focus on responsible sourcing and farming practices aimed at improving soil health, water efficiency and long-term productivity. Hindustan Unilever has also recognized that business risks extend deep into agricultural supply chains. Its disclosures highlight supplier engagement, responsible sourcing and efforts to make the supply of important agricultural commodities more resilient.

But individual company efforts may not be enough. India's agricultural supply chains remain highly fragmented. Many small farmers who produce essential ingredients do not have adequate access to irriga-

tion, finance, technology or timely weather information. It makes adaptation a policy challenge as much as a corporate priority. Better water management, improved irrigation, agricultural research, local weather forecasting and easier finance for farmers, apart from being key rural development goals, are becoming essential infrastructure for industries that depend on predictable agricultural production. The government's think-tank Niti Aayog has highlighted the need to strengthen water management and build more resilient agricultural systems as pressure on natural resources increases.

Strong brands and low-cost sourcing have long given FMCG companies an edge, but the next competitive advantage in this sector may come from knowing exactly where ingredients originate, understanding the risks facing those regions and investing before the next disruption occurs. El Niño may possibly see an Indian Ocean dipole effect counter it to a small extent this year, but its lesson is clear: FMCG businesses must mitigate their vulnerability to the adversity it could result in. They have spent decades building brands that consumers can trust. The future battle for India's consumer market may begin long before a product reaches a store shelf. It may begin in its farms.

## The next test for such firms may come from weak rainfall and fragile agricultural supply chains



## Editor's TAKE

### PoK burns while Pakistan looks away

Economic despair, democratic deficits and a heavy-handed crackdown on the JAAC movement have pushed it to its brink in years

The streets of Muzaffarabad, Rawalakot, and Mirpur do not burn without reason. What began as a campaign for subsidised flour and affordable electricity by the Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) has morphed into a full-blown political rebellion against Islamabad's grip on Pakistan-administered Kashmir. Markets are shuttered, paramilitary boots are on the ground, and at least eleven protesters have been killed in clashes with security forces. Islamabad's response — banning the JAAC, placing bounties on its leaders, and flooding the region with federal forces — has only poured fuel on the fire. The unrest is rooted in decades of structural grievance. The JAAC's central demand — abolishing the twelve legislative seats reserved for 1947 Jammu and Kashmir refugees settled in mainland Pakistan — strikes at the heart of PoK's political dysfunction. These seats have long allowed Islamabad's favoured parties to engineer governments in Muzaffarabad, bypassing the will of local voters. Combine this with punishing electricity tariffs, a cost-of-living crisis, and persistent constitutional ambiguity about the region's status, and the tinder was always there. The JAAC simply lit the match.

Faisal Mumtaz Rathore's appeals for dialogue ring hollow when made alongside mass arrests, communication clampdowns, and a ₹10 million bounty on protest leaders. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan has warned that suppressing popular movements erodes democratic legitimacy — advice Islamabad appears unwilling to heed.

British MPs, diaspora Kashmiris outside the Pakistani Consulate in Bradford, and international observers are all watching. The crackdown is becoming a reputational liability for Pakistan far beyond the region itself. New Delhi must watch this situation with clear eyes and a steady hand.

The temptation to exploit the crisis with triumphalist commentary should be firmly resisted — it would only hand Islamabad a nationalist distraction. Instead, India should pursue a multi-pronged approach. First, it must amplify the voices of PoK's people in international forums — not as a propaganda exercise, but as a principled defence of democratic rights and self-determination, values India espouses globally.

Second, New Delhi should engage the Kashmiri diaspora in the UK and elsewhere, whose protests against Pakistani conduct now align with India's long-standing legal position that PoK is illegally occupied territory.

Third, and most critically, India must ensure that its own conduct in Jammu and Kashmir remains beyond reproach. The moral authority to speak on PoK's democratic deficit is strongest when the Indian side of the Line of Control is seen as a genuine model of governance, economic development, and political participation. Besides, New Delhi must ensure that the Kashmir Valley remains peaceful, even if Pakistan tries to foment trouble to deflect the attention of the international community. Every hospital built in Ladakh and every elected panchayat functioning freely in the Valley is a more powerful statement than any diplomatic demarche.

## Bihar's silent land records revolution

The future of land governance in India may not always emerge from the courtrooms, but from transparent, continuously updated, digitally secured revenue records



VIVEK KUMAR SINGH

India's economy runs on land records, but its legal imagination has never fully trusted them. Few administrative instruments have been as routinely dismissed as mutation entries — long treated as weak fiscal documents carrying little evidentiary value regarding ownership. Courts have repeatedly observed that mutation neither creates nor extinguishes title. Lawyers have viewed it as merely presumptive. Citizens have associated revenue records with manipulation, missing registers, opaque procedures, and arbitrary correction slips.

Much of this scepticism was justified — but it was justified in relation to a system that largely belonged to another era. The problem today is that India's legal discourse on mutation remains trapped in the past even as the architecture of land administration has changed dramatically in several states. One of the most striking examples of this transformation is Bihar, where a silent but far-reaching land records revolution has unfolded over the last decade.

Bihar was not an early mover in digitisation. Having embarked upon it as late as in 2017-18, within a short span, it emerged as one of the country's most ambitious reformers, eventually being recognised as the most progressive state on the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) Land Records and Services Index in 2021. What makes Bihar's experience particularly significant is that the reform was not merely technological. It was simultaneously legal, procedural, and institutional.

The state adopted what may be described as a "3-D Strategy" — Digitise, Distil, Deliver. The challenge before Bihar was uniquely complex. Zamindari-era land records carried enormous inconsistencies, missing links, overlapping claims, and fragmented documentation accumulated over generations. Mere scanning of old records could not solve the problem. Data had to be cleaned, reconciled, standardised, and continuously updated. Digitisation was, therefore, accompanied by distillation — validation, correction, integration, and dynamic update of records through a transparent process 'Parimarjan' (meaning refurbishment). Without this process, digitisation would merely have fossilised historical inaccuracies into electronic form. The final stage was delivery. Technology was transformed into citizen-facing governance. Revenue services became increasingly online, transparent, and traceable.

Crucially, Bihar's reforms were not built on technology alone. They were anchored in legal restructuring. Prior to the reforms of the last



decade, land revenue administration across much of India functioned largely through executive conventions, departmental circulars, and manual practices. Bihar gradually moved away from this uncertain framework and introduced clearer statutory foundations governing mutations after 2011. Mutation thereby ceased to remain an informal administrative exercise and increasingly acquired the character of a legally regulated quasi-judicial process incorporating notice, hearing, objection, appeal, and revisional safeguards. Subsequent amendments after 2017 aligned digitised governance with modified statutory procedures. This distinction is critical. The objective was not merely to convert paper registers into electronic images but to create continuously updated, legally governed, and procedurally traceable land records. The subsequent integration of the Revenue Court Management System (RCMS) added another layer of transparency by digitally recording proceedings and making orders publicly accessible and institutionally traceable. The results have been striking. Within just one year of digitisation, mutation applications in Bihar increased from 13.41 lakh to 20.90 lakh. Citizens generally avoid dysfunctional systems. Burgeoning mutation applications indicated growing public trust and increasing willingness to formally record transfers, inheritance, and succession through official channels. Today, 100 percent of revisional survey maps in Bihar have been digitised and geo-referenced, significantly strengthening cadastral accuracy and future GIS-linked governance. Equally important has been the reduction in pendency. Within the last year itself, pending mutation cases have declined from 8.42 lakh to 1.32 lakh.

The scale of record updation is even more revealing. Out of 454.32 lakh digitised jamabandis in Bihar, approximately 93.5 lakh now reflect changes brought about through proper quasi-judicial proceedings. This translates into an Updated Jamabandi Ratio of nearly 21 percent — evidence that land records are no longer static archival entries but living administrative instruments aligned with ground realities. Transparency in revenue adjudication has sim-

ilarly improved. Of the 4.19 lakh online cases filed before Deputy Collectors Land Reforms (DCLRs), approximately 2.57 lakh cases have been disposed of — a disposal rate of nearly 61 percent. Meanwhile, citizen access has steadily expanded. Today, 22 online services are available through the Bihar Bhumi portal, progressively transforming land governance into accessible e-governance.

One of the standard criticisms against land revenue proceedings has been that revenue officers lack the legal training of judicial officers. But this condemnation often overlooks the specialised nature of land administration itself. Most conventional LL.B. programmes devote limited attention to highly state-specific land revenue laws, jamabandi systems, tenancy frameworks, survey administration, and mutation procedures. Revenue officers, on the other hand, are trained precisely in these domains and continuously work within an ecosystem involving succession disputes, partition claims, transfers, inheritance, possession patterns, and cadastral realities.

None of this implies that revenue courts should replace civil courts, or make current revenue record entries assume the mantle of an infallible declaration of title. Fraudulent transfers, forged deeds, coercive transactions, and complex title disputes will always require judicial adjudication. Yet the traditional tendency to dismiss mutation records as casually maintained fiscal entries no longer reflects contemporary administrative reality. Modern mutated records increasingly operate as the de facto current title recognised by the state machinery. Banks rely upon them before sanctioning loans. Government agencies use them during compensation proceedings. Purchasers scrutinise them during transactions. Utilities and welfare systems increasingly depend upon them. The law may still stop short of granting conclusive de jure

status to mutation entries, but governance systems increasingly function on the assumption that mutation-backed records represent the current ownership framework.

Certainly, Bihar's challenges remain enormous. The sheer scale of its land-related ailments — historical gaps, overlapping claims, tenancy complications, survey inconsistencies, family partitions, and procedural delays — forebode that disputes and grievances are persistent, and may continue to be so. But within the limitations of India's land adjudication architecture, continuously updated and digitally secured mutation systems, like Bihar's, are gradually bringing method to what was once near-chaotic land administration. Bihar's experience demonstrates that land revenue administration need not remain trapped in the shadows of its past. The convergence of statutory safeguards, digitised records, geo-referenced mapping, transparent revenue adjudication, and continuous record updation can fundamentally alter the credibility index of land governance.



The writer is an ex-IAS officer and is presently Chairman, RERA Bihar. He served as Principal Secretary, Department of Revenue and Land Reforms, Bihar

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## PICTALK



A man plucks dates from a date palm tree on the outskirts of Jagdalpur in Bastar district, Chhattisgarh. PHOTO: PTI

## The last lesson of life: Understanding death



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

### 2ND OPINION

Death is the one destination we all share, yet it remains the most feared. No one wishes to die, and the uncertainty surrounding it fills our minds with dread, avoidance, and superstition. Yet ancient Yogis and Saints stood in striking contrast to this fear — they faced death with complete calm and awareness. This profound difference has long fascinated scientists and spiritual seekers alike, drawing them to study the dying process, particularly as experienced by those deeply rooted in spiritual practice.

It is said that Yogis receive an inner knowing when their time approaches. This awareness gives them the precious opportunity to settle unfinished attachments, ensuring that nothing pulls the mind back to the world at the critical moment when the soul departs.

Stabilised in soul-consciousness and absorbed in the loving remembrance of the Almighty, the Yogi experiences a gentle numbness beginning at the toes, with the soul gradually rising towards the forehead. The final karmic accounts are dissolved, and the soul — completely detached — feels neither physical pain nor emotional confusion. It simply rises and flies out through the forehead into higher, angelic realms.

This graceful exit is not accidental; it is the fruit of years, sometimes lifetimes, of sincere spiritual effort. For such a soul, death is not a doorway into darkness but a passage into light.

For those without such spiritual preparation, however, the experience is vastly different. At the moment of realisation that time is up, a flood of images rushes in — loved ones, unfinished business, unfulfilled desires, and a lifetime of actions, both good and bad.

Confusion and regret cloud the mind, and in this unsettled state, the soul departs without peace or clarity. The contrast is clear: the more one understands death from a spiritual perspective, the better one can prepare for it.

Many believe death is feared simply because it is unknown. But this overlooks a deeper truth. Every soul has left and entered bodies countless times; the experience of leaving is not truly foreign — it lives within our subconscious.

Death becomes painful primarily because we identify with the body, becoming so attached to it that the soul cannot leave peacefully. Deep emotional bonds, combined with the anguish of "I will never see them again", intensify karmic ties and make the separation unbearable. This is why spiritual detachment, cultivated throughout life, becomes invaluable at the time of death. Unresolved emotions act like invisible chains, holding the soul back in sorrow even after it has left the body.

When a Yogi loses someone close, there is no grief — only understanding. Rather than weeping, the Yogi meditates and channels vibrations of peace towards the departed soul, helping it move forward quickly and painlessly into the next chapter.

A natural death at the end of a well-lived life carries with it a quiet inner voice: my part here is complete. According to ancient scriptures, death at the end of a full karmic cycle is the only death followed by true liberation.

To reach that state, one must actively renounce negative actions that create karmic bondage — conquering anger, greed, lust, arrogance, fear, and attachment — and choose to live a life of purity, awareness, and grace.



The writer is a popular columnist and a spiritual teacher

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## FOUR DECADES LATER, JUSTICE FINALLY REACHES APPELLANT

The Supreme Court's recent concern over a 40-year delay in the disposal of a criminal appeal by the Allahabad High Court highlights the urgent need for judicial reforms. A Bench comprising Justice Prashant Kumar Mishra and Justice Atul Chandurkar rightly described the situation as disturbing and sought solutions to tackle the mounting pendency that continues to burden the justice delivery system.

The case relates to Vijay Singh, who was arrested in 1983 for an alleged murder and was convicted by a Kanpur sessions court later that year. He challenged his conviction before the Allahabad High Court, only to see his appeal remain pending for four decades before being dismissed in February this year. Such an extraordinary delay undermines

faith in the judicial process and raises serious questions about access to timely justice.

Justice delayed is often justice denied. While courts across the country face a heavy caseload, delays of this magnitude are unacceptable. Prolonged litigation affects not only the accused but also victims, families, and society at large. It weakens public confidence in institutions and defeats the very purpose of the legal system.

Addressing judicial vacancies, improving case management, adopting technology, and creating additional benches are some measures that can help reduce pendency. The judiciary must ensure that justice is delivered not only fairly but also within a reasonable timeframe.

YASH PAL RALHAN | JALANDHAR

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

## The Zojila tunnel breakthrough

The Zojila Tunnel, at an elevation of 11,578 ft, is set to become India's longest road tunnel and will provide all-weather connectivity between Kashmir and Ladakh. The recent breakthrough near Minimarg, attended by Union Minister Nitin Gadkari, marks a significant milestone in India's infrastructure journey.

The 13.153-km single-tube, bi-directional tunnel is expected to open to the public in February 2028. Linking Baltal in Kashmir with Minimarg in Ladakh, it will end the seasonal isolation caused by the Zojila Pass and provide uninterrupted connectivity to Dras, Kargil, and Leh. Megha Engineering and Infrastructure Limited (MEIL), the executing agency, states that the tunnel will reduce travel time from 1.5-3 hours to about 15 minutes while meeting state-of-the-art safety standards. Beyond improving military logistics, the project is expected to boost year-round tourism, lower transport costs, reduce fuel consumption and emissions, facilitate faster movement of goods and services, and generate local employment. Often described as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's dream project, the Zojila Tunnel promises enhanced connectivity, security, and economic development for Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh.

RAJINDER NARULA | PATIALA

## From welfare to growth

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has surpassed Jawaharlal Nehru's tenure as India's longest-serving elected Prime Minister. While this is an important political milestone, the true measure of leadership lies not merely in longevity but in the depth and durability of transformation. Over the past 12 years, India has witnessed a significant expansion of welfare delivery through direct benefit transfers, financial inclusion, rural housing, tap-water connectivity, and healthcare coverage. By reducing leakages and leveraging technology, the government has sought to make welfare more transparent and accessible. Equally noteworthy is the BJP's expansion into regions once considered beyond its political reach, reshaping the country's electoral landscape.

The next phase of governance, however, must move beyond welfare delivery towards wealth creation. Employment generation, skilling, quality education, urban planning, agricultural diversification, and climate resilience require greater attention. As India aspires to become a developed nation by 2047, success will depend on converting demographic potential into productive opportunities. The challenge now is to ensure that welfare gains translate into sustainable economic growth, social cohesion, and stronger institutions.

SANJAY CHOPRA | MOHALI

## Protecting Nicobar's fragile ecosystem

The debate surrounding Great Nicobar has highlighted the island's strategic importance for India. Located near the Strait of Malacca, a maritime chokepoint through which a substantial share of global trade passes, the island is of undeniable geopolitical significance. India's desire to establish military and civilian infrastructure there is therefore understandable.

However, strategic necessity does not override ecological accountability. The proposed felling of 9.6 lakh trees across 130 square kilometres of tropical rainforest is not incidental to development; it is central to it. Coral reefs, leatherback turtle nesting grounds, and one of the world's last intact island biospheres cannot be protected through vague assurances alone. While the Ministry of Environment has acknowledged biodiversity concerns, details of effective mitigation measures remain unclear.

The situation of the Shompen community is equally troubling. With a population of only around 300, their homeland lies within the project footprint. Allegations that community consent was falsely certified warrant an independent inquiry. India needs neither a choice between strategy and ecology nor a false binary. What is required is an independent environmental review, transparent and genuine community consent before proceeding further.

M BARATHI | BENGALURU



## India's era of cultural renaissance: Reclaiming our civilisational glory

## NEET & the crisis of trust

India stands as one of the world's oldest living civilisations. For centuries, our resilience was tested by brutal onslaughts from foreign invaders. Regimes changed and political power shifted, yet the core ethos of Bharat successfully endured, passed down seamlessly from one generation to the next



**GAJENDRA SINGH SHEKHAWAT**

As India scales new heights across diverse sectors from economic robustness and national security to cutting-edge science and infrastructure - the path to becoming a truly Viksit Bharat (Developed India) demands more than just material milestones. True national progression requires an unyielding anchor in our ancient culture, history, and heritage.

India stands as one of the world's oldest living civilisations. For centuries, our resilience was tested by brutal onslaughts from foreign invaders. Regimes changed and political power shifted, yet the core ethos of Bharat successfully endured, passed down seamlessly from one generation to the next. Though our sacred places of worship, ancient texts, libraries, and universities were systematically demolished during these turbulent eras, our cultural soul remained indomitable.

However, the most insidious blow to cultural India came later through a systematically altered education system. This framework was deliberately engineered to instil a deep-seated inferiority complex within us towards our own heritage, intentionally severing us from our civilisational roots.

### 2014: The dawn of a cultural reawakening

The year 2014 marked a historic paradigm shift. Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, India began shedding its colonial cloak and initiated a massive cultural resurrection. Today, a confident Bharat is not merely recalling its glorious past; it is actively restoring its grandeur, majesty, and spiritual values to the very fabric of our mainstream social life.

Our timeless festivals, historical monuments, traditional cuisine, attire, fine arts, music, and profound craftsmanship are no longer viewed as mere relics of history — they have emerged as dynamic pillars of global fascination and respect.

### Activating India's cultural soft power

Over the past 12 years, the global acceptance and appreciation of Indian heritage have reached unprecedented heights. The universal adoption of June 21 as International Day of Yoga is a spectacular example. Yoga is not merely a physical regimen; it is a profound ancient Indian philosophy that the world has embraced for holistic human well-being.

Our commitment to our heritage is equally reflected in the aggressive repatriation of stolen antiquities, marking a sharp departure from past decades of institutional apathy:

- Prior to 2013: A mere 13 stolen artefacts were brought back to India over several decades.
- Past 12 Years: More than 640 sacred heritage artefacts have been successfully retrieved from foreign soil.

This overwhelming shift proves that preserving culture is no longer just a rhetorical exercise; we are fiercely determined to reclaim the physical and spiritual symbols of our civilisation. These artefacts are the living imprints of our ancestors' mastery of art, craft, and science, serving as eternal beacons of inspiration.

Furthermore, UNESCO's recognition of Durga Puja and Diwali as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity validates the timeless, universal messages embedded in our traditions — the eternal triumph of truth over falsehood and light over darkness. With 44 World Heritage Sites, India now ranks sixth globally and second in Asia, offering proud testimony to our tangible historical legacy.

### Reclaiming forgotten and suppressed knowledge

For centuries, foreign forces that lacked respect for intellectual and spiritual traditions tried to obliterate India's knowledge repositories by burning our universities, dismantling gurukuls, and scattering our manuscripts. While dedicated sages and households quietly preserved these priceless manuscripts in remote monasteries and temples, they unfortunately slipped from public memory. Regrettably, even after gaining independence, past regimes made no structured, national-level effort to compile these texts and



THROUGH ICONIC TRANSFORMATIONS SUCH AS THE KASHI VISHWANATH DHAM, MAHAKAL LOK CORRIDOR, KEDARNATH, AND SOMNATH, WE ARE EXECUTING A COMPREHENSIVE OVERHAUL OF OUR SPIRITUAL LANDSCAPE. BY CREATING WORLD-CLASS INFRASTRUCTURE AND SEAMLESS FACILITIES FOR PILGRIMS, WE HAVE SUCCESSFULLY CHAMPIONED THE PHILOSOPHY OF 'VIRASAT BHI, VIKAS BHI' (HERITAGE ALONGSIDE DEVELOPMENT)

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reclaim our civilisational wisdom.

To rectify this historic oversight, the 'Gyan Bharatam' National Manuscript Survey has been launched as a massive nationwide initiative. Today, over 1 crore manuscripts have been successfully catalogued from across the country.

We are not just collecting these texts; we are pairing ancient wisdom with modern technological capability. By leveraging cutting-edge tools such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and advanced digitisation, we are securing this intellectual wealth for posterity. This monumental archive will introduce future generations to India's historic excellence in spirituality, science, art, and craft, inspiring an unshakeable pride in their roots.

### Virasat Bhi, Vikas Bhi: Rejuvenating our sacred places

Our grand temples, imposing forts, and historical fairs are the physical anchors of our civilisational narrative. Yet, for nearly seven decades after independence, these cultural landmarks faced systemic neglect and administrative apathy, while only a select few monuments were curated for global visibility. Temples in India have historically been the unifying threads of our diverse social fabric. Over the past 12 years, we have completely reversed this culture of neglect.

Through iconic transformations such as the Kashi Vishwanath Dham, Mahakal Lok Corridor, Kedarnath, and Somnath, we are executing a comprehensive overhaul of our spiritual landscape. By creating world-class infrastructure and seamless facilities for pilgrims, we have successfully championed the philosophy of 'Virasat Bhi, Vikas Bhi' (Heritage alongside Development).

This revitalisation has sparked a massive boom in spiritual tourism, directly strengthening local economies and transforming these holy towns into vibrant economic hubs.

Most heartening is the massive influx of young people to these sacred centres. Their growing presence is the ultimate symbol of India's cultural revival, proving that our younger generation is eagerly re-establishing its bond with our spiritual heritage.

### Bharat reconnecting with its eternal roots

Today, India is confidently walking a dual path: keeping pace with the cutting-edge modern world while remaining deeply anchored in its ancient civilisational roots. We are writing a glorious new chapter of cultural decolonisation. After centuries of existential struggle, Bharat is firmly asserting its timeless spiritual and cultural identity on the global stage.

We are demonstrating to the world how ancient traditions and state-of-the-art modernity can seamlessly coexist. The future belongs to this vibrant, self-reliant New India. In this Amrit Kaal, the thought, philosophy, and cultural values of Bharat are poised to give a fresh, holistic direction to the global community.



**AASHISH CHAUDHRY**

the students. Such acts create serious doubts about the validity of the system, as well as put tremendous pressure on students, parents, and the government. Any allegation of a paper leak or exam irregularity deeply hurts not only students but also the faith of the entire nation. NEET-UG is today one of the largest entrance examinations in the world. As per reports, NEET-UG 2026 was held in over 551 cities in India and 14 foreign countries, at over 5,400 exam centres. Around 22.8 lakh students registered for the test, while over 22 lakh appeared. After reports of paper leakage, the examination will now be conducted again in June. The exam is also linked to a massive medical education system. India reportedly has more than 1.28 lakh MBBS seats across over 800 medical colleges. Along with this, there are thousands of seats in dental and AYUSH colleges. The future healthcare workforce of India begins with this one examination.

Exams such as NEET should reflect honesty, merit, discipline, and equal opportunities. Students must believe that their efforts have value. Over the last few years, allegations related to paper leaks and cheating have repeatedly raised concerns. Whether proven or under investigation, such incidents damage public trust.

The biggest impact is not only administrative but also emotional. Students preparing for NEET already face extreme pressure. Many study for years. Some repeat attempts multiple times. They live under constant stress, and when reports of leaks or unfair practices emerge, students start feeling helpless. This uncertainty even affects their mental health. Today, anxiety, burnout, sleep problems, depression, and emotional exhaustion are becoming common among competitive exam students.

Parents also silently suffer. In many homes, the entire family's routine revolves around the child preparing for NEET. Expectations become very high. If trust in the system weakens, stress increases further.

As doctors, we often talk about mental wellness, but we must also understand the mental pressure created by academic systems. A student preparing for medicine should not feel broken before even entering medical college.

At the same time, we must also acknowledge the positive side. Conducting an examination of this scale is not easy. The conduct of examinations for lakhs of students in thousands of centres requires tremendous coordination, manpower, and security. There are many officials, teachers, administrators, and staff members who genuinely try their best for the smooth conduct of the examination. We must also appreciate their efforts.

However, in the present era of technology, it is not sufficient. India is an IT nation. If technology can secure the banking system, digital payment systems, and national databases, then surely the examination system can also be improved. Artificial intelligence and data analytics could be used for the detection of anomalies in students' answers. If a group of candidates shows highly abnormal answer similarities, systems can immediately flag it for investigation. This can help detect organised cheating networks early.

There is a need to strengthen biometric authentication and standardise it across all NEET examination centres in the country. Facial recognition, fingerprint scanning, and live verification can minimise impersonation and fraudulent candidate entry. There is a need to make sure that question paper movement becomes totally encrypted and digitally traceable. All stages, from printing to transporting, storing, and distributing papers, have to be digitally tracked in real time.

Technology can play an important role in monitoring examination centres. AI-enabled CCTV systems can detect suspicious activity, while live monitoring from central control rooms can improve transparency. Multiple paper sets generated through secure algorithms can further reduce the risk of leaks. Cybersecurity must also become a priority for examination bodies. Stronger cyber audits, ethical hacking tests, and independent technology reviews should be mandatory before every major national examination.

In addition, we also need institutional accountability. In the case of any irregularities, the process of investigation should be quick, unbiased, and fair. Information should reach students immediately rather than creating rumours and chaos. Any delay will increase panic. Strict punishment is equally important. When people leak papers, they are not just committing an act against the system; they are robbing honest students of opportunities. Strict legal action can instil fear among such groups indulging in malpractices. It is also necessary to decrease over-centralisation. India is a vast and diverse nation. According to some experts, states should play an active role in counselling, monitoring, and conducting exams. The pressure around a single examination is another major issue. For lakhs of students, one exam decides everything. This creates enormous stress. India should gradually explore systems where academic performance, aptitude, practical assessment, and multiple opportunities also play a role in admissions. A single three-hour exam should not completely define a student's worth or future.

Career counselling is equally important. Not qualifying for NEET should not be seen as failure. India needs skilled professionals in many healthcare fields - nursing, physiotherapy, psychology, public health, biotechnology, research, and allied sciences. Society must stop treating only MBBS degrees as success.

Parents also play a very important role during such crises. Students preparing for competitive exams need emotional support more than pressure. They need reassurance that their value as individuals is worth more than mere marks and rankings. I firmly believe that the future of medicine lies in the psychological health of students choosing this field. A stressed, exhausted, and emotionally damaged student cannot become a compassionate doctor easily. The NEET examination system does not only select future doctors. It shapes the future culture of Indian healthcare.

India has the talent, technology, and administrative strength to make NEET more secure and transparent. What is needed now is continuous reform, political will, institutional responsibility, and student-first thinking. Lakhs of students are not asking for shortcuts. They are simply asking for fairness. And fairness is the minimum any young dream deserves.

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## From efficiency to sustainability: The evolution of conscious industry



**SHARMILA DAS**

At the turn of this century, the most intelligent boardroom conversations revolved around a single obsession: efficiency. The language was clinical, precise, mathematical. Waste reduction. Defect control. Process optimisation. Lean systems.

I remember walking into the meeting where Six Sigma was to be introduced. Our CEO asked if I knew what it stood for. In those pre-Google days, I reached for common sense and humour: 'If it's American, it must be simple.' As it turned out, the very first line of the presentation read: "Six Sigma plugs the hole in the bucket." We made eye contact and laughed. But beneath the simplicity, the concept was powerful.

Six Sigma became the gold standard of industrial discipline. If you were a certified champion, those credentials walked into the room slightly ahead of you — much like a pot belly. Factories embraced it. Production lines worshipped it. Consultants built empires around it. And, to be fair, it worked. The manufacturing world became sharper, faster, cleaner, and more accountable. Every scrap of excess material, every unnecessary movement, every defective output was treated as a leak in a carefully engineered system. The goal was simple: preserve value by eliminating waste.

But nearly a quarter of a century later, humanity discovered something larger. The bucket itself was leaking — not merely in factories or supply chains, but in ecosystems, lifestyles, cities, oceans, and our very relationship with consumption itself.

That is where sustainability quietly entered - not as a replacement for efficiency, but as its natural evolution. Because sustainability, in many ways, is Six Sigma expanded to life itself. Today, the conversation is no longer only about how efficiently we manufacture fabric. It is about what happens to everything left behind once manufacturing is complete — the offcuts, the trims, the rejected panels, the tiny mountains of discarded material that silently accumulate across the world every single day. For decades, fabric scraps were treated as unavoidable industrial residue: too small to value, too inconvenient to process, too insignificant to discuss. But sustainability changes the lens entirely.

What if the scrap is not waste? What if it is simply material waiting for its next identity?

A discarded fragment today can become insulation tomorrow, handcrafted accessories, regenerated yarn, or even the design statement itself. Reuse and recreation are no longer experiments in niche studios. They are becoming central to the future of responsible manufacturing. The beauty of fabric is that, unlike many materials, it carries memory — texture, history, energy. A scrap is not dead matter. It is unfinished possibility.

This is why the philosophy of textile reuse feels so connected to the ancient wisdom of Yoga. At



its core, Yoga is not merely exercise. It is alignment. It teaches that waste occurs the moment there is disconnection — between breath and awareness, between movement and intention, between body and mind. The moment we lose consciousness of how energy flows through us, imbalance begins.

The same principle applies to sustainability. Modern consumption has functioned like a body breathing incorrectly. We inhale endlessly through production, extraction, and acquisition — but we have forgotten how to exhale responsibly through reuse, restoration, and mindful circulation. The result is imbalance: overflowing landfills, pollut-

ed rivers, burning textile waste, and societies consuming faster than they can emotionally process.

Yoga reminds us that health lies in circulation, not accumulation. Nothing in nature wastes itself — a fallen leaf becomes soil, a river recycles its own journey. Sustainability is, in this sense, industrial yoga. It asks industries to move with awareness, to understand that every output carries a consequence and every resource deserves respect.

In traditional manufacturing, scraps represented inefficiency. In sustainable systems, they represent opportunity. That single change in perception is revolutionary. When designers build collections around leftover materials, creativity transforms. When factories intelligently segregate scraps, systems transform. When consumers value recreated products, markets transform. And when businesses measure not only profit margins but also environmental footprints, priorities transform.

The remarkable thing is that sustainability has moved far beyond environmental activism - it has become operational intelligence. The companies shaping the future are no longer simply those producing the fastest or cheapest products. Increasingly, they are those designing circular systems where materials stay in motion longer, waste is minimised before it exists, and regeneration is built into strategy itself.

Six Sigma taught us how to control defects in manufacturing. Sustainability asks us to examine defects in behaviour.

Six Sigma asked: How do we reduce wastage inside the factory? Sustainability asks: How do we

reduce wastage within civilisation?

It is no longer enough for a process to be efficient if the planet supporting that process becomes inefficiently burdened.

And perhaps the most hopeful part of this transition is that creativity is returning to industry. For years, mass production rewarded uniformity. Now sustainability rewards imagination. A recreated fabric panel carries character. A repaired garment feels personal in ways a new one rarely does. Imperfection becomes individuality rather than failure. Yoga teaches acceptance — not of stagnation, but of transformation. A stiff body can grow flexible. A fragmented life can become integrated. Likewise, a fragmented textile can become whole again. The scrap is not the end of the story. It is simply the pause before reinvention.

Value does not disappear merely because form changes. A cutting on a factory floor still holds purpose. A repaired product still carries dignity. A recreated object still possesses beauty.

We are entering an era in which the most admired industries may not be those that produce the most, but those that waste the least while creating the most meaning. The future belongs not to those who build bigger buckets — but to those who finally learn how to stop the leaking altogether.

The writer is a trained Sivananda Yoga teacher

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**A thought for today**

*There are worse things than being exploited, and being redundant and unable to make a living is one of them*

ZEYNEP TUFEKCI

# Control, Shift

*AI is not destroying the job market, but changing it. There will be jobs aplenty if you update your skills*

In white-collar circles, this is the best of times. The first trillionaire is just round the corner. This is also the worst of times – millions of jobs are at risk from AI. A new poll shows more than half of all Americans fear they, or someone in their family, could be out of work. In London, 46% of jobs are such that parts of them can be easily automated. And in India, global back office of IT, it looks like campus placements are no longer an entitlement. TCS chairman N Chandrasekaran has said, days of hiring at scale are over, and the future of work is equal parts human intelligence and AI.

It's natural to be nervous when the future starts *seeming* so uncertain. When old certainties – STEM course, top college, campus placement, steady job – are demolished. So, as individuals, we are worried, but what about the big picture? Are we all – or most of us – going to be jobless? Is it time to decide how we'll distribute apples, oranges, movie tickets, cars, etc, when nobody has an income to buy them? No, because this isn't the end of work, it's just a massive shake-up. And it's not the first. Someone whose last memory is from the 1940s, won't recognise 60% of jobs today. And, we don't know what new jobs await us in 2036. But if the past is a template, there will be many more.

As TOI reported yesterday, Chandrasekaran, and SAP CEO Christian Klein, have dropped some clues. The biggest opportunity of all lies in training AI models to do real-world tasks. The global economy is incredibly complex. You could fill a few volumes just listing the different types of toys made around the world. Add clothes, shoes, cookies, hotels... But the AI we dread – whether ChatGPT, or Gemini, or Claude – takes a one-size-fits-all approach, mostly. To replace humans at supply chain jobs, say, AI needs customisation and training. And who will do it, if not humans? So, a tide of new jobs is coming. The first signs have already appeared in the hardware market. Where the talk was all about GPUs – needed to train AI models – for the past five years, now good old CPUs – essential for real-world task deployment – are rising again. We'll be just fine, long-term. As for the short-term, new learning, retraining, and money in the bank, will get us through. Don't neglect that war chest.



# Pink Line In The Sand

*Not every island is for the Trump khandaan to profiteer, especially when flamingos got there first*

Sazan. Say it softly. You don't have to be Albanian to really like the word. It's got Open Sesame feel. A magical incantation taking you into an otherworldly space. Sazan. For ordinary Albanians, the island by this name has come to have a haunting vibe. They have never made it there. Through the 20th century it served as a secretive military base for the Italians, Soviets, communists. Then, the collapse of communism brought good fortune to Sazan too. Nature began clawing back lost ground. Nothing spoke ecological rebirth louder than the return of flamingos. Most Albanians still don't get to go to Sazan or the surrounding wetlands. They watch the flamingos thriving there from a distance only. Still, they treasure the life of the birds, their pink striking against the Adriatic grey light.

Hence, the flamingo revolution. It's Albanians protesting against Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump plotting to turn Sazan into a \$1.4bn plus luxury resort. To them, this is as galling as Trump's Riviera-style Gaza plan was for Gazans. Of course, Albania's govt gave the go-ahead to Kushner's plan only after Trump 2.0 got underway. It's hardly the only one trying to suck up to the world's most powerful man by sweetening his *damaad*. But it alone is in the (un)happy position of giving this family a Christopher Columbus ego kick. Ivanka's spoken of being on a friend's boat (a friend called Rothschild), stopping for a swim, 'finding' the island, climbing to its top barefoot, being just captivated. So, naturally, she set about sending in the bulldozers.

People in different corners of the world can feel united by the oddest things. Mumbaiers would certainly understand what the Albanians are trying to protect. They, too, cherish a horizon of flamingos. And every project proposal that endangers it, sees a fierce public pushback. The beautiful pink bird on one leg, isn't it inhuman to drown it in a billionaire's infinity pool?



# Testy time

*If mantris sat for exams, how would they fare?*

Bachi Karkaria



Now that cockroaches are swarming all over the place, we put ministries in the exam hall to see how they'd perform. Their published results too bristled with discrepancies. Most of them got the highest and lowest marks – depending on who examined the answer sheets, *sarkar* itself or *janata*. Naturally, Opposition was kept out. Here are the scores.

**Education:** This should have led this list, but its abysmal ranking is being media mauled every day; no need to repeat.

**Home:** This is permanent headline; so let's begin with it instead. Even many external examiners gave it 100%; and everyone can see how hard it works to achieve its goals. But there was no 'rah-rah' from those it told to 'ja ja'. In the Elections paper, lakhs had cried 'SIR, too many illogical discrepancies in my results.' In WB, it was too late for those who failed – including star student Banerjee M. During the CAA exam, in centres such as Delhi, Assam and UP, many had shouted, 'Can't Accept Annihilation, please reassess our papers!' Border Security exam, similar grievances. As for conventionally contentious Centre-State Relations paper, with Home party's strike-rate, it could well be merged with History.

**Finance:** Clinton's 'It's the economy, stupid' is now 'It's the stupid economy'. *Suno-ji*, we'll soon be world's 5th largest, so kindly do not bring up killjoy subjects like rising prices/unemployment, falling rupee/stock market. If Mr Trump hadn't happened, finance ministry might have to invent him.

**Defence:** Classified.

**External Affairs:** PM hugs, EAM squeezes. 90%.  
**Women:** Maternal mortality rate, 80%; reproductive health, 18%. Sexual safety, 30%. Welfare schemes, 90% (but plenty *ghuspathiyas* here too). *Ouff!*, so what if KPMG Report said low labour-force participation, 65% mid-career attrition, only 1% board presence compared to 79% aspiration? See how high women now score in cricket, etc.

**Infra:** Top-rank for PM GatiShakti National Master Plan, but road safety: 53 crashes, 19 dead every hour: Mega projects 90%, but 9% for mega human, social, environmental costs.

Net-net, we now wow the world. Except when we litter, pilfer, bhanga.

Alec Smart said: "If I kill a cockroach will I be anti-Gen Z?"

# Messi, Ronaldo & Football Rebirths

*In their final act on the grandest stage, the two modern greats of the game are fighting to cement their legacies. They won't have it easy. But whatever happens, such is their story, we will be riveted*

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Oh my Gods! Surely, we are not having that conversation from four years ago, as the hub of expectations shifts from a compact West Asia base to the divided States of the North American continent. Deities Messi and Ronaldo still rule parallel worlds, although there is a feeling that despite the celestial weapons in their legend, young forces will emerge in the New World come July 19.

Messi turns 39 this month, Ronaldo is already 41. But will they go gently into the 'good night'? With the tick and the talk, for the one slaloming through the defensive poles, or the other, preening and prancing above the highest obstacle, the end is nigh.

It's a feeling similar to bidding goodbye to a Roger Federer or a Rafael Nadal. Also looming is the imminent departure of Novak Djokovic, who is still raging against the dying day, yearning for the final kiss of a 25th Major trophy. Peacock, Bull or Goat, you have to take your pick...

Or can you hear the last gasp of a LeBron James? All 6ft 9in of him, striding the basketball court imperiously at 41, and often generously passing the ball to an open teammate. We love him for his humility as he is disinclined to beat his chest like a Michael Jordan or a Kobe Bryant.

Hmmm...that brings us back to showman Ronaldo. He did not become the top scorer in men's international football with 143 goals for being accommodating. As a fledgling winger in Alex Ferguson's Manchester United team, he graduated from his indulgent stepovers to bulging nets with straightforward intensity, but always with a disregard for limitations. His former teammate Louis Saha had once shared with TOI how Red Devil dictators like Ryan Giggs and Roy Keane all wanted wingers to defend in a certain way. "Cristiano

was a different animal. He had that kind of balance of respecting the structure but he knew if he played to his full potential, it would benefit the team. This mentality helped him maintain his improvement. That's the kind of selfishness a striker needs." So, no apologetic hand gestures there. Then and now.

The man from Madeira craves to fill Portugal's cup to the brim, with one last shot. His greatest moment still remains that extraordinary Euro final night at Stade de France in 2016, when hobbling along the touchline, the animated cheerleader, outscreeching coach Fernando Santos, rallied his players to glory against the hosts. His gravity-defying goal in the semis would come a close second.

Messi, satiated after grabbing World Cup permanence, returns to the biggest stage at his current residence now. For Argentina, Diego Maradona was always God, and Messi finally became the messiah.

Often derided for his tragic flaws in national colours, Messi, if you remember, burdened by the 'dependencia', Maracana's 2014 WC missed opportunity and continental disappointments, hastily announced his retirement in 2016, following a skied penalty against Chile in the Copa America Centenario final, a mere fortnight before Cristiano's Euro salvation. "I tried so hard to be champion with Argentina. I couldn't do it." Messi moaned. "No te vayas (Don't go)" was the emotional national outpouring.

Football can be life, it can be death. The comforting bit is that football can be rebirth too. Leo's poetry had always stemmed from joy, forged in the heart of Barcelona's La Masia. With blue-and-white love reciprocated, he was the carefree boy from Rosario again.

Come Maracana 2021, it was the new Messi exorcising the ghosts of the past. It was also the rough Messi, standing like a streetfighter with his band of merry men, lifting the Copa America with a bruising win over Neymar's Brazil.

A year later, Louis van Gaal's Netherlands ignited the angry Messi in a bruising World Cup quarterfinal at the Lusail. The image of the bearded Argentine,

cupping his ears in front of the Oranje crowd after scoring the penalty was a click for the ages, while the humiliation of the Dutch was complete with Leo's admonishment of nearly hero Wout Weghorst, "Qué miras, bobo? (What are you looking at, fool!)", a remark that sparked a million memes reminiscent of the ageing Zinedine Zidane's "Coup de Boule" of Materazzi, in the Germany 2006 final.

But the long day wanes. When Messi walked off the Nu Stadium pitch last month, suffering from muscle fatigue, there were fears. His presence on the pitch or the bench is still what Argentina needs. The Miami murmurs may be far from the loud Messi of 2022, but it is his catalogue of assists, his ability to reinvent himself, that may yet have its say. It is also sheer irony that this World Cup final will be played at the MetLife, New Jersey – the scene of his breakdown 10 years before. This time, it could be the perfect bookend.

Still time-travelling with defiance, Ronaldo insists he has not been softened by his Al-Nassr ways. There's another title in the bag with his prolificacy in front of goal, but the Saudi Pro League is at best a pebble among gemstones.

Qatar would have been a sad epitaph, a drooping Ronaldo denied by Morocco in the quarters, drenched in tears of frustration. But fast forward, and there's renewed hope.

Averaging a goal every 75 minutes this World Cup qualifying, he has netted 25 goals in 30 games under Roberto Martinez, his best goals-per-game ratio under a national coach. "The secret of his longevity is his hunger," reveals the Spaniard. "Whatever he wins, the next day he has the same hunger to improve."

But if CR7 stays the central character, will a talented Portugal team steered by Bruno Fernandes respect him a bit too much? The 'supreme being' needs to know when to harness or unleash his spears. Mere mortals like us can only wait and watch the denouement, as the play stretches into the Sixth Act.



# 10 Years Of Prohibition: No Cheers For Bihar

NFHS data shows despite ban on booze, Biharis are drinking more. Worse, they're drinking illicit alcohol. Substance abuse is also up, driving up household spend. Even impact on spousal violence is negligible

Alakh N Sharma and Bhim Reddy



As Bihar's alcohol prohibition policy completed ten years in April 2026, recently released fact sheets from NFHS 2023-24 indicate limited success. The survey recorded a 1.1 percentage-point increase in share of men consuming alcohol, compared with previous NFHS round. This raises important questions about the effectiveness of what is Bihar's most ambitious social policy.

Introduced in 2016, prohibition was viewed as Nitish Kumar keeping his electoral promise. The policy sought to cut back household spend on alcohol, and curb domestic violence, based on an assumption that prohibition would eliminate drinking altogether. However, alcohol consumption persists. Institute for Human Development's research reveals a more nuanced and less-than-satisfactory picture, highlighting significant policy and implementation gaps.

Even before the 2016 ban, NFHS data showed a decline in men's alcohol consumption, from 35% in 2005-06 to 29% in 2015-16. However, the proportion of regular drinkers increased from 9% to 14% in the same period.

Govt was criticised for expanding liquor availability, after liberalising alcohol sales in 2007. Three years after prohibition, NFHS 2019-20 recorded a sharp decline in male drinking, from 29% to 17%. The proportion of married women reporting their husbands consumed alcohol also fell from 33% to 23%. Although substantial, this decline fell short of what would be expected under total prohibition.

Moreover, the gains were not fully sustained. A 2022 study by IHD across urban centres in Patna, Darbhanga, Nawada and Buxar – interviewing around 600 married women about husbands' drinking behaviour, before and after the ban – revealed that barely 11% of the women, whose husbands drank before prohibition, said their men had stopped drinking altogether. Conversely, 8% of

women whose husbands had previously abstained, reported they had begun drinking after the ban.

A more realistic measure is change in drinking frequency. Reports of husbands drinking "almost daily" declined significantly. Overall, 29% reported substantial reduction in drinking, another 29% found marginal decline, a high 37% said 'no change', and 4% reported increased consumption.

One of prohibition's objectives was to reduce alcohol-related expenditure among poorer households. Yet NFHS 2019-20 found that 23% of men in lower-income groups continued to consume alcohol. IHD research further revealed that many were spending three to four times more on illicit liquor than they had previously spent on legal alcohol.

Evidence also suggests a shift towards alternative intoxicants. Per NSS, the combined share of expenditure on intoxicants, tobacco, and paan in rural Bihar, nearly doubled from 1.5% of monthly household spend in 2011-12, to 3% in 2023-24, despite known underreporting.

Since alcohol consumption often complements tobacco and other substances, increased spending on these products points to substitution rather than abstinence. Growing substance abuse among individuals with alcohol dependence, including use of drugs, cough syrups, and other intoxicants was also documented in IHD's study. NFHS 2019-20 reported that 17% of Bihar's men consumed alcohol other than toddy, despite prohibition. The state has witnessed cases of organ damage and deaths linked to spurious liquor – common tragedies when alcohol becomes scarce or unaffordable.

Prohibition may have generated unintended public health consequences through proliferation of low-quality alcohol and alternative substance abuse.

On spousal violence, NFHS data show that the share of married women experiencing such violence declined from 41% in 2005-06 to 35% in 2015-16, before the ban.

After prohibition, this declined to 34% in 2019-20. The decline following prohibition was relatively modest.

IHD's study found that around 40% of women in both groups – those with 'drinking husbands' and those with 'non-drinking husbands' – reported lower levels of spousal violence. So, lower domestic violence cannot be attributed solely to alcohol prohibition. Broader social changes, rising women's collectives, increased public awareness may also have contributed.

Bihar continues to report among the country's highest levels of spousal violence, underscoring the need to address deeper structural causes beyond alcohol consumption, even though drinking remains a recognised risk factor.

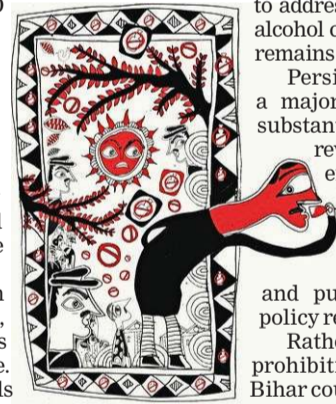
Persistence of illegal drinking presents a major policy challenge. Bihar incurs substantial fiscal costs through lost excise revenue and expenses associated with enforcing prohibition, estimated at roughly ₹20k or to ₹25k cr annually.

The state's modest reduction in alcohol consumption has come at considerable economic, social and public health costs, calling for a policy reassessment.

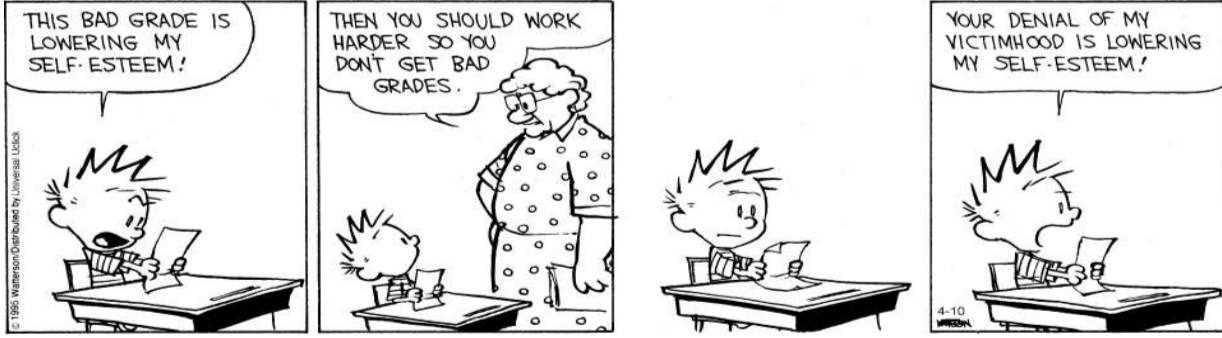
Rather than choosing between complete prohibition and unrestricted availability, Bihar could pursue alcohol-harm reduction through voluntary moderation and complementary policy measures. Restricting availability through fewer outlets, limited operating hours, stricter enforcement against underage drinking and drink-driving, appropriate pricing and taxation policies, tighter regulation of alcohol marketing and measures such as single-serve bottles to encourage moderation can help.

Bihar's experience demonstrates that durable improvements in public health and social welfare require a balanced, evidence-based approach, rather than reliance on prohibition.

Sharma is director, and Reddy, senior fellow, at Institute for Human Development. Views are personal



# Calvin & Hobbes



# Sacredspace



There is something infantile in the presumption that somebody else has a responsibility to give your life meaning and point... The truly adult view, by contrast, is that our life is as meaningful, as full and as wonderful as we choose to make it.

Richard Dawkins, The God Delusion

# Song Of The Divine: The Universe Is Still Singing

Partha Sinha

The world keeps remembering Krishna at the loudest moment of his life. It remembers him on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, standing between two armies, speaking words that have echoed across centuries. It remembers the cosmic vision that overwhelmed Arjun. It remembers the line Oppenheimer reached for as the first atomic cloud rose over New Mexico: *Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.*

But Krishna was many things before he became the voice heard above the drums of war: Before the battlefield, there was a flute. Before duty, there was delight. Before philosophy, there was play. There was a boy running barefoot through Vrindavan, stealing butter from earthen pots, returning home with a face innocent enough to challenge any accusation. There was laughter floating over the Yamuna at dusk. There was

music wandering through mango groves. There was a universe that seemed less interested in power than in wonder.

Somewhere along the way, we chose to remember the counsellor and forgot the child. We live in a civilisation fascinated by consequence. We measure, calculate, optimise and predict. We reward seriousness and trust those who explain outcomes. Mystery has become an inconvenience. Yet the oldest wisdom traditions kept whispering a different possibility.

*Nada Brahmh*, they said. The world is sound. Not stone. Not machinery. Not conquest. Sound.

Modern physics, in its own strange and beautiful way, circles the same intuition. At the deepest levels of reality, matter dissolves into vibration, rhythm and pattern. A melody arrives, lingers, and disappears, leaving us somehow

altered. The universe appears less like a monument and more like music. Not a structure to be overcome, but a song to which we belong.

Perhaps that is why Krishna arrives carrying a flute. A flute is an unusual instrument. It produces music only because it is hollow. The note emerges from emptiness. The Divine enters through space, openness. The ego fills. The flute yields.

When Krishna steals butter, he is not committing theft so much as rescuing life from excessive seriousness. Butter is milk transformed

by patience and care. Krishna steals it with laughter, as if to remind us that joy is older than ownership. That existence carries a mischievous streak. That creation smiles more often than we think.

The sacred, in these stories, is not

stern. It sparkles. And even Krishna of Gita is not the Krishna many remember. Before the war, he went as a messenger of peace. He asked for restraint. He asked for five villages. Only when every door had been shut did he speak of battle. Gita was never the first chapter. It was the last.

A civilisation that remembers only Kurukshetra eventually sees battle everywhere. A civilisation that remembers Vrindavan remembers that existence is not merely a problem to be solved but a mystery to be inhabited.

So perhaps the image worth carrying today is not the cosmic destroyer, nor even the philosopher on the chariot. Perhaps it is the boy beneath a tree at twilight, flute in hand, smiling at a world that has become far too certain of itself. For beneath all the noise of history, ambition and anxiety, victory and defeat, the universe may still be doing what it has always done. It may still be singing.



THE SPEAKING TREE

# This World Cup, Brand It Like Beckham

Mkting campaigns, from products to fans

Starting tonight, the quadrennial football World Cup, the biggest global television spectacle for decades, will be played out on a second screen. This is the first World Cup in which the majority of spectators watching matches on TV will also be watching and discussing football on their smartphones. Brands are optimising their World Cup marketing with decentralised creator-led campaigns for these extra eyeballs. Influencers will push out community-driven content into social media feeds, and podcasts will serve as companion media to extend engagement. Both Coca-Cola and Pepsi have moved their marketing campaigns away from products to fans. Nike and Adidas are zeroing in on the unifying culture of football. The switch to emotional storytelling from pure spectacle of the game will throw up a new set of winners among brands during this tournament.

Brands are connected with the rise of football culture in the US and Canada, as well as how audiences consume the sport. Since this World Cup will play out longer, with 48 participating countries rather than the traditional 32, and over a bigger geography, it opens up the field for localised marketing. Geo-targeted campaigning across a diversity of cultures is another area of marketing innovation during this Cup. The tools to deliver the 'right' message to audiences have never been as powerful, and they will be tested rigorously over the next 39 days.

Audience engagement is expected to be an astounding 6 bn people, which makes the World Cup as much a marketing championship as a football tournament. Marketing mavens have widened the event to a cultural one where fans are as much a part of the spectacle as players. Tech has added a social layer to communication that is driving engagement. Over the years, football has also changed quite a bit off the field. It's no longer restricted to sponsorships and broadcast rights. Smart messaging is moving with the new realities of the World Cup. Along with the likes of Mbappé, Yamal, Haaland, watch out for other brands tackle and shoot to the top.



# India's Weight-Loss Market Grows Up

Availability of cheaper generic anti-obesity drugs has not resulted in a rush to your local drugstore. The relatively early flattening of India's anti-obesity drug market marks a certain maturity, allowing market forces, sensible regulation and improved awareness to shape behaviour, rather than relying on a heavy-handed ban.

The early surge of adopters consisted largely of more affluent users, for whom weight loss, rather than price, was the primary consideration. The next group of eligible consumers is more price-conscious, and although generic brands are cheaper, their cost remains substantial. What makes sales trajectory of these rapid weight-loss drugs noteworthy, however, is the way caution and open access have been balanced. Semaglutide wasn't banned. Instead, 13 pharmaceutical companies launched 26 generic brands, while GoI relied on raising awareness and putting guard rails in place. Drug regulators issued advisories prohibiting D2C advertising and promotion of prescription weight-loss drugs, while also tracking unauthorised sales through gym trainers, dieticians and online pharmacies to prevent misuse.

Perhaps the most important factor shifting consumers away from viewing GLP-1 drugs as an easy weight-loss option has been efforts to address the info asymmetry that plagues pharma markets. Medical professionals and trustworthy institutions focused on raising awareness about the serious side effects associated with misuse, including muscle loss, malnutrition, pancreatitis and rapid weight regain once the medication is discontinued. Better understanding and wider dissemination of safety-related information, including data on adverse reactions, help create informed consumers rather than consumers seeking quick fixes.



**JUST IN JEST**  
Vishwa's most popular sport isn't Vishwaguru's — deal with it

# F'ball World Cup? For Cricket Champions?

Being world-class spectators of anything put up for display, many Indians will follow the month-long fest of top-notch football that is *the* World Cup that kicks off tomorrow in Mexico City. While this is also the time many anti-nationals bemoan the cliché of 'the world's most populous country not being able to enter the planet's most popular sporting tournament', this time around, India has found the perfect way to deal with this minor embarrassment: by insisting that football is a frivolous pastime for people in shorts and little enlightenment. Swami Vivekananda may have once said, 'You will be nearer to heaven through football than through the study of Gita.' But that was clearly a clerical error. What he must have meant was cricket — because nothing says spiritual awakening like watching a batsman adjust his pads for 20 mins, or blurs of sixes in T20 cricket. So, while the rest of the world kicks balls around fields, India climbs rooftops to shout, 'We are world-beaters in cricket!' Frankly, why bother with 90-plus mins of near-constant running, sweating, regular physical entanglements and occasionally scoring, when you can dominate a game seriously played between ourselves and against fewer countries than there are fingers and toes on a human body? Our football strategy is simple: don't play, don't qualify. Just keep watching.

Despite a fouling US, the planet's biggest tournament will display roaring globalisation in action

# Have the World at Your Feet



Rudraneil Sengupta

It's not without irony that the most inclusive World Cup in the history of the tournament is being co-hosted by the US, the most exclusionary host ever. Already among those denied entry, along with scores of fans, journalists and team officials from participating countries that the US government does not like, is Africa's 2025 referee of the year Omar Artan, who was set to become the first Somali referee at the World Cup finals. A few days before that, the official photographer travelling with the Iraqi team was turned back from Chicago's O'Hare airport, and the team's talismanic striker Aymen Hussein, who scored the goal that brought Iraq back to the World Cup after 40 yrs, was detained and questioned for 7 hrs.

If the great footballing nations bring glory and on-field magic to the World Cup, debutants and nations who make a comeback after a long hiatus bring the most compelling, human storylines, the thrill of the underdog, the delicious possibility that anything can happen. Seen in that spirit, the expanded 48-team tournament this year — up from the traditional 32 — is cause for celebration. The extra slots, divided among the various confederations around the world, has led to the rise of small or struggling footballing nations to the sport's greatest stage, via journeys full of grit, adventure and a sense of romance. Hussein and his Iraqi teammates exemplify that. Hussein was born and raised in Kirkuk in northern Iraq, a historically



Head over heels

restive region, which faced mass expulsions during Saddam Hussein's rule, was bombed during the US invasion of Iraq, attacked by Isis, and has been riven with internal conflict since. Hussein's father was killed in an al-Qaeda attack in 2008. His brother disappeared in 2014 during an Isis attack, and Hussein and the rest of his family had to flee the city. Hussein, like the rest of the Iraqi team — in fact, the rest of Iraq — has overcome decades of horrors and deprivation to reach the World Cup. Hussein is a striker in the classic mould, and was prolific through Iraq's gruelling qualification process — 21 matches in 28 mths — with nine goals. Expect Hussein to score, putting that 7-hr airport ordeal behind him, and send a country that has gone through the worst of human experiences into rapture. When Iraq made their only previous World Cup appearance in 1986, one of the four nations making their debuts at this World Cup, Curaçao, was not even their own political entity. The tiny island nation in the Caribbe-

and became an autonomous country — within the kingdom of Netherlands — only in 2010. What you need to know about Curaçao is that it's very small, wildly beautiful, and its entire population (a little over 1.5 lakh) can be packed into the Narendra Modi Stadium in Motera. How does a country like this make the World Cup? One word — diaspora. None of the players on the Curaçao squad were born on the island. Being a European colony means that people from Curaçao have long been migrating to Europe and the US, and you can find pockets of Curaçao in all these places. All citizens of Curaçao also hold a Dutch passport and enjoy the same rights as inhabitants of the EU. Which means that footballers from Curaçao, or its diaspora populations, can play in any football league within the EU without restrictions. What remained to be done was for Curaçao Football Federation to embark on an inspired and patient recruitment drive around the world, and create an atmosphere that would attract talented players from its diaspora population to come join the national team. Put a legendary Dutch coach like Dick Advocaat in charge, and then watch the miracle take shape. Fellow debutants Cape Verde, which gained independence from Portugal in 1975, followed the same route for the same miracle. This tiny nation, comprising 10 volcanic islands off the coast of West Africa, features players born in Cape Verde, but also those born in Portugal, France, Ireland and the Netherlands. The 25 players play for clubs in 15 different countries. Centreback Roberto Lo-



How can a country whose entire population can be packed into Motera's Narendra Modi Stadium make the World Cup? One word: diaspora

# How'd You Like Your Cup Served?



Dhaval Ponda

In the golden age of broadcasting, 'global' was the goal. We marvelled at the idea of 4 bn people watching the exact same feed, hearing the same commentary, and seeing the same slow-mo replay of Roberto Baggio's missed penalty. But as we settle down to watch the 2026 World Cup starting tonight, with a staggering 48 teams, and therefore countries, the 'one-size-fits-all' jersey is officially hitting the substitutes bench. Welcome to the era of hyper-regionalisation. For the uninitiated, this isn't just about translating 'Goal!' into 40 languages. It's the sophisticated art of slicing a single live sporting event into thousands of bespoke experiences. Think of it this way: the same goal

scored in a World Cup match will be celebrated differently in São Paulo, Sarajevo or Samarkand (yes, Uzbekistan's making a debut). In the old days, a fan in London or Seoul watching England or South Korea in action would have seen the same global ads for luxury watches. In today's hyper-regionalised world, he or she will see ads for the local food delivery app, hear commentary from a local personality if he or she chooses to, and receive real-time data overlays tracking every heartbeat of favourite players. With 48 nations competing across three North American countries, the logistical maths is enough to give AI a migraine. It isn't just broadcasting a tournament but managing a concoction of cultural nuances. Why does this matter? Because fandom is inherently parochial. We love our teams with a fierce, localised passion. When 104 matches kick off, a viewer in Casablanca doesn't necessarily want the same narrative as a viewer in Chicago. Hyper-regionalisation allows broadcasters to treat every fan like they have a front-row

seat at their local stadium, even if they are halfway across the globe. From a technical standpoint, this is where the 'invisible' infrastructure — think cloud edge computing and remote production — becomes the real MVP. Traditionally, sending a different feed to every country required a small army of trucks and enough cables to lasso the moon. Today, the heavy lifting happens in virtual environments. We can swap out pitch-side digital boards in an instant, ensuring that a fan in Buenos Aires sees a different sponsor than a fan in Bareilly, all while the game is being played in real time. And, yes, it's complicated. But then again, so is football. And we've never asked it to simplify. But the real magic isn't just in the ads. By lowering barriers to entry for regional commentary and customised graphics, it's about democratising the viewing experience. We are moving away from a singular 'voice of god' commentator toward a chorus of diverse voices that reflect the actual makeup of competing nations. For the broadcast industry, this is the ultimate stress test and a generational opportunity. If we get it right, 2026 World Cup won't just be the biggest sporting event in history, it'll be the most personal. There is also something delightfully ironic about all this. In a sport celebrating globalisation, the future of sports broadcasting is unapologetically local and intimate. The bigger the stage, the more personal the experience must become.



Meanwhile, in Chinese tonight

# Party Poopers Nixing Voter Choice



Gilles Verniers

There's still intense speculation about the identity and exact number of MPs who will split from TMC and pledge their support to NDA. Moments such as these always lead to horse-trading and rumour-mongering. But what seems certain is the inevitability of a vertical split in the party. Post-election defections, resignations or party splits are common in India. They follow electoral defeats and victories like the post-election undoing of majorities in Maharashtra in 2022, MP in 2020, Karnataka in 2018, and Arunachal Pradesh in 2016. The list grows if one adds majorities built through defections after hung verdicts, as in Manipur in 2017, or Puducherry in 2021, or the slow erosion of MLAs between elections, as in Goa between 2017 and 2022. In TMC's case, we have a party splitting vertically after an election, in similar fashion to Shiv Sena and NCP in Maharashtra a few years ago. So, what makes so many politicians so prompt to abandon their parties? It would be easy to characterise this as individual greed and opportunism. But party splits never occur from individual decisions alone. They are engineered, often with the support — if not through the initiative — of other parties. BJP has a vested interest in splitting one of the largest opposition

parties and, in the process, increasing its majority in Parliament. Party splits and mass resignations are defections in hiding and are never spontaneous. But beyond individual opportunism and political engineering, there are systemic factors that help explain why party allegiance is so brittle in India. ► **Regional factors** Political transitions in Bengal are notoriously total. When TMC came to power in 2011, it captured much of the CPM's local machinery, and the communists were effectively destroyed as an organisational force. When BJP lost in the 2021 assembly election, it saw a mass desertion of the very people it had recruited, many former TMC workers who had switched sides only years earlier. For the defeated, the future journey through the desert seems particularly long. ► **Moving on** Defeats lead to loss of local resources and party patronage, due to organisational collapse. This creates powerful incentives to seek greener pastures. ► **Ideo-illogical** Ideology has always proved a friable cement for party organisations. One of the TMC faction leaders, Ritabrata

Banerjee, originally came from CPM and now claims to support BJP. ► **Careering** Most parties fish from the same pond. Candidates who are individually wealthy political entrepreneurs, willing to stake small fortunes on short careers in office, making India's political class highly interchangeable. ► **Ball unchained** Parties are hyper-centralised and often led by authoritarian figures. This is usually more of a problem in defeat than in victory. In TMC's case, grievances voiced by disgruntled MPs about Mamata Banerjee's style of functioning are neither new nor unknown, and can't be treated as genuine causes for departure. This is not a new phenomenon. In his 1969 book, *The Politics of Defection: A Study of State Politics in India*, constitutional expert Subhash Kashyap documented more than 1,400 cases of defection between 1967 and 1969, two crucial years of political realignment in national and state politics. Party splits were also common, often engineered by other parties. Many of these defections involved groups rather than individuals, altering post-facto electoral outcomes. When Indira Gandhi came back to power in 1980, she fielded 22 turncoats from the collapsed Janata coalition, many of whom had deserted Congress earlier. The anti-defection law, passed in 1985 precisely to prevent such spectacles, has long since been outwitted. Its central



Shhh—plit

flaw is that it cannot prevent MPs or MLAs from simply resigning or splitting their party, which is technically a voluntary act, and, therefore, outside its reach. Mass resignation is a legal disguise for defection. A party that controls majority of a legislature's seats can engineer a split, claim it constitutes two-thirds of the parliamentary group, and seek recognition as a legitimate faction — as TMC rebels are now attempting. The law that was meant to protect electoral mandates has, in practice, provided a technical roadmap for circumventing them. Immediate implications are clear: If 20 TMC MPs switch to NDA, it would push the ruling coalition's strength above 300 in Lok Sabha, still short of the two-thirds threshold but a useful symbolic addition. More significantly, it accelerates NDA's gains in Rajya Sabha that would otherwise take years to materialise from the recent Bengal election results. Parliamentary arithmetic aside, it's the principles that matter. Party splitting, either opportunistic or engineered (or both), makes a mockery of voters' choices. Electoral verdicts are processed and, at times, altered in ministerial residences rather than polling booths. It's not surprising that Cockroach Janta Party demands sanctions against politicians who defect. In the end, the political future of those who break their parties is usually grim. Some may be rewarded with cabinet positions. But most end up in a political dungeon after enjoying the proverbial few minutes of fame.

Expect Iraq's Aymen Hussein to score, putting his 7-hr airport ordeal behind him, and send a country that has gone through the worst of human experiences into rapture. These are all teams that have been, in the recent past, ranked way below India, scraping the barrel at the 150s and lower, before serious policy shifts saw them rise slowly, but consistently, up the footballing ladder. Indian football, forever in decline, eternally languishing, is missing a trick. Decades of talking about improving the grassroots of football has barely made a dent in ground realities. Perhaps it's time to look at the problem from above, tap into the vast Indian diaspora to fast-track the national team's progress. Imagine if the Indian team started winning a few matches, making some inroads into Asian competitions. What that can do for the popularity of Indian football. Maybe it's time for All India Football Federation to send out LinkedIn invites.

The writer is a Delhi-based journalist and author



# Back to The Source

**GANESH KOLAMBAKAR**  
Modern science and ancient spirituality seem to point towards a deeper reality behind existence. Science tells us that the human body is made from the very substance of the cosmos. The calcium in our bones, oxygen we breathe, carbon in our cells, and iron in our blood formed inside stars billions of years ago. We are made of atoms that existed in the universe long before becoming part of us. We are not separate from the cosmos; we are the cosmos expressing itself. What appears solid and permanent is, at a deeper level, the movement of particles, energy and invisible forces. The body we identify with so strongly is a temporary arrangement of atoms interacting with the universe around us. Science also tells us that energy cannot be destroyed; it only changes form. The atoms that form our body existed long before our birth, and will continue to exist after our death. When an individual dies, it is only the physical form that dissolves. Through cremation or burial, the body gradually merges into nature, and its elements return to the cosmos from which they had emerged. Ancient spiritual wisdom viewed the body as temporary but existence to be continuous and interconnected. When we realise that we are part of something greater than our temporary individuality, life acquires a deeper meaning. Love, compassion, kindness and responsibility become natural expressions of this understanding.

**STEP UP TO THE PLATE**  
**Beihouse**  
Beirut



It may not be the best time to visit the Lebanese capital, but along with an exceptional meal, Beihouse offers a deeply moving cultural experience for those not besotted with war. Set within three beautifully restored villas in Beirut's vibrant Gemmayzeh district, the restaurant stands as a symbol of resilience, having risen from the devastation caused by a major chemical explosion in 2020. The menu honours Lebanese culinary traditions while embracing modern techniques like fermentation and preservation. Familiar flavours are transformed into sophisticated creations, from smoked hummus topped with caviar, to inventive interpretations of shawarma and stuffed vine leaves. House-baked sourdough, served with exceptional local olive oil, is a deceptively simple highlight. The seasonal tasting menu offers the best introduction to chef Tarek Alameddine's thoughtful approach. While Israeli airstrikes continue to cast a shadow over parts of Lebanon, Beirut remains a place of creativity, warmth and extraordinary perseverance. Its cafes, galleries and restaurants continue to celebrate life with quiet defiance. Beihouse captures that spirit beautifully: a restaurant where outstanding food becomes a testament to a city's enduring ability to rebuild, welcome, inspire.

# Chat Room

**Being Superficial About Artificial**  
Appropos 'Temple Offerings at the Altar' by Dipankar Bhattacharyya (Jun 10), the scepticism about AI IPO valuations is well-founded. SpaceX at \$1.75-trn and OpenAI at \$1-trn represent enormous bets on future dominance in markets still taking shape. Retail investors chasing these listings without understanding the underlying technology barriers — data, compute, distribution — risk significant losses when valuations correct. The IPO drought has genuine causes: governance structures favouring founders over public shareholders, and operational control remaining firmly with insiders. Indian investors specifically should note that AI value creation is currently concentrated almost entirely outside domestic markets, making meaningful participation structurally limited. *Abharna Barathi Chennai*

The writer is a researcher at CERI, Sciences Po Paris

THE ASIAN AGE

11 JUNE 2026

Challenges abound after 12 years of Modi Sarkar

They have led his party and alliance to victory in a third successive national general election was a phenomenal achievement for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, particularly considering that the stakes involved only seem to have got bigger each time. It is moot whether he is India's longest-serving Prime Minister, which comes with the rider that his record 4,400 days in office are for an "elected" PM, which the esteemed Jawaharlal Nehru was not when he was in office in 1947-1952.

The years rolling by in the Gregorian calendar are more chronological conveniences than grand milestones and yet they must be celebrated given how bitterly polarised the nation is politically in these modern times. However, truth to tell, India's Goldilocks period economically, which could be said to have started from the depths of 2014, is over even as India, in its post-Covid recovery, is still the fastest growing major economy.

The headwinds blowing against the economy are global today. To perform in difficult conditions when the nation's energy bills, especially as India imports 80 per cent of its oil and gas requirements, is going to be the biggest challenge as Mr Modi aims to complete his third term. Add the rising bills for merchandise imports and the nation can be under pressure regarding BoP and CAD positions even if there is no real cause for alarm with the CAD projected to be not far above 1.5 per cent of GDP in FY2027.

**Much more can be done, say with private sector investments tardy despite sitting on cash reserves. Suffice it to say that the Indian people have not been irretrievably let down by their leaders in a dozen years.**

The GDP numbers alone are not going to reflect comfort as they used to, not because they are bound to drop in the near future along with India's global ranking, which has slipped to sixth from fourth, but because GDP growth does not guarantee better employment percentages, particularly as the numbers are invariably enormous in the world's most populous nation. It is in job creation that India has lagged which shows in dissatisfaction among youth as evidenced in recent events.

It was the duty of the Opposition to point out even during a time of celebratory gestures towards the man who rose to national prominence from stints as Gujarat CM that inflation, unemployment and agrarian distress continue to persist. There is no silver bullet for anyone to fire and solve such complex issues. The fact remains that the 2025 unemployment rate — at 4.22 per cent of the labour force (highest was 7.86% at the height of the Covid pandemic in 2020) — is reflective of a burgeoning problem simply because the basic numbers are so huge.

Given the fact there is no end in sight to the Iran war and importing energy through the Strait of Hormuz is going to remain problematic even as nations prepare to buy their crude oil at prices nearer \$100 a barrel for some time to come, India would have to hit its straps to find alternatives. India's record of sloth in terms of pushing for more nuclear power is generally indicative of the lack of will to adapt quickly enough to rising challenges.

Notwithstanding all the problems, India can pride itself in achievements that were unprecedented in building infrastructure, especially roads, welfare delivery through direct transfer and financial inclusion. The nation has come a long way on those counts, as also in terms of a far more pragmatic and diversified foreign policy that placed India's permanent interests ahead of all other considerations.

The report card of 12 years would show many positives against the few shortcomings that may, however, be pulling down the confidence of rising generations. As a nation with an organic growth that has defied very high population figures, India has stood the test of time. Much more can be done, say with private sector investments tardy despite sitting on cash reserves. Suffice it to say that the Indian people have not been irretrievably let down by their leaders in a dozen years, despite a disastrous demonetisation.

The Cup that cheers

Starting tonight, top notch footballers will have the world at their feet. Billions of eyeballs glued to television sets, tensions flaring, friendly fights over favourite teams/players and reporting sick for duty are some incidents that will occur with increasing frequency over the next 40-odd days. It's the football World Cup, dubbed the greatest show on Earth, one that provides a kick to sports buffs and everyone alike.

The best 48 teams that have qualified for the tournament being hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico will slug it out to outshine others and lay their hands on the coveted trophy that weighs 6.175 kg in solid gold.

Lionel Messi's Argentina lead the list as defending champions while last edition's runners-up France are breathing down the necks of their South American rivals. They are the No. 1 ranked team too while Argentina are third on the list. Be that as it may, the focus would largely be on Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo of Portugal, long time rivals for football's top individual prizes. Both are most certainly playing their last World Cups — Messi is 38 and Ronaldo 41. Hugely popular, the two will invariably garner intense attention as they weave their magic on the world stage one last time.

The younger crop is ready too. Lamine Yamal of Spain, Brazilian prodigy Endrick and France's Kylian Mbappe have been making headlines with their performances in various leagues and championships in the lead-up to the big one. They will surely be thrown up into a different orbit now.

With matches being played in an altogether different time zone, fans in India will have to burn midnight oil, and then wake up early morning, to catch the action. That would most likely lead to a lot of absenteeism at places of work.

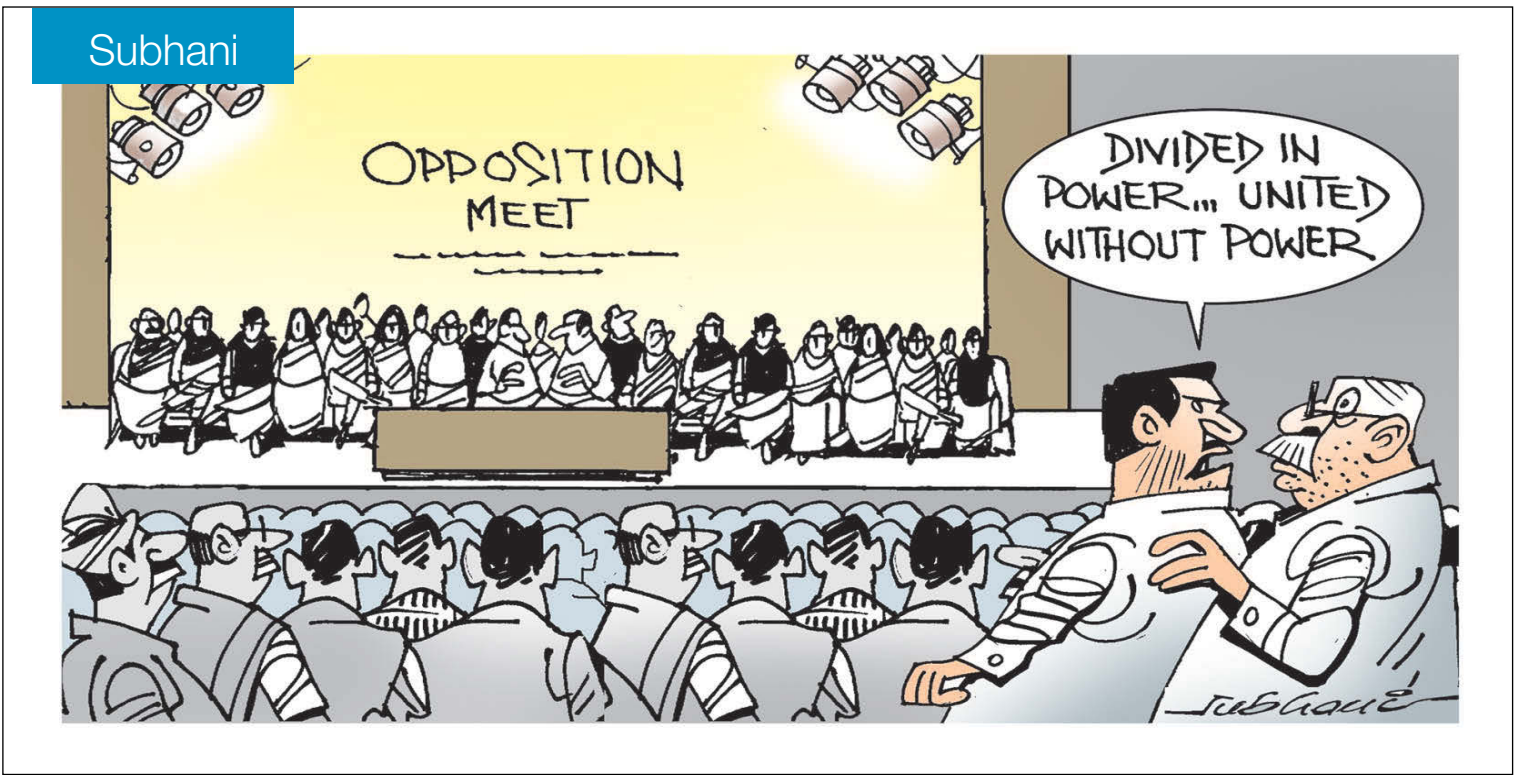
All's not fair play though. The World Cup is being played with a heavy political undercurrent, thanks to chief host USA's animosity towards Iran and its allies. The Iran football federation has already flagged tickets booked by their nationals being revoked. In another incident a referee from Somalia has been refused entry into the US after arriving at Miami airport. If only politics could be kept out of sport, especially the beautiful game.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Will Myanmar Prez visit to India impact N-E security?



Wasbir Hussain

Myanmar President Min Aung Hlaing's recent visit to India may have been projected as a diplomatic engagement, but for New Delhi the real significance of the visit lies far away from the conference rooms and ceremonial receptions. It lies along the troubled India-Myanmar border and, more specifically, in Manipur.

The symbolism of the visit can't be missed. After all, Myanmar's new President, Hlaing, chose India for his first foreign visit, signalling Naypyidaw's desire to deepen engagement with New Delhi at a time when Myanmar remains engulfed in conflict. But for India, the visit should not be viewed merely through the prism of regional diplomacy. Its significance is far more immediate and domestic: the impact of Myanmar's instability on the security of India's Northeast.

The timing could not be more relevant. Even as the visit was underway, violence continued to cast a shadow over Manipur. The recent killing of three people in Kangpokpi district is yet another reminder that Manipur remains vulnerable to recurring cycles of armed violence, mistrust and insecurity. While the roots of the Manipur crisis are undoubtedly internal, developments across the border in Myanmar are increasingly shaping the broader security environment in which the conflict is unfolding.

This is why one particular aspect of Min Aung Hlaing's remarks deserves close attention. In an interview with DD India, the Myanmar President acknowledged that armed groups have long exploited the rugged and porous 1,600-km India-Myanmar frontier for drug production and trafficking, using narcotics revenues to finance their activities. He noted that while production had been brought under some control around 2020, the situation deteriorated significantly

**Drug trafficking is not merely a law-and-order problem; it is a security challenge. Revenues generated from narcotics have historically funded armed movements across the region.**

The concern for India is obvious. Modern conflicts are no longer confined within national borders. Expertise, technology, finances and weapons often travel faster than governments can track them. Any prolonged instability in Myanmar risks creating conditions in which armed actors, criminal syndicates and extremist elements can exploit the borderlands, with inevitable spillover effects into Manipur and other parts of the Northeast.

This is where Min Aung Hlaing's pledge of enhanced intelligence-sharing assumes particular significance. For years, India and Myanmar have cooperated against insurgent groups operating along the border. Joint military operations and intelligence exchanges have, at various times, disrupted militant camps and cross-border networks. If Myanmar is able to restore greater control over its frontier regions and if intelligence cooperation deepens further, it could help restrict the movement of weapons, narcotics and armed cadres that contribute to instability in the Northeast.

The narcotics dimension is especially important. Drug trafficking is not merely a law-and-order problem; it is a security challenge. Revenues generated from narcotics have historically funded armed movements across the region. Myanmar's own acknowledgement that drug production has been used to finance conflicts underscores the need for closer coordination between the two countries.

There is another dimension that deserves equal attention: connectivity. During his visit, Hlaing was optimistic about reviving the long-delayed India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway. For years, the project has been seen primarily as an economic initiative

linked to India's "Act East" policy. Yet its importance extends beyond trade. Connectivity creates state presence, encourages legitimate economic activity and helps integrate border regions into formal economic networks. In the long term, roads can become instruments of stability just as much as they are instruments of commerce. However, the expectations should remain realistic. Myanmar remains deeply fragmented. Large areas continue to witness conflict between the military and various resistance groups. A comprehensive political settlement is distant. The restoration of effective state authority across Myanmar's border lands will not happen overnight.

Nor will stability in Myanmar automatically resolve the crisis in Manipur. The causes of the conflict in Manipur are rooted in local political, ethnic and social dynamics that require solutions within India. Yet, external factors matter. A volatile Myanmar can aggravate existing tensions. A more stable Myanmar can help contain them. That is why New Delhi's engagement with Naypyidaw must be driven not by abstract geopolitical calculations alone but by a clear understanding of India's security interests in the entire N-E region. Intelligence-sharing, coordinated border management, anti-narcotics cooperation and the revival of connectivity projects should all be viewed through that lens.

The true significance of Min Aung Hlaing's visit will not be measured by diplomatic communiqués or ceremonial photographs. It will be measured by whether the India-Myanmar border becomes more secure, whether narcotics and weapons flows are reduced, and whether places such as Moreh, Churachandpur and Kangpokpi become safer.

For India, Myanmar is no longer simply a neighbouring country facing a distant civil conflict. It is a critical factor in the future security and stability of the Northeast. And nowhere is that reality more evident than in Manipur.

*Wasbir Hussain, author and political commentator, is editor-in-chief of Northeast Live, Northeast India's only satellite English and Hindi news channel. Views expressed are personal.*

LETTERS RECREATION CLUB

The INDIA bloc meets like a club that only opens after electoral setbacks. It claims to speak for a restive public, yet DMK and AAP walked out, Congress fights the Left in Kerala and AAP in Punjab, and partners trade blame over Rajya Sabha seats. Unity built only on opposing Hindutva cracks in every state. Voters want relief on exams, jobs, prices and voter rolls, not meetings that dodge hard choices. Sans a clear rule for seat sharing and policy priorities, the bloc will stay emaciated. Parliament work and street protests need one agenda. A real Opposition must settle its house first, else the BJP faces a recreation club, not a rival.

**K. Chidanand Kumar**  
Bengaluru

BLOW TO MAMATA

TRINAMUL CONGRESS leader Sushmita Dev on Wednesday resigned as Rajya Sabha MP in the second such jolt for the Mamata Banerjee-led party this week after the resignation of veteran TMC leader Sukhendu Sekhar Ray from membership of the Upper House, alleging "unbridled corruption" and "archaic rule" of the party. After her resignation, Ms Dev met Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma in Delhi. It's a massive blow to Ms Banerjee. It will take a long time for her to return as a serious contender in politics if at all.

**Sankar Paul**  
Chakdaha, West Bengal

IMMORTAL STORIES

THE PASSING of veteran film director Bharathiraja is an irreparable loss to Indian cinema. His pioneering 1977 debut, *16 Vyathinile*, forever transmogrified the visual grammar of South Indian filmmaking, moving it out of studio sets and into the dusty, emotional landscapes of villages. He revolutionised Indian cinema by bringing raw realism and authentic rural narratives to the screen that were easily encompassed by the audience. In a career that spanned over five decades, Bharathiraja directed nearly 40 films and crafted timeless classics such as *Mudhal Mariyathai*, *Sigappu Rojakkal* and *Alaigal Oivathillai*. The ace director may have fallen silent forever, but the stories he gave us will live forever.

**R. Sivakumar**  
Chennai



John J. Kennedy

The Government of India is reportedly considering using the Indian Air Force to transport Neet examination papers. A civilian examination system is now looking to military logistics to secure the pan-India movement of question papers. This is not merely a security problem but a sign that something much more serious has gone wrong inside our trusted institutions.

The proposal has already triggered criticism from a variety of quarters, with opponents questioning whether military resources should be deployed to compensate for failures in the civilian examination management system. If civilian institutions cannot guarantee the integrity of a national examination, the problem then lies far deeper than simply transportation.

The recent Neet controversy exposed what many had already suspected — that India's high-stakes examination system is vulnerable from within. Students protested. Parents demanded answers.

The courts intervened. Investigations then followed. Arrests were made. More troublingly, investigators pointed to the involvement of individuals linked to the examination ecosystem itself. This is the part that matters most. The threat did not come solely from outsiders. It also came from insiders who had privileged access to the processes that were supposed to remain secure.

Many major examination scandals in India have showed a similar pattern. Public outrage is followed by a familiar set of fixes — more cameras, biometric systems, stricter laws, encrypted transmissions and now, perhaps, military transport. The assumption behind these responses is that the system is fundamentally

sound but operationally weak and that better logistics will solve the problem. This assumption is only partly correct. A paper does not leak merely because transportation is insecure. It leaks because someone, somewhere in the chain — a paper setter, moderator, printing official, coordinator or even administrator — misuses the access. Technology and tighter logistics can reduce risk, but cannot totally eliminate the failures of integrity.

Indian society has traditionally held teachers and educational institutions in deep respect. Exams were not just tests. They were the mechanism through which a child from a poor family could compete with one from a wealthy background. Exams carried a promise — that merit would be rewarded regardless of where one came from. That promise is now under serious strain. The problem is not simply criminal infiltration from outside. Investigations repeatedly suggest that insiders sometimes become part of the problem. When individuals entrusted with safeguarding examinations compromise them, the issue ceases to be merely administrative and becomes ethical. This is not happening in isolation. Across Indian public life, there is a growing tendency to treat duty as a transaction. Private gain often overrides public responsibility. In education specifically, the pressure on students to secure admission at any cost has created an ecosystem where shortcuts can appear normal and even rational. The coaching industry thrives on this anxiety and, in some cases, helps intensify it. As the stakes rise, so does the temptation to cheat.

A system operating under such pressure, staffed by individuals shaped by the same social environment, is unlikely to be repaired simply by placing question

papers on an Air Force aircraft.

What India needs is structural reform, and it must begin with how paper setters and examination personnel are selected and managed. For high-stakes examinations such as Neet, JEE, and CUET, those handling sensitive material should be treated as members of a specialised and carefully screened pool. Rigorous background checks, conflict-of-interest declarations, and periodic recertification should become standard practice. Examination work must be regarded as a serious public responsibility rather than a routine academic assignment distributed without adequate scrutiny.

The deep and largely unacknowledged overlap between examination bodies and the private coaching industry also deserves closer attention. Rules against conflicts of interest already exist in various forms, but enforcement remains uneven. Mandatory disclosure of ties to coaching institutes, test-preparation companies, and related commercial ventures should become standard practice. Concealing such relationships should attract serious penalties, including permanent exclusion from examination-related responsibilities.

Beyond personnel reforms, the examination process itself requires stronger compartmentalisation. Paper setting, moderation, printing and distribution should be kept strictly separate, with no individual enjoying access across multiple stages. Large international examination systems, including organisations such as Cambridge Assessment, employ various forms of role separation, restricted access and layered oversight to reduce insider risk. India should adopt similar safeguards while ensuring frequent personnel rotation to prevent

the emergence of long-standing informal networks that could facilitate collusion. The problem in India is not a shortage of regulators but a shortage of independent oversight. Examination agencies should not be left to assess their own security failures. Regular external audits, integrity reviews and insider-risk assessments by an autonomous panel of experts strengthen accountability without creating another layer of bureaucracy.

None of these reforms, however, will succeed if the broader ethical culture surrounding education continues to deteriorate. When students stop trusting examinations, they stop believing that hard work will be fairly rewarded. The coaching industry grows on that fear, and merit loses credibility. For a country where examinations determine access to education, employment and social mobility, this is not a minor administrative lapse. Meritocracy cannot survive if those entrusted with protecting fairness fail to uphold it. The damage extends beyond a single examination cycle. It erodes public trust in institutions themselves.

Surely, India does not need a militarised examination system. It needs an examination system that works. One that is secure not merely because papers are transported under tighter guard, but because the people entrusted with the process take their responsibilities seriously. The real leak in this crisis is not simply in the question paper. It is in institutional integrity. And unlike a paper, that cannot simply be reprinted.

*The writer is retired professor and former dean of the School of Arts and Humanities at Christ University in Bengaluru*



## quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	73,983.18	0.09
Nifty 50	23,214.95	-0.12
S&P 500*	7,321.07	-0.89
Dollar (₹)	95.27	-0.09
Pound Sterling (₹)	127.63	-0.02
Euro (₹)	110.10	-0.12
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	148,092.4	-2.85
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	93.79	2.34
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.913	0.042
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.521	-0.008

### Airtel deploys over 2,900 new 5G network sites

Telecom service operator Bharti Airtel said it has deployed more than 2,900 new 5G network sites across the upper north region to ensure faster speed and better experience for its users. Spanning 77 districts, the rollout provides reliable high-speed connectivity to over 28.6 million customers from major cities to remote rural villages of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Jammu and Kashmir.

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# GST, reforms built trust, India GDP to hit \$5-trn

Measures reflect vision of 'Ramrajya', says booklet on Modi's stint

FC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JUNE 10

Reforms such as GST, faceless tax administration and Digital India have helped build trust in public institutions and will support India's journey towards a \$5-trillion economy, according to a booklet released by the Centre to mark Narendra Modi becoming India's longest-serving Prime Minister.

The booklet said the reduction in income tax burden over the past 12 years reflected the government's vision of 'Ramrajya' and highlighted a series of tax and economic reforms undertaken since 2014.

It said increased taxpayer confidence had enabled greater investment in roads, hospitals, infrastructure.

The annual tax-free income limit has been raised six times over the past 12 years, from ₹2 lakh to ₹12.75 lakh and the income taxpayer base has expanded to 12.13 cr from 5.26 cr during the period.

"When the government's income increased, that money did not stay in the treasury; it returned to the citizens," it said, adding that faster income tax refunds had improved liquidity for taxpayers.

Modi became the longest continuously serving Prime Minister of India. He assumed office on May 26, 2014. He began his second term on May 30, 2019, and his third consecutive term on June 9, 2024.

## BIG ACHIEVEMENTS

- Tax-free income limit raised from ₹2 lakh to ₹12.75 lakh.
- Tax refunds have become faster, says govt.
- Banking reforms reduce NPAs.
- Digital India and faceless tax boost trust.
- India moving towards a \$5-trillion economy.
- Smartphones have become India's top export category with overseas shipments worth \$30 bn in 2025.
- GST collections hit a record ₹2.42 lakh cr in this April.
- India moved from 'Fragile Five' to fastest growing major economy.



Reforms like GST, faceless tax, and digital India have helped build 12 years of trust in the public system, which will support India in becoming a \$5-trillion economy. — GOVERNMENT BOOKLET

**LANDMARK** reforms, enhanced ease of doing business, record infrastructure investments, expanding trade partnerships, stronger financial institutions.

— ANANT GOENKA, FICCI president.

**INDIA HAS** witnessed remarkable progress across multiple fronts, strengthening its position as one of the world's leading economies and emerging as a confident global voice.

— CHANDRAJIT BANERJEE, CII director general

**INDUSTRY** remains committed to working closely with the government to accelerate investment and ensure that growth remains inclusive.

— R MUKUNDAN, Director general (CII) president

**DURING** Modi's tenure, the country has emerged as a "bright spot" in the global economic system.

— NIRMAL K MINDA, Assocham president

### INDIA NOW TRUSTED TECH PARTNER TO MANY: VAISHNAW

New Delhi, June 10: India has transformed into a trusted technology value chain partner under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 12-year tenure, with the country now exporting electronics to even the US and China, said union minister Ashwini Vaishnaw.

"We are going to the next level, where we are starting the manufacturing of components. One of the good things that happened last year we exported about ₹35,000 crore worth of components to China. Some complex electronics products, like railway propulsion,

# Blockbuster SpaceX IPO attracts billions from Gulf

New York, June 10: SpaceX's highly anticipated initial public offering (IPO), expected to be one of the largest in history, has attracted multi-billion-dollar commitments from Gulf sovereign wealth funds and generated investor demand well in excess of shares on offer, said people familiar with the matter.

The IPO is scheduled to launch and begin trading on Nasdaq on June 12, under the ticker symbol 'SPCX'. The company set the share price at \$135.

The Elon Musk-led company is targeting a valuation of about \$1.8 trillion, with institutional investors, retail participants and ETFs expected to drive some of the heaviest trading volumes ever seen for a newly listed company.

Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF) and Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) have each placed orders for shares worth between \$1 bn and \$5 bn, while the \$580-bn Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) is also expected to make a significant investment, sources said.

The Gulf interest adds to a broader rush from global institutional investors. Some investors have reportedly submitted orders exceeding \$10 billion, although final share allocations are expected to be lower because of oversubscription.

Entities from the Gulf region are already among SpaceX's prominent shareholders.

The scale of investor interest has also prompted preparations across trading and settlement infrastructure.

## GLOBAL FRENZY

- SpaceX plans to raise \$75B through ipo
- IPO price fixed at \$135 per share.
- Company targets valuation of \$1.8 trillion
- SpaceX would rank fourth largest, after Nvidia at \$5.05 trillion, Amazon at \$2.63 trillion, and Tesla at \$1.49 trillion.
- Saudi PIF and Kuwait investment authority bid \$1-5 bn each.

Some global institutions reportedly bid for \$10 bn plus of stock.

SpaceX listing scheduled on June 12 on Nasdaq.

555.6 million shares are being offered in what could become the world's biggest IPO.

We have heard nothing but encouraging feedback. We remain committed to India and to working with the govt to bring Starlink's services soon to the country.

— LAUREN DREYER, Starlink Business ops VP.

# Starlink: No delay in India launch

FC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JUNE 10

Elon Musk-led Starlink on Wednesday denied media reports claiming that approvals for its commercial launch in India had been put on hold due to security concerns, saying discussions with the government remain active and productive.

The satellite broadband services provider said it has completed all regulatory and compliance requirements and continues to receive feedback from authorities on its plans to support connectivity in India, particularly in remote and underserved regions.

"Starlink remains in active and productive discussions with the Government of India contrary to stories based upon unsubstantiated claims from anonymous sources. We have worked with the government through all of the required regulatory and compliance processes in a transparent and responsible manner," Lauren Dreyer, vice president, Starlink business operations, said in a post on social media platform X.

The clarification from the company follows media reports that India had effectively frozen approvals for Starlink's commercial rollout over concerns related to the use of satellite terminals during the Iran conflict.

## WORLD

### SHORT TAKES

#### FORMER TALIBAN COMMANDER GETS 42 YRS' JAIL

New York, June 10: A former Taliban commander was sentenced to 42 years in prison on Tuesday for crimes, including kidnapping a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist. Haji Najibullah's sentencing capped a day-long proceeding in Manhattan federal court that featured a dramatic few moments when the reporter, David Rohde, faced Najibullah and described how Najibullah took part in the abduction of him and two other men in 2008 in Afghanistan but was now "refusing to take responsibility as I look at him today".

#### GUNMEN SHOOT DEAD 12 NEAR JOHANNESBURG

Johannesburg, June 10: Gunmen stormed an informal settlement near Johannesburg and shot dead 12 people overnight, South African police said on Wednesday, in the latest mass shooting in the crime-ravaged country.

The shootings happened before midnight on Tuesday in an impoverished area of metal shacks near where illegal miners were living and working, police said.

Around 10 attackers were driven to the Jumpers settlement and dropped off before storming the area, a police spokeswoman said.

#### HK CHARGES 7 PEOPLE OVER FIRE THAT KILLED 168

Hong Kong, June 10: Hong Kong authorities on Wednesday charged seven people and two companies with offences, including manslaughter and conspiracy to defraud over the city's deadliest fire in decades.

The massive blaze engulfed seven apartment buildings and killed 168 people on November 26, 2025.

Former residents and relatives of the dead have been waiting for answers for months after the fire shattered the close-knit community of Wang Fuk Court, which housed thousands of people in the suburban district of Tai Po.

# Trump says Iran 'will pay the price' after tit-for-tat strikes

Qatar negotiators in Tehran to narrow gaps; China urges against escalation

Dubai, Washington, Tehran, Beijing, June 10: US President Donald Trump said on Wednesday Iran had taken too long to negotiate a deal and would now "have to pay the price," while Tehran said it would reassess diplomatic engagement with Washington after overnight tit-for-tat strikes.

Iran launched missile and drone attacks on US bases in Jordan, Kuwait and Bahrain in what it called retaliation for American strikes on Iranian targets around the Strait of Hormuz.

The exchange of fire, which came after Trump said Iran had downed a US Apache helicopter near the strait, marks one of the most significant escalations since Washington and Tehran agreed to a ceasefire in April.

"Iran is all talk and no action," Trump said in a social media post on Wednesday morning. "They've taken too long to negotiate a deal that would have been great for them, now they will have to pay the price!!!"

The US military said it had targeted Iranian air defences, ground control stations and surveillance radar sites in what it described as a "proportional response" to the downing of the helicopter, whose two crew members were rescued.



Flames engulf vehicles following an Israeli airstrike that hit a car in the centre of the southern Lebanese city of Sidon, on Wednesday.

Iran's Gulf neighbours and Jordan activated air defences to intercept incoming missiles and there were no immediate reports of damage to US bases.

The escalation — just days after Iran exchanged strikes with Israel for the first time since the ceasefire — casts fresh doubt on prospects for a deal to end the war, which began on February 28 with joint US-Israeli strikes on Iran.

Iran's foreign ministry spokesperson said Tehran would reassess diplomatic

engagement with Washington after what it called repeated ceasefire violations. "Any diplomatic process requires a minimum stable environment," Esmaeil Baghaei said. Oil prices jumped by around 2% and stock markets fell after Trump's remarks.

Fox News, citing a phone interview, reported that Trump said he may order new strikes on Iran's power plants and bridges because Tehran was taking too long to make a deal. Still, there were signs

diplomatic efforts were continuing. An official with knowledge of the matter said that Qatari negotiators travelled to Tehran on Wednesday after consultations with the US, in an effort to finalise an agreement.

China said on Wednesday it was "deeply concerned" over the conflict in the West Asia and urged against escalation after Washington carried out strikes on Iran over the downing of a US helicopter. — Agencies

#### BIBI WILL SEEK RE-POLL DESPITE WAR STRAINS

Jerusalem, June 10: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will seek re-election in Israel's upcoming national vote, his Likud party announced on Wednesday, after US President Donald Trump publicly questioned whether the 76-year-old would run.

Netanyahu, who is Israel's longest-serving prime minister, has led his country through three years of war, and is currently on trial for graft. — AFP

#### MEXICO, CANADA TRADE DEAL WON'T BE RENEWED: TRUMP

Washington, June 10: President Donald Trump said he would not reauthorize the US's trade deal with Canada and Mexico, setting the stage for months or years of negotiations over provisions governing automobiles and other key industries.

The countries are facing a July 1 milestone to extend the pact. Such an extension wasn't expected, with the US president escalating trade tensions with the neighbours. — Bloomberg

# Ukraine strikes Mariupol port

Kyiv, Moscow, Sofia, June 10: Ukrainian forces struck several key facilities at the Russian-occupied port of Mariupol, Kyiv said on Wednesday, in an attack that has "significantly limited" its capacity as a critical logistics hub for Moscow's war effort.

The port was left without power after strikes on its energy and management infrastructure, according to Ukraine's drone forces, which said they had carried out the operation with the 1st Azov Corps and the

SBU security service. "The port was used by the enemy for military logistics, as well as the illegal export of Ukrainian grain, coal and metal to Russia," it said. "The enemy's ability to use Mariupol as a logistics hub is significantly limited."

A video posted separately by the 1st Azov Corps shows drone footage of ships, electrical stations and other structures coming under attack.

Russian military logistics far behind the front line, an effort that analysts say has hampered Moscow's battlefield advances.

Russian investigators said on Wednesday that they had arrested at least two suspects behind a car bombing in Moscow, detaining teenagers who the domestic security service said were convinced to plant the bomb. There were two car bombs on Tuesday. Bulgaria will no longer provide weapons from its army stocks to Ukraine. — Agencies

# Pak Army copter crash kills all

Islamabad, June 10: An Mi-17 helicopter of the Pakistan Army Aviation crashed near Muzaffarabad in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir on Wednesday, killing all personnel on board, the army said.

"There were no survivors," the Inter-Services Public Relations, the media wing of the Pakistan military, said, without giving the number of those killed. In a statement, it said that the accident occurred "during take-off due to a technical fault".

Rescue and recovery teams immediately reached the crash site. A board of inquiry has been ordered to ascertain the technical cause of the accident.

President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Speaker of the National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq expressed grief and sorrow over the accident.

In separate statements, they extended their heartfelt sympathies to the families of those killed.

Chief of Defence Forces and Chief of the Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir and all ranks of the army "express deep grief over the tragic loss of precious lives and extend heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families", the ISPR said. In September last year, an army helicopter crashed in Gilgit-Baltistan's Diamer district, killing five personnel.

In August 2025, a helicopter of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government crashed in the Mohmand district. — PTI

Smoke billows after an army MI-17 helicopter crashed due to a technical fault, in Muzaffarabad, capital of Pakistan-administered Kashmir, on Wednesday. — PTI

## The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

## Modi milestone

Now for the march ahead

NARENDRA MODI has become India's longest continuously serving democratically elected Prime Minister. It's a creditable milestone. Twelve years at the helm have also seen the Bharatiya Janata Party exponentially expand its footprint across the length and breadth of the country. Three consecutive Lok Sabha victories exemplify a remarkable political consolidation, aided in no small measure by an uninspiring Opposition. West Bengal is just the latest in the BJP's long list of unlikely electoral domination in regions where it once had limited resonance. For the party, Prime Minister Modi is the mascot that seldom fails the EVM test, while Home Minister Amit Shah promises big and delivers. The winning formula is a combination of personal charisma and relentless vote bank micro-management.

Even his staunchest critics would admit that Prime Minister Modi exudes energy and passion that is difficult to match. Criticism is but an essential component of a vibrant democracy. The Modi government can rightly pat itself on the back for a whole range of schemes, initiatives and decisive actions. There is visible vibrancy in several sectors, but the possibilities are endless. Much more is within reach, and expected from a stable, strong government. 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas' remains the engine and the guiding principle to realise the Viksit Bharat dream, but only if it stays true to its name. Partisanship and majoritarianism are self-damaging. The country seems to be in a constant state of confrontation that continues to weaken social cohesion, the foundational cornerstone of economic growth. It is undesirable, pointless and bothersome.

As the West Asia conflict unravels, India, the world's fastest-growing major economy, is no longer so popular among global investors. The march ahead is tough. Like the Zojila project, that was once unthinkable, there is hopefully light at the end of the tunnel.

## Dam warning

Use Bhakra's excess water, avert floods

THE Bhakra Beas Management Board's (BBMB) advisory urging Punjab and Haryana to draw more water from the Bhakra reservoir should serve as a wake-up call on the growing complexities of water management in north India. Far from being a routine operational decision, it reflects the pressures of climate uncertainty, unsustainable agricultural practices and fragile inter-state cooperation. The reservoir level currently stands at 1,578.07 ft—more than 21 ft higher than at the same time last year. With only about 102 ft of vertical buffer remaining before the full reservoir level, the margin for error is narrowing as the monsoon approaches. Snowmelt from the Himalayas and extreme rainfall events could rapidly transform abundance into vulnerability.

Ironically, this challenge coincides with Punjab's paddy transplantation season. Although the state advanced the paddy calendar to June 1 partly to optimise water use, large tracts continue to depend heavily on groundwater while canal networks remain under-utilised. When available surface water is not efficiently distributed, reservoirs are forced to retain larger volumes, shrinking the flood cushion needed to absorb sudden inflows. The lessons of the devastating floods of 2023 should not be forgotten. Delayed releases and disputes over reservoir operations fuelled political acrimony and raised questions about preparedness. Dam management cannot focus solely on power generation. Flood moderation must be an equally important objective.

Irrigation departments must ensure timely delivery of canal water, particularly to tail-end farmers, allowing greater reliance on surface irrigation and reducing pressure on depleting aquifers. Partner states, meanwhile, must coordinate reservoir operations with foresight. Water abundance should strengthen resilience, not heighten risk. Clearing reservoir space today is the best insurance against tomorrow's climate uncertainties.

## ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

## The Tribune.

LAHORE, FRIDAY, JUNE 11, 1926

## The Gurkha Awakening

THE proceedings of the second anniversary of the Gurkha League, which was celebrated at Dehra Dun on Sunday last, are of more than ordinary interest. The Gurkhas are the principal inhabitants of the only independent Hindu Kingdom that exists in the world to-day, and they are closely connected with India not only by religious ties, but by those of association and fellowship. As was pointed out in the course of the proceedings, no less than half a million of them are domiciled in India, while they constitute an invaluable part of the Indian army. Any movement for all-round progress among such a people cannot fail to evoke the deepest sympathy in this country. Among a people like the Gurkhas, educational and social advancement must naturally take precedence of political advancement. The present movement is, therefore, quite rightly educational and social in its inception. Its aim is to educate the community, to promote industrial and commercial life among its members, and to free it from those evil customs and usages bear heavily on it and prevent it from taking its rightful place in the life of its own country and in the wider life of humanity. As was pointed out by the President, except in the army the Gurkhas were at present lagging behind all or most other communities; so much so that to most people who know them only from a distance they are no better than splendid fighting units. There is no reason why this should be so, because, as Thakur Chandan Singh pointed out, the Gurkhas have in them all the good points which characterise very valiant and trustful nation.

## Cooling India before it overheats

Extreme heat is turning cooling from a luxury into a necessity, demanding innovative approaches

DINESH C SHARMA  
SCIENCE COMMENTATOR

THE summer monsoon is here under the shadow of El Niño. The India Meteorological

Department (IMD) has forecast below-normal monsoon rainfall at 90% of the long period average (LPA), driven by the developing El Niño conditions in the Pacific Ocean. The El Niño warming patterns are known to weaken moisture-bearing winds and create uneven rainfall distribution across India. In its latest update, the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) has warned that the world should prepare for a potentially strong El Niño event, which will exacerbate drought and increase the risk of heat-waves both on land and in the ocean. Among the global impacts of El Niño, according to the WMO, will be below-average monsoon rainfall in South Asia.

One of the most obvious impacts of the developing weather situation will be extreme heat, heat-related illnesses, spread of vector-borne diseases and pressure on food, water and power generation. Heatwave conditions, warmer nights and humid conditions are being reported from many parts of the country. These impacts vary depending on local weather conditions and other factors like density of settlements, industrial and human activities and lack of green spaces.

All this leads to higher demand for cooling appliances and systems—fans, desert coolers, home and office ACs, mobile air-conditioning systems in vehicles such as cars, buses and trains, chillers, cold storages, etc. Homes, offices, industrial factories and infrastructure need cooling systems to suit



URBAN HEAT ISLANDS: Each AC unit throws heat directly into the environment creating a vicious cycle. ISTOCK

their needs and demands. Adding more window, split and centralised ACs is not a sustainable solution. The demand for AC units has surged this year and there are shortages in many markets. In the business-as-usual scenario, it is estimated that India will add 130 to 150 million new room ACs between 2025 and 2035. These units will be a strain on the power system, accounting for almost 180 gigawatts of the load in 2035. At present, room ACs contribute to about 60 to 70 gigawatts of the peak load in the summer.

Urban areas witness the phenomenon of urban heat islands (UHI), where some dense areas become several degrees warmer than surrounding less-populated areas. Besides consuming more power, the use of AC units in cities amplifies the UHI effect as each unit throws heat directly into the ambient environment, creating a vicious cycle in which hotter areas drive even greater demand for cooling.

The mainstay of energy-efficient cooling in India, at present, is the star rating system for ACs introduced in 2009, first as a voluntary label and later made mandatory. Subsequently, the Minimum Energy Performance Standards (MEPS) were introduced, followed by the Indian Seasonal Energy

## Adding more window, split and centralised ACs is not a sustainable solution.

Efficiency Ratio (ISEER) in 2015. These standards have made some impact on the AC market, with consumers preferring star-rated products and manufacturers introducing upgrades like inverter technology, which improves efficiency by adjusting compressor speed to cooling load. While this is so, there are technical and implementation deficiencies. A 2025 study by researchers at the India Energy and Climate Centre, University of California, Berkeley, pointed out that the test

procedures primarily assess cooling under dry conditions and overlook dehumidification, which is a critical factor in India's hot-humid climate. So, ACs might work well in lab tests, but they may underperform in real-world settings or overcool spaces at high energy cost.

The study also found that the MEPS being enforced in India lag behind those of Japan and South Korea, where average efficiencies of ACs are almost double compared to the average unit in India. Compliance and enforcement of standards remain weak. In addition, multiple Central and state agencies are involved in the implementation of different aspects of cooling efficiency norms.

Another initiative, the India Cooling Action Plan, was launched in 2019. One of the ideas being experimented with under this action plan is the District Cooling System (DCS), on the lines of the centralised heating systems in use in some European cities. The DCS involves a centralised cooling system for a set of buildings. Cooling is distributed through pipelines, much like water or gas utilities.

Such a system is considered more efficient as cooling is produced at a central plant using treated wastewater and making

use of waste heat through absorption chillers, instead of using refrigerant gases as in individual AC units. Since it is a centralised system, the cooling demand can be managed more efficiently. The DCS is considered ideal for airports, IT parks, industrial hubs, special economic zones, university campuses, etc. Such systems are functional in Singapore, Dubai, Qatar and the UAE.

For 'cooling as a service' to become a reality in India, however, several regulatory, legal and financial challenges, as well as hurdles like right-of-way, will have to be overcome. Some years ago, a DCS was planned for Connaught Place in Delhi, but the project failed to take off due to several on-ground problems. It may be relatively easier to implement in greenfield projects, as has been seen in the GIFT city in Gujarat. The DCS will be incorporated in the government buildings in Amaravati, the new capital of Andhra Pradesh, which is under development. It is time the DCS is promoted in large housing townships under construction in different cities.

Cooling is no longer just an option for the comfort of those who can afford it. As India gets urbanised and people move to cities, the demand for cooling will become more widespread. Building heat resilience for people and communities should be the policy goal if we are interested in addressing the cooling challenge that India faces. For this, the country needs a holistic cooling policy focussed on energy efficiency norms, cooling technologies designed to suit conditions in different regions, increased consumer awareness about energy efficiency and research into new cooling techs.

At the same time, community-level initiatives like cool roofs, which can significantly reduce indoor temperature in dwellings exposed to heat, should be rolled out in heat-vulnerable areas. Although policies and initiatives exist, the overall approach remains fragmented and implementation slow.

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When the weather is hot, keep a cool mind. When the weather is cold, keep a warm heart. — Ajahn Brahm

## Humour through errors &amp; omissions

BILAL AHMAD SHAMIM

THE aphorism 'to err is human' has ossified into commonplace wisdom. A Japanese proverb says that even monkeys fall from trees. Both of these signify that no mortal, however erudite or impeccable and immaculate in his expertise, is exempt from fallibility. Errors, lapses and inadvertent absurdities lend to life its variegated hues. They infuse the monotony of existence with mirth and animation, even as they engender moments of acute embarrassment. Amid the prosaic rhythms of quotidian life, I have encountered innumerable such instances.

Once, I visited a bank to exchange a damaged five-hundred-rupee note. The bureaucratic rigmarole was formidable. I was required to fill in a form with the particulars of the impaired currency and my residential address, phone and account number and attach a photocopy of my Aadhaar card. After completing all the formalities, I approached the counter—only to notice a glaring orthographical glitch on the display board: MUTULATED NOTES. The correct spelling, of course, is mutilated. I politely pointed it out to the lady official adding, with mild irony, that the bank had not only mutilated the currency but also the spelling.

On another day, while teaching a chapter, I mentioned the term amoeba, a unicellular organism. A prankish but intelligent student named Noori asked, with mock seriousness: "Sir, can it be pronounced as 'Ammi Abba' since it embodies both parental qualities?" The entire class burst into laughter, and I too struggled to maintain composure. On another occasion, Noori amused everyone by pronouncing dilemma as 'Dai Aleema.'

During my school days, a junior gave an answer in an exam that has remained etched in my memory. The question was: 'Humein munh se saans kyu nahin lena chahiye?' (Why should we not breathe through the mouth?) He wrote: 'Munh se saans lena se machhar andar aa kar laat mar kar daant tod sakta hai.' (If you breathe through mouth, a mosquito may enter and shatter your teeth with its legs).

Another amusing incident involved a Punjabi-speaking mechanic of our area and a chaste Urdu-speaking customer, who had come to get his sewing machine repaired. He politely asked the mechanic his name: "Aapka ism-e-giraami kya hai?" (What is your good name?) The mechanic replied, "Nai, nai." (No, no). After two or three attempts, the customer said: "Mai kitni der se aapka ism-e-giraami pooch raha hun, aap jawab nahin de rahe?" The mechanic retorted: "Mai bhi to itni der se keh raha hun ke isme garari nahin padegi, lekin aap ko samjh nahi aati." (I have also been saying the machine could not be fitted with a gear, but you don't seem to understand). He had mistaken 'giraami' for 'garari'.

Such trivial misadventures serve as gentle reminders that human frailty, far from being a defect alone, is often the very fountainhead of laughter and delight. Someone rightly put it: 'A little non-sense, now and then, is relished by the wisest men.'

The author taught English at TISS, Qadian, Gurdaspur

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## RBI must shed gold fixation

Refer to 'Why RBI should sell some gold'; the US-based Bloomberg report on RBI gold sales sparked needless speculation and exposed the nation's deep-rooted fetish for gold. However, the controversy triggered a timely debate on the role of gold reserves. The central bank's golden trilemma is whether to buy, sell or do nothing. The writer rightly argues that gold is no different from other reserve assets and should be sold when required in the national interest. As gold is meant to serve the economy, not sentiment, the RBI should shed hesitation and sell prudently to fortify economic resilience.

CHANCHAL S MANN, UNA

## India, Nepal must respect old ties

Refer to 'A young Nepal seeks partnership over patronage'; RSP chairman Rabi Lamichhane's India visit is a vital diplomatic reset intended to ease tension following PM Balen Shah's controversial remarks. New Delhi's majestic reception to Lamichhane is a strategic signal from India to adapt and engage with Nepal's new political generation. The breadth of cooperation between the two countries transcends formal diplomatic framework and extends beyond *roti-beti* ties. Simultaneously, India should not perceive Nepal's balanced foreign policy stance as adversarial. Both nations should interact through established bilateral mechanism rather than aggressive public rhetoric. New Delhi and Kathmandu must emphasise enhanced transparency, mutual respect and greater consideration of each other's political constraints.

HARBINDER S DHILLON, UNA

## Sort disputes without third party

The Nepal PM's statement accusing India of occupying a part of its territory is indicative that the new dispensation in Nepal is wet behind the ears and jumping the gun. Balendra Shah has ruffled feathers of the Indian government by claiming that he is in talks with the UK and the China governments over Indian territory occupied by Nepal. It does not behove a Prime Minister to make such foot-in-the-mouth comments about a friendly neighbouring country. India has rightfully declined third-party intervention.

AANYA SINGHAL, NOIDA

## Micro-clusters for greater progress

Apropos of 'The many faces of Modinomics'; India needs manufacturing bases in different geographical regions for labour-intensive industries, like food processing and textiles, in order to shift workers from agriculture to high-paying occupations. Modinomics should thus encourage the setting up of micro-clusters in rural hinterlands having good connectivity with urban markets. Each cluster is structured like one big factory. Initial investments for infrastructure and supportive facilities can come from a single or several small investors, or collectively from farmer entrepreneurs acting in a cooperative mode.

CHANDER SHEKHAR DOGRA, JALANDHAR

## Move beyond welfare schemes

Apropos of 'The many faces of Modinomics'; the true measure of leadership lies not merely in longevity but in the depth and durability of transformation. Over the past 12 years, India has witnessed unprecedented expansion of welfare schemes. The next phase of governance must move to wealth creation. Employment generation, skilling, quality education, urban planning, agricultural diversification and climate resilience require greater attention. As India aspires to become a developed nation by 2047, success will depend on converting demographic potential into productive opportunities. The challenge now is to ensure that the gains of welfare translate into sustainable economic growth.

SANJAY CHOPRA, MOHALI

## Use AI to clear court cases

With reference to 'Delayed justice'; the discernible laxity in the delivery of justice has become a systemic failure. The tardy pace of adjudication is increasingly being accepted as the new normal. Whether inadvertent or systemic, this crisis demands a robust corrective mechanism. Despite repeated directives from the apex court, the delays remain largely unaddressed. Now that AI and computing techniques have transformed our lives, we must leverage them to address this stagnation. We should create algorithms to send constant, automated reminders regarding cases to those at responsible positions.

ABHYAM SHARMA, PATHANKOT

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit.

These should be cogently written and can be sent by e-mail to: [Letters@tribunemail.com](mailto:Letters@tribunemail.com)

# Modi, Nehru & Rahul : Leadership matters



**AJAY K MEHRA**  
SENIOR FELLOW, CENTRE FOR MULTILEVEL FEDERALISM

**E**VEN as author and analyst Ramachandra Guha stirred a hornet's nest by demolishing Rahul Gandhi, a fourth generation scion of the Nehru-Gandhi family, as incapable of challenging Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a recent article and TV show, the day has arrived when the PM — whose party has often used the comparison with Jawaharlal Nehru as a yardstick — surpassed Nehru as the longest serving prime minister of India.

Nehru, who ruled democratically from 1952-1964, was in power for 4398 days. On June 10, Modi completed 4399 days of his premiership. But there was no word from the BJP about counting the days since August 1947, when India became independent, to 1952, when the results of the first election came out in which the Congress, and Nehru himself, had won a huge victory.

Nehru and his great grandson can be compared with each other in two very different ways. Nehru was PM for almost 17 years; Rahul was an

MP for 20 years, when in 2024 he became the Leader of Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha.

In Guha's assessment, Rahul Gandhi 'lacks gravitas' (endorsing the Pappu and Rahul Baba taxonomy); 'lacks a CV for a claim to India's premiership'; 'his only claim to fame is his Nehru-Gandhi lineage'; 'lacks Modi's charisma (and) instead of stating his constructive agenda, makes personal attacks on Modi'; under his leadership the Congress has been losing elections since 2014, and has shrunk both in legislative bodies both at the national and state levels as well as on the ground. The party, Guha adds, has become a 'family firm' and is completely out of breath to reach the goalpost. All these characteristics, he says, only display Rahul's political incompetence with no capacity for hard work.

I believe that Guha's objectivity is seriously in question. An analysis of political developments in the country since 2009 are completely missing. Can he say, with authority, that PM Modi possesses all the qualities he has declared Rahul Gandhi lacks?

Rahul won the 2004 Lok Sabha elections from Amethi by 300,000 votes — a seat he retained in 2009 — and declined PM Manmohan Singh's invitation to join his Cabinet. He remained a reticent backbencher in Lok Sabha for nearly a decade and was only noticed for his controver-



**DERISION** : Most damaging to Rahul's image was the hostile 'Pappu' campaign launched by the BJP. PTI

sial public trashing of his own government's ordinance to protect convicted lawmakers from immediate disqualification on September 27, 2013, at the Press Club of India. In 2019 when the Congress lost for the second time, party president Mallikarjun Kharge resigned as party president and took the blame, although it was widely known that Rahul had called the shots.

The most damaging to Rahul's image since 2014 was the hostile 'Pappu' campaign launched against him by the BJP. However, after taking over as LoP following the 2024 election, when the party won 99 Lok Sabha seats, his image began changing. The Bharat Jodo Yatra in 2022-23 and the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in 2024 helped mitigate the impact of the 'Pappu' campaign, on

Jawaharlal Nehru stood tall despite challenges all around; his great grandson Rahul is still taking baby steps under adversity of a different kind.

which Rahul alleged the BJP spent Rs 2 crore. But the BJP's derision, right from the top leadership, continued.

As Rahul began raising issues by assertively leading discussions in the Lok Sabha, he was disqualified from his membership of the House in March 2023. The Supreme Court reinstated him in August. This incident of his expulsion also reflects the partisanship of the presiding officers of Parliament.

Regularly touring the country, meeting people at the grassroots, sharing meals with them, Rahul seems to be slowly developing the image of a popular leader. With his white T-shirt and jeans, he has adopted simple middle class attire. As LoP he participates in policy debates in Lok Sabha — the PM mostly attends when he has to speak himself. However,

given the weaknesses of the Congress at the organisational, multi-level leadership pool, Rahul needs to build the party organisation, leadership, cadre and bases in states.

As Modi overtakes Nehru on the longest-serving PM parameter and consolidates his party's hold on India's politics, Rahul Gandhi, two years ago, managed to dent the PM and BJP's invincible image by leading the Congress in the 2024 election limiting the NDA from reaching an absolute majority in the Lok Sabha.

The BJP's victory in several states — Haryana, Maharashtra, Delhi, Bihar and West Bengal — has called Rahul's leadership into question. Party insiders point to several faulty decisions. They believe he must be open to suggestions of grassroots leaders in framing party strategies. The recent decision of the party to end the long-time association with the DMK in Tamil Nadu shows that he does not value old alliances.

Back in 2001, RSS swayamsevak Narendra Modi was rewarded by then Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani with the chief ministerial chair in Gujarat for facilitating his rath yatra. However, within his first four months in office, Modi had to face his first major test as a leader when brutal riots broke out in the aftermath of the burning of the Sabarmati Express. About a thousand people were killed in the violence that followed, in

the wake of which then PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee's advice to Modi to follow 'rajdharm' will go down in history.

I will argue that the BJP's celebration of PM Modi surpassing Nehru, despite his victory in election after election, is far-fetched. We cannot forget that Nehru inherited a divided country, a ruptured social fabric and an empty treasury. He and his team, of which Sardar Vallabhai Patel was an integral part, proceeded to build a violence-torn nation brick by brick. They bound the dissimilar regions and communities of the country by the thread of a nationhood that barely existed. Factories, educational institutions, dams, institutions of governance and his insistence that India would be a full-fledged democracy was unprecedented — notice, that hardly any other nation that shed the colonial yoke followed India's example. He built a foreign policy, the touchstone of which was the Non-Aligned Movement. He turned down luxury — in 1958, at the age of 69, his 10-day journey to Bhutan by vehicle, trekking and on mules is an example never followed.

The great grandfather stood tall despite challenges all around; his great grandson is still taking baby steps under adversity of a different kind. But Guha's analysis shows that India is being failed by its intelligentsia too. Rahul Gandhi's efforts may not be perfect, but they are sincere.

## Prisons and forgotten childhoods



**SHRUTIKA PANDEY**  
LAWYER AND RESEARCHER



**AISHWARYA SINHA**  
SR SOCIAL WORKER, IPRBONO INDIA

**I**N a recent ruling, the Madras High Court dismissed a petition by the wife of a life convict seeking 21 days' leave for her husband so the couple could undergo fertility treatment. A child born to a life convict, the court reasoned, would grow up bearing the stigma of the parent's crime and the psychological harm society inflicts.

The judgment is striking less for what it decides than for what it reveals. A court has acknowledged, with unusual candour, the lifelong stigma borne by children of imprisoned parents, and then invoked that stigma to deny a child the chance to be born. The asymmetry is stark: the welfare of an imagined child is reason enough to refuse a parent's claim, while thousands of children already living with the consequences of incarceration remain on the margins of every child-protection framework.

The Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 defines a child in need of care and protection to include one whose parents are unable to provide adequate care. Incarceration is such an incapacitation. The law recognises part of this: a child may stay with an imprisoned mother until age six, but must leave after. Children older than six when a parent is arrested are affected just as deeply. Yet child-protection authorities show little sign of assessing their needs, or stepping in.

This omission is not for want of instruction. Over 20 years ago, in *RD Upadhyay vs State of AP*, the SC issued directions:

nutritious food, crèches, medical care and education for children inside prison, and a clear policy for those who must leave at six. In 2019, the Ministry of Women and Child Development studied mothers in custody and made 22 recommendations on crèches, in-prison education and structured contact with children outside.

Not one indicator from these efforts appears in any national data system today. On crèches, the response is haphazard. Across four years of prison statistics data, nine out of 35 states and union territories report some facility for children: a one-off creche run by an NGO, anganwadis, basic education and vaccination. RTI replies tell a starker story: in Odisha, just two of 20 prisons had crèches, though 49 children lived in the rest; Kerala extends the facility only to convicted mothers, leaving under-trials' children out; in Assam, infants are housed in sub-jails unfit even for adults.

What is missing is not policy but accountability: a binding national baseline, mandatory disaggregated reporting, independent inspection and adequate living conditions. The executive's record is no better. The

same ministry has admitted, in answer after answer to parliamentary questions, that it maintains no data on children of prisoners or their welfare entitlements. The body built to protect these children does not know how many there are.

The law is unambiguous that no child may remain in prison beyond six. Yet RTI responses reveal administrative silence: child welfare panels and district child protection units either held no records of such children or said no case had come before them, impossible to reconcile with the women and children living in prisons. Whether a child's need is identified at all depends on the awareness of a local committee and individual goodwill.

In Delhi, protection is extended only when both parents, or the sole surviving parent, are imprisoned; the presence of any adult relative outside can render a child ineligible. This is a poor proxy. In one case, a father's incarceration left his wife and three young children without income. The mother, forced into daily-wage work, left the children unattended for long stretches, the eldest assuming care far beyond her years, while schooling and nutrition suffered. These are the circumstances child-welfare bodies are meant to assess. What little support exists is financial, and not available everywhere.

Read against this backdrop, the Madras judgment looks less like a defence of an unborn child than a confession: we will not let you bring this child into the world because we are not prepared to face the stigma that will follow her. The stigma is real. But the systems that should absorb it, that should ensure that a child of an incarcerated parent is not abandoned to society's verdict on her parents, do not exist.

The judgment is unwittingly honest. Rather than protecting, the state has simply forgotten them. And instead of demanding accountability, the court has settled on a tidier solution: fewer children to forget.

*Views are personal*

Thousands of children living with the consequences of their parents' incarceration remain on the margins of every child-protection framework.

## Dhaka's Pakistan pivot



**DIVYA MALHOTRA**  
SR FELLOW, CENTRE FOR NEW AGE WARFARE STUDIES, DELHI

**T**WELVE senior Bangladeshi civil servants landed in Karachi last month for an executive leadership programme organised by Pakistan's Higher Education Commission and Civil Services Academy. The training began with an engagement at the National Institute of Public Administration in Karachi, alongside visits to key public institutions in Pakistan's financial capital. The delegation then proceeded to Lahore's Civil Services Academy, the institute that had trained bureaucrats of undivided Pakistan before 1971. This marked the first such institutional exchange between Islamabad and Dhaka in over 50 years.

The development is significant because until recently, Bangladeshi officials trained in India. The Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA), Mussoorie, hosted mid-career officials under agreements formalised since 2014. Although a training cooperation agreement for 2025-2030 has been renewed, no Bangladeshi officer has visited LBSNAA since the Sheikh Hasina's ouster in 2024.

While unresolved issues from 1971 remain, they are no longer a barrier to engagement.

Bangladesh emerged from the traumatic events of 1971. The Pakistan army's war crimes are deeply embedded in its national identity. During Hasina's 15-year tenure (2009-24), Pakistan was largely treated as a pariah partner, while the Awami League drew much of its political legitimacy from the liberation war narrative.

The student-led uprising that toppled Hasina and sent her into exile in India opened space for a reset with Pakistan. Islamabad moved quickly. Cargo shipping resumed between Karachi and Chittagong, senior Pakistani officials travelled to Dhaka and structured cooperation expanded across trade, connectivity and governance.

Thus, the Bangladeshi delegation's orientation in Karachi was equally symbolic. Exposure to institutions in Pakistan reflected Islamabad's effort to familiarise Bangladeshi officials with the country's trade architecture at a time of expanding economic engagement. While unresolved issues from 1971 remain, they are no longer being treated as a barrier to engagement. By de-hyphenating past issues from present realities, both sides seem to have found a new diplomatic space.

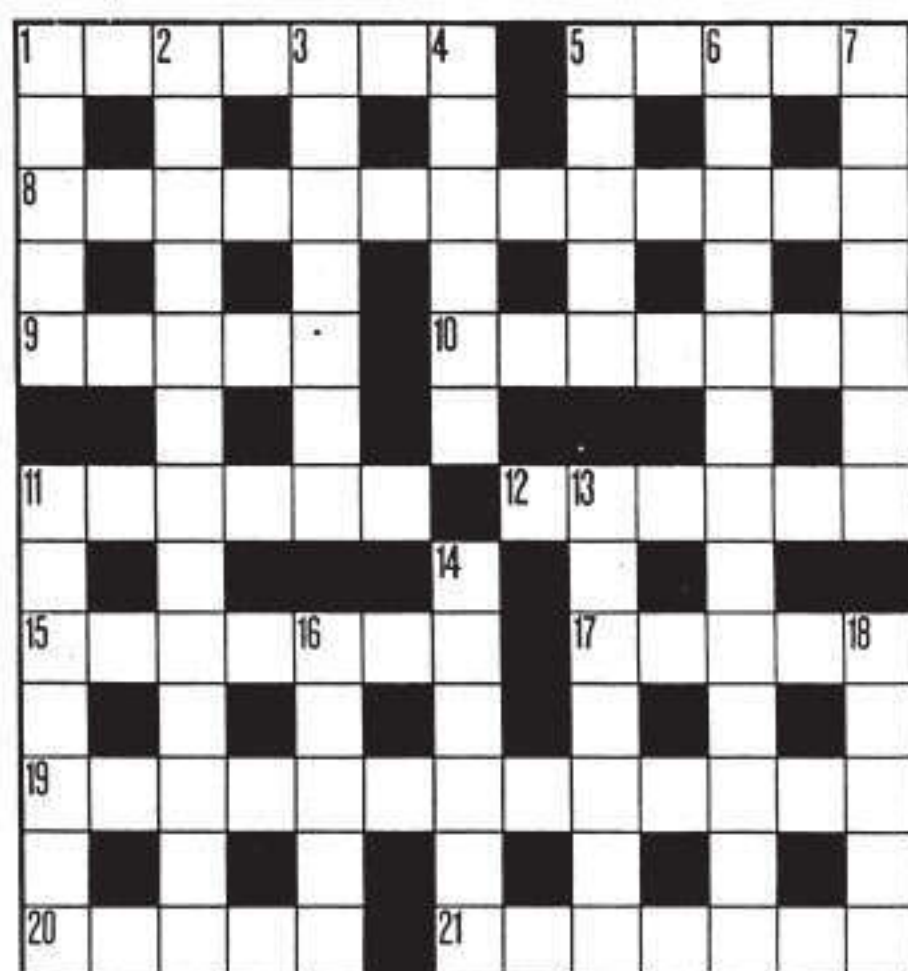
But, the training programme's significance goes beyond this. These programmes are designed to shape how officials think about governance,

statecraft, regional politics and national interests. For years, Bangladeshi officials attended training programmes in India and were exposed to administrative practices, governance models and strategic perspectives shared by New Delhi and Dhaka. Pakistan now has an opportunity to engage a new generation of administrators. This is why the exchange of ideas may prove more consequential than the exchange of goods.

Exposure to Pakistani institutions, policy debates and administrative traditions will now shape their perspectives. Pakistani analysts have argued that such exchanges should be institutionalised through long-term agreements so that the relationship is not left vulnerable to changing political cycles. For decades, Dhaka-Delhi ties defined the boundaries of the Dhaka-Islamabad engagement. That constraint has loosened following political change in Dhaka. Religious affinities have also become more visible in the post-Hasina period.

This does not mean Bangladesh has abandoned the Liberation War as a foundational national narrative. Rather, the post-Hasina political order appears more driven by national interest. The visit of officials reflects the willingness of both countries to test the possibility of normalisation, and that in itself is a milestone.

### QUICK CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- Put back in position (7)
  - Criminal deception (5)
  - Commit oneself irrevocably (4,4,5)
  - Profundity (5)
  - More important (7)
  - Dismal (6)
  - Captain Bligh's ship (6)
  - Zealot (7)
  - Frame supporting painting (5)
  - Soon enough (3,2,4,4)
  - Vestige (5)
  - Secret procedure (7)
- DOWN**
- Raging (5)
  - Items of equipment (13)
  - One more (7)
  - Come to light (6)
  - Legendary tale (5)
  - Unable to proceed (2,1,10)
  - Demolish (7)
  - Openly disobedient (7)
  - Behind schedule (7)
  - To the other side (6)
  - Stressful (5)
  - Bloodsucking parasite (5)

**Yesterday's Solution**  
**Across:** 1 Scrap, 8 Fair game, 9 Mirth, 10 Set piece, 11 Blare, 12 Job, 16 Gung-ho, 17 Even so, 18 Tag, 23 Gruff, 24 Play down, 25 Weary, 26 On the sly, 27 Truth.

**Down:** 2 Chill out, 3 Alter ego, 4 Take to, 5 Grope, 6 Waver, 7 Fever, 12 Jot, 13 Beg, 14 Hear hear, 15 Ask for it, 19 As well, 20 Spoof, 21 Faith, 22 Adder.

### SU DO KU



HARD  
epaper.tribuneindia.com

### YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

### CALENDAR

- JUNE 11, 2026, THURSDAY**
- Shaka Samvat 1948
  - Jyeshtha Shaka 21
  - Jyeshtha Parvishte 28
  - Hijari 1447
  - Krishna Paksha Tithi 11, up to 10:37 pm
  - Sobhana Yoga up to 1:00 am
  - Revli Nakshatra up to 8:17 am
  - Moon enters Aries sign 8:17 am
  - Panchak ended 8:17 am

### FORECAST

CITY	THURSDAY		FRIDAY	
	MAX	MIN	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	39	28		
New Delhi	41	28		
Amritsar	40	28		
Bathinda	42	27		
Jalandhar	40	28		
Ludhiana	41	28		
Bhiwani	40	26		
Hisar	42	27		
Sirsa	42	29		
Dharamsala	33	20		
Manali	28	16		
Shimla	25	20		
Srinagar	29	13		
Jammu	40	25		
Kargil	24	09		
Leh	19	10		
Dehradun	36	22		
Mussoorie	25	19		

TEMPERATURE IN °C

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

Opposition's Test

The latest gathering of opposition parties in New Delhi offered a reminder that the central challenge before India's non-BJP political forces is no longer one of arithmetic. It is one of credibility. For years, opposition politics has revolved around alliance-building. The assumption was that if regional parties and the Congress could overcome local rivalries and pool their votes, they would create a formidable electoral challenge. Yet recent elections have demonstrated that political chemistry cannot be reduced to mathematics. Voters may be dissatisfied with governments, anxious about the economy, worried about unemployment or disturbed by institutional controversies, but dissatisfaction does not automatically translate into votes for the opposition.

This reality appears to be dawning on opposition leaders. Their discussions reportedly ranged from examination controversies and economic concerns to questions about electoral processes and the state of democratic institutions. What ties these disparate issues together is a growing recognition that electoral contests are only one part of a broader political struggle. Winning elections requires winning public confidence. That confidence cannot be secured through press conferences, parliamentary coordination or occasional conclaves in the national capital. It must be built through sustained political work on the ground. The Bharatiya Janata Party's greatest advantage today is not merely its organisational strength or leadership appeal. It is its ability to maintain continuous engagement with voters between elections. Opposition parties, by contrast, often appear active only during campaigns or moments of crisis.

The internal criticisms aired during the meeting are therefore significant. Regional parties appear increasingly unwilling to accept a hierarchical arrangement in which the Congress is the unquestioned anchor of the alliance. Their message is simple: unity requires consultation, accommodation and mutual respect. If opposition parties cannot manage differences within their own ranks, convincing voters that they can govern together becomes considerably harder.

Equally notable is the emergence of independent protest movements that operate outside traditional party structures like the Cockroach Janata Party. Whether such movements endure is less important than what they signify. They suggest that public anger does not only seek expression through established political parties. In a democracy, that should concern these parties. Citizens who are unhappy with the government but remain unconvinced by its challengers create a political vacuum that no alliance formula can easily fill.

The opposition's frequent focus on the fairness of the electoral playing field reflects another dilemma. If voters come to believe that institutions are under strain, such concerns deserve scrutiny and debate. But arguments about process cannot substitute for political mobilisation. Parties that wish to govern must persuade citizens not only that the system needs reform but also that they themselves offer a credible alternative.

The meeting's most important takeaway is therefore not that the opposition remains united. It is that its leaders increasingly understand the scale of the task before them. The real test lies ahead: transforming scattered discontent into organised political support. Until that happens, unity will remain a slogan rather than a strategy.

After the Headlines

A year after the Air India crash in Ahmedabad, attention is once again turning to what caused one of India's worst aviation disasters. Investigators dissect technical failures, examine cockpit decisions and scrutinise maintenance records. Those questions matter. But they are not the only questions that matter. Modern societies have become adept at investigating disasters and remarkably poor at remembering their human aftermath.

The public conversation around major tragedies usually follows a familiar pattern. There is shock, saturation coverage, official inquiries and demands for accountability. Then, gradually, attention shifts elsewhere. New crises emerge. New headlines compete for space. Yet for those who survive, and for families who lose loved ones, the event does not move into the past. It becomes part of everyday life. This is particularly true in disasters that claim victims beyond their intended sphere. Far less attention is paid to those on the ground who happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. An aircraft is expected to carry risk for those who board it. Yet the crash also killed 19 people on the ground, a fact that has largely faded from public memory. Workers, students, residents and passers-by often become secondary characters in the public memory of such events, even though their losses are no less profound. The Ahmedabad crash offers a reminder that the consequences of catastrophe extend far beyond casualty figures. They alter how communities experience familiar spaces. Buildings become memorials. Ordinary sounds become triggers. Daily routines acquire emotional weight. Recovery is therefore not a single event but a prolonged social process that can last years.

There is also an institutional lesson. Hospitals, colleges and local administrations are usually judged by how effectively they respond in the immediate aftermath of disaster. Equally important is how they manage the long shadow that follows. Psychological support, rehabilitation of the injured, assistance for bereaved families and preservation of collective memory are not peripheral responsibilities. They are central to genuine recovery. India's rapid urbanisation makes this challenge increasingly relevant. Airports, highways, industrial facilities and dense residential zones now coexist in close proximity across many cities. When accidents occur, the impact is rarely confined to a single group. Entire neighbourhoods can become unwilling participants in tragedy. Disaster planning must therefore extend beyond emergency response to include long-term community healing. The anniversary of a catastrophe should not merely be an occasion to revisit the mechanics of failure. It should also be a moment to recognise the quieter burdens carried by those left behind. Technical reports may eventually establish why a plane fell from the sky. They cannot measure the empty chair at a family table, the lingering fear attached to a familiar sound or the memories embedded in a damaged building. A society demonstrates its maturity not only through its ability to investigate disasters but also through its willingness to remember those who continue living with their consequences. The headlines eventually fade. For many families, the story does not.

India's water needs

No water strategy can succeed if it remains confined to government files. Water is too local, too seasonal and too personal for that. It must become a people's movement with Jan bhagidari at the core. In a country as diverse as India, that principle matters because local solutions often work better than one-size-fits-all models. India's water future will not be secured by the government alone. It will be secured when citizens, Urban Local Bodies, Panchayats, industries, scientists and administrators act as partners



Water resources are finite and also critical for life. India's ambition to become a developed nation by 2047 is usually discussed in the language of highways, factories, digital platforms, exports, start-ups, global investment, etc. These are all important. But beneath every one of them lies a quieter, more basic question: will India have enough reliable water to sustain the economy it wants to build?

A developed India cannot be built on uncertain water security. The real test of "Viksit Bharat @2047" will not be whether India can announce ambitious infrastructure projects, but whether it can deliver dependable water systems at scale.

By 2050 India's water demand is estimated to exceed the water supply and the per capita water availability is likely to touch the "water scarce" situation. India faces severe and interconnected water-sector challenges, especially in urban water management and agricultural water use. These problems are driven by population growth, climate variability, groundwater depletion, weak infrastructure, and policy distortions.

Cities are growing faster than water infrastructure can keep up. Water demand exceeds supply in many cities. The informal settlements often lack piped water access and dependence on groundwater and water tankers is increasing. The Non-Revenue Water (NRW) of treated water in many Indian cities is 30-50 per cent because of old and dilapidated pipelines, leakage, illegal connections and poor metering. A major share of urban wastewater is untreated before entering rivers and lakes due to insufficient sewage treatment plants (STPs), industrial discharge and solid waste dumping.

A similar picture emerges in the water sector in rural areas also. Agriculture uses around 80-90 per cent of India's freshwater withdrawals, making it the dominant water-consuming sector. Farmers often grow highly water-intensive crops in water-stressed regions, such as rice in Punjab and Haryana, and sugarcane in Maharashtra.

This mismatch between crops and local water availability is a major issue. India is one of the world's largest groundwater users. Agriculture is highly exposed to erratic monsoons, droughts, and heat stress. As climate change intensifies, irrigation demand increases while water availability becomes less predictable.

For decades, groundwater has carried India's rural economy on its back. It supports most rural drinking water needs and a large share of irrigation. Yet because it is underground and out of sight, and by using the Easement Act 1882, it has too often been treated as an endless reserve.

However, the latest groundwater assessment shows signs of progress. Recharge from conservation structures has

risen from 13.98 billion cubic metres in 2017 to 25.34 billion cubic metres in 2024. The share of "safe" assessment units has improved from 62.64 to 73.39 per cent, while "over-exploited" units have declined from 17.24 to 11.13 per cent.

One reason for this shift is the growing convergence between schemes and institutions. The Atal Bhujal Yojana is a good example of this new approach. Water budgeting across thousands of Gram Panchayats is not just a technical exercise. It is a democratic one. This is where India's water future will be decided: not only in large dams or policy

100 MW AI data centre running 24/7, approximately 1.68 million litres/day of water is required. Similarly, a green hydrogen plant is estimated to use a sizable amount of water in a year for purification and cooling.

This is going to put additional burden on the already stressed water resources in India. Safe reuse of treated water (SRTW), process efficiency and Zero Liquid Discharge technologies must become mainstream, especially in water-intensive sectors. Better water-use efficiency is possible when industry treats conservation as a business priority rather than a compliance burden.

No water strategy can succeed if it remains confined to government files. Water is too local, too seasonal and too personal for that. It must become a people's movement with Jan bhagidari at the core. The Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain campaign reflects this understanding. Its message is simple, but powerful: catch water where it falls, when it falls. In a country as diverse as India, that principle matters because local solutions often work better than one-size-fits-all models. India's water future will not be secured by the government alone. It will be secured when citizens, Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), Panchayats, industries, scientists and administrators act as partners.

By 2047, the country will need water systems that are reliable, transparent, technologically enabled and locally owned. It will need groundwater management that respects ecological limits. It will need river infrastructure that balances ambition with responsibility. It will need industries that recycle before they extract. It will need cities that plan before they run dry. And it will need citizens who see water not as a free commodity, but as a shared inheritance.

Urban water solutions, such as leak reduction and smart metering, wastewater recycling and reuse, rainwater harvesting, lake and wetland restoration, 24/7 water supply reforms, and decentralized sewage treatment pave the way towards Jal Samridh Bharat. Agricultural solutions include crop diversification away from water-intensive crops, drip and sprinkler irrigation, better groundwater regulation, solar pumps with smart controls, water pricing reforms, and climate-resilient agriculture. There is also a need for introducing water governance reforms at the Centre and state level. The existing concept of "silos" in the water sector should be immediately discarded: for example, surface and groundwater are the same water resources, and not "silos" and their current management should be revised immediately.

India's development story for "Viksit Bharat 2047" will be written in many languages: infrastructure, innovation, investment, productivity and jobs. But the ink, in the end, will be water.



GIRIJA K BHARAT



S K SARKAR

The writers are, respectively, MD, Mu Gamma Consultants, Gurugram, and Distinguished Fellow, TERI and former Secretary, Ministry of Water Resources, Govt of India

documents, but in village-level decisions made before a well runs dry.

The next phase of India's water governance will not be shaped only by canals, reservoirs and recharge structures. It will also be shaped by data. This is where institutions like the National Water Informatics Centre become crucial. It needs real-time information, reliable datasets, predictive tools and transparent dashboards. Platforms such as India-WRIS and the Water Information Management System are steps in that direction. Decision-support systems can help governments move from crisis response to anticipation. Data is no longer a back-office function. It is part of the country's water infrastructure.

India's industrial water demand is projected to rise sharply in the decades ahead. At present, the industrial water use efficiency in India is very low compared to international standards. That should concern every policymaker and business leader. A circular water economy is no longer optional, it is imperative.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)/data-centre cooling tower water demand in India is going to rise. It is estimated that for a



Drawing from the past for the future

The second World Conference of Classics will be held in Athens, Greece, on Tuesday and Wednesday. With the theme "Dialogue between Ancient and Modern: Contemporary Inspirations from Classical Wisdom", it brings together leading scholars in classical studies, as well as experts in civilization, culture and archaeology from China and other countries, to discuss issues related to classical civilizations and promote academic exchanges and consensus-building in global classical studies. The event serves as a timely reminder of the importance of cultural exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations in an era marked by geopolitical tensions and deep-seated mistrust.

It has long been realized that ancient Eastern Mediterranean civilization is not the only form of civilization, nor is it the best. There is a heritage of civilization all over the world, and the acceptance of

that heritage is important for countries to get along.

There is a misconception about classics that we study ancient times to gain certain wisdom or practices that can be directly borrowed. But the real significance of classics is that they help us understand the causes of some of the most consequential decisions in history. They provide practical food for thought for political theory and political thinking today.

For instance, the Thucydides trap is much talked about today. Knowing its origins helps us better understand if it is relevant today and, if so, how it can be avoided.

Civilizations are wellsprings of wisdom, embodying a vast repository of rational and practical knowledge about understanding and transforming the world. They have always thrived through exchanges and

interaction. The ancient Silk Road, for instance, was not merely a trade route but a conduit for cultural, technological and philosophical exchanges between the East and the West.

All this underscores the potential of civilizational dialogue to foster mutual understanding and cooperation, two things the world is in dire need of today.

The public goods China has put forward in recent years - such as the Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, Global Civilization Initiative and Global Governance Initiative that are foundational for the building of a community with a shared future for humanity - are frameworks deeply rooted in the traditional Chinese notion that common challenges require collective action and shared solutions. Their resonance comes from the belief in ancient times in an ethical community - a group of individuals who

share common ethical values and principles, working collectively to maintain social harmony and justice. In ancient times, these communities were often localized, such as within a village or kingdom, where shared values and norms governed behavior.

The importance of an ethical community lies in its ability to foster cooperation, mutual respect and a sense of belonging among its members, which are essential for societal stability and well-being. It is thus easy to see why China's proposals have been widely accepted by those countries hoping to build a more harmonious world. From the Belt and Road Initiative to the Global Governance Initiative and through mechanisms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, China is steadfastly striving to foster a sense of interconnectedness and a more ethical and collaborative global community based on mutual respect and the pursuit of shared development.

Letters To The Editor | editor@thestatesman.com

Credibility

Sir, Apropos "Counting Trust" published today, India's transition to a fully digital census highlights a modern paradox. While state-of-the-art software and devices can easily map a billion lives, technological sophistication means very little without absolute civic trust.

In an era of surveillance and data privacy, citizens must be fully convinced that their personal details will be protected and used fairly. When transparency is treated as an afterthought, data quality suffers.

This massive headcount carries immense political consequences, especially as the inclusion of caste data shapes representation, welfare budgets, and future constituency boundaries.

Slight doubts regarding impartiality or methodology will quickly trigger intense

political controversies. To prevent governing in the dark, the state must remember that a credible census relies entirely on public legitimacy rather than sleek digital applications.

Yours, etc., K. Chidamand Kumar, Bengaluru, 5 June.

Reckless

Sir, Mamata Banerjee's insinuations on the killing of Osman Hadi in Bangladesh are dangerous and could heighten tensions across the border.

When domestic political grandstanding is used to tear into the delicate layer of international security, it amounts to treason.

Mamata has handed on a platter a rhetorical victory to the hardline, sectarian elements across the border who want to destabilize Indo-Bangladesh ties. Her rhetoric risks legitimising extremist narratives that seek

to portray India as a hostile neighbor.

The most immediate and tragic cost of such reckless comments is borne by innocent people. Unsubstantiated rumours regarding Hadi's death have previously triggered violent backlashes, media crackdowns, and fatal attacks on minority populations in Bangladesh. Reviving these conspiracies directly endangers minority safety by providing a fresh pretext for radical mobilization.

Yours, etc., Sudipta Ghosh, Jangipur, 5 June.

Clarity

Sir, Apropos "The Ultimate Reality Hack" published today, in a world driven by constant distractions, achievements, and endless competition, true growth begins when we learn to understand ourselves.

Knowledge, technology and success can

make life comfortable, but inner awareness gives life meaning.

When we develop clarity of thought, emotional balance and a deeper connection with our values we become better equipped to face challenges with confidence and wisdom.

The greatest journey is not towards wealth or recognition, but towards self-discovery. A calm mind, a compassionate heart, and a clear purpose can transform the way we see the world. Real progress happens when learning is combined with reflection and action. Ultimately, happiness and fulfillment come not from changing the world around us, but from understanding and mastering the world within us. That inner transformation is the foundation of a meaningful and peaceful life.

Yours, etc., Aditya Kamble, Kalaburagi, 8 June.



# Organic farming adds to incomes, health

BHARAT DOGRA

Both at the level of the government and several non-government organizations, the importance of natural farming has been increasingly emphasized in recent years in the context of integrating sustainable rural livelihoods with improved climate resilience and protection of the environment. Now with the likely reduction in the availability of chemical fertilizers due to disruption of imports, there is an additional reason for this emphasis.

The good news is that success stories of natural farming are being received from several villages, and small farmers in particular are responding very well, partly also due to their greater need for reducing costs and related debts.

Saroj Kushwaha, a small farmer of Pathari village in Tikamgarh district, Madhya Pradesh, is practicing natural farming and climate resilient farming in very creative ways. She has succeeded in reducing the burden of fossil fuels on her farm, planted plenty of trees, improved the soil and at the same time with diversification she has adapted herself well to weather uncertainties in times of climate change, while also increasing her net income. She has achieved all this on the basis of her small-scale farming, while also improving nutrition and health of family members and also arranging for college education of not just

her daughter but also her daughter-in-law.

She is happy also because the work she is doing is very creative. Her family has about four acres of farmland, scattered at different places. About three years ago, influenced by a campaign for natural farming and farm biodiversity initiated by the Srijan voluntary organization, Saroj and her family decided to make several significant changes in their farming patterns.

Firstly, they shifted from chemical fertilizers to organic fertilizers made on their own farm from cow-dung, cow urine and other local ingredients. Similarly, they now used local organic materials to keep pests away. This reduced their expenses and also drastically reduced the fossil fuel burden of their farming. Secondly, a relatively small part of the land was devoted to vegetable and fruit cultivation. A multi-layer vegetable garden makes it possible for them to grow about 15 vegetables in a small plot of land.

In addition, they have planted about 100 fruit trees, including 80 guava trees, and some mango, amla, lemon, litchi and berry trees. Thirdly, Saroj has also started a nursery for providing plants of fruit trees to others. All along, they have continued to grow the cereal, legume, oilseed and millet crops of the past, although on a smaller area.

Saroj has one cow, one buffalo and seven goats. This provides the base for natural farming and adds to the diversity of the family's

nutrition and income, including the capacity for meeting sudden expenses. Thus, Saroj has wisely made changes which have reduced her expenses significantly, and provided her a higher and continuing income through crop and livelihood diversification.

A great source of satisfaction for this family is that their food based on produce of natural farming provides better nutrition to the family and improves their health. It also gives satisfaction that they are making available healthy food to others. Saroj says that her soil is showing significant signs of improvement. With soil-improvement (and its increased capacity to absorb carbon), with planting of so many trees and doing away with several inputs having a strong base in fossil fuels, Saroj contributes a lot to climate change mitigation. Her contribution to climate adaptation is even more obvious, as diversification helps her to save some crops or produce even in times of adverse weather conditions. Reducing dependence on external inputs helps her to reduce costs and avoid debts.

Gaura Devi and Harcharan in Nayakhera village of the same district have also achieved encouraging success in natural farming, particularly in the context of vegetables. They have about two acres of land. A small patch of this land, just 1/20 of an acre, is devoted to creating a multi-layer vegetable garden. With the help of bamboo, wires and ropes, a structure has been created



which makes it possible to grow more vegetables in a healthier way on a small plot of land, combining vegetables which grow underground, on the surface and creepers. Thus, over a dozen or more vegetables can be grown on this small plot of about 200 square meters.

Both Gaura Devi and Harcharan work here in creative ways. They have a cow and two calves, and one buffalo. They prepare organic fertilizers and pest repellants on their farm using cow-dung, cow urine, leaves of some trees and local materials. Hence their dependence on any cash purchased inputs is greatly reduced and overall expenses are reduced.

Practicing these low-cost methods, they have been able to achieve a significant increase in income from selling vegetables. Their vegetables grown using natural farming methods are known to be healthier and consumers as well as small traders are willing to give a good price.

The good health brought by vegetables produced using natural

farming methods should also be considered in any appraisal of their work, Gaura Devi adds. Harcharan said that by providing support for more creeper-based vegetables, the quality of the produce improves, there is less harm from pests and fungus, and the excess water can drain out more easily. In a similar pattern several other farmers here and in nearby villages have been helped and encouraged to initiate such vegetable gardens on a small part of their land.

Rakesh Kumar has been involved with this idea since the early days. He told me that when he first explored such a model on behalf of Srijan by visiting several places, he found the costs to be too heavy for the small farmers of this region. So, they decided to evolve a low-cost model based on natural farming to which even very small farmers have responded very well.

(The writer is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include India's Quest for Sustainable Farming and Healthy Food, Man over Machine and A Day in 2071.)

## 100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 11 June 1926

## OCCASIONAL NOTE

AT a meeting of members of the Bengal Presidency Council of Women held in the Council Chamber at Government House yesterday interesting papers on Unemployment in Calcutta amongst European and Anglo-Indians were read by Sir George Godfrey, Mr. J. H. Simpson, and Miss Hawkins. The tone employed by the speakers was by no means pessimistic. The fact is that although the volume of unemployment in Calcutta, particularly amongst Anglo-Indians, is still very large the situation is not as desperate as it was during the years that followed immediately after the boom year, 1919. Then as a result of a number of firms closing down or reducing their staffs some hundreds of Europeans and Anglo-Indians were literally thrown on the streets. Many of the Europeans had been brought out on promises of large salaries and belonged to a class which had never known want. Of the Anglo-Indians a large number had resigned posts in the mofussil in order to enjoy the larger pay offered by newly started industrial or commercial concerns. When these concerns stopped their unfortunate employees found that the positions they had left in the mofussil had been filled by Indians. However, various charitable organizations took the matter in hand. We believe it is true that the majority of Europeans stranded in Calcutta in 1920 and 1921 have now been repatriated. It has not been so easy to deal with Anglo-Indian unemployment, for the educated Indian is now competing severely with this unfortunate community. But Anglo-Indians are beginning to look for employment in directions they had neglected in the past and the outlook for them does not seem to be as dismal as it was a few years ago.

# Should we not put politics in its place?

NARAYANAN KIZHUMUNDAYAR

There was a time when politics occupied a defined place in human life. It was an important part of society, certainly, but it was only one among many concerns. Family, friendship, religion, art, literature, science, work, recreation, and personal aspirations all had their own spaces in the human experience. Politics influenced life, but it did not consume it.

Today, however, many people feel that politics has escaped its traditional boundaries and expanded into almost every corner of existence. Conversations at family gatherings, sporting events, entertainment programs, educational institutions, workplaces, social media platforms, and even personal relationships are increasingly viewed through a political lens. Everything appears to be political, and everyone seems expected to take a political position on everything. This raises a profound question: if politics becomes the measure of all things, whither our life? Where are we heading as individuals and as a society?

The most visible driver of this transformation is the digital revolution. Social media platforms have fundamentally altered the way human beings consume information. In earlier generations, people encountered politics at specific times through newspapers, radio broadcasts, or television news bulletins. Today politics arrives continuously, every hour of every day, through mobile phones that rarely leave our hands. The citizen

has become both a consumer and a producer of political content. Every event, however trivial, can instantly become part of a larger political narrative.

The consequence is that many people no longer experience events simply as events. A sporting victory is not merely a sporting victory; it becomes a political statement. A film is not judged solely on artistic merit; it is evaluated according to ideological implications. A scientific discovery, a social trend, a cultural practice, or even a personal opinion often becomes the subject of political interpretation. The world is increasingly divided into competing camps, each eager to claim or condemn every development according to its own worldview. Such politicization carries certain advantages. Politics, at its best, encourages citizens to be aware of public affairs and to participate actively in shaping society. It reminds people that social justice, governance, rights, and public welfare are not abstract concerns but matters that affect daily life. Political engagement can awaken people from indifference and encourage them to hold institutions accountable.

Yet there is a difference between political awareness and political obsession. Awareness enriches life; obsession narrows it. When politics becomes the primary lens through which we view reality, we risk losing our ability to appreciate the complexity of human existence. We begin to classify people not as fellow human beings but as allies or opponents. Friendship becomes conditional upon ideological agreement. Dialogue gives way to argument. Understanding

yields to suspicion. One of the most unfortunate casualties of excessive politicization is the capacity for genuine conversation. In many societies today, disagreement is increasingly treated as hostility. People are less willing to listen and more eager to judge. Nuance becomes a victim of polarization. Every issue is forced into simplistic categories of right or wrong, friend or enemy, progressive or reactionary. The rich diversity of human thought is reduced to slogans and labels.

The impact on personal relationships can be equally damaging. Families that once found unity despite differences now experience divisions rooted in political loyalties. Lifelong friendships are strained by ideological conflicts. Individuals often feel compelled to conceal their opinions to avoid social isolation. In an environment where political identity dominates personal identity, the bonds that traditionally united communities begin to weaken.

Another danger lies in the gradual erosion of inner life. Human beings require spaces that are free from constant ideological conflict. Literature, music, spirituality, contemplation, and simple human companionship provide nourishment for the soul. These experiences remind us that life possesses dimensions that transcend political competition. When every aspect of existence is transformed into a battlefield of ideas, opportunities for reflection and inner growth diminish.

History offers valuable lessons in this regard. The greatest civilizations flourished not merely because of



political activity but because they cultivated philosophy, art, science, ethics, and spiritual wisdom. The achievements of humanity emerged from a balanced engagement with life. Politics was important, but it did not eclipse all other pursuits. Societies that allowed politics to dominate every sphere often found themselves trapped in cycles of conflict and division.

The challenge before modern humanity is therefore not to abandon politics but to restore it to its proper place. Citizens must remain informed and engaged, yet they must also preserve areas of life where human beings can meet as people rather than as political representatives. A neighbour should be more than a voter. A friend should be more than an ideological ally. A family member should be more than a political opponent. We must recover the wisdom of seeing life in its fullness. Human beings laugh, love, create, dream, worship, learn, and suffer in ways that cannot be adequately explained by political categories

alone. The beauty of a sunset, the comfort of friendship, the joy of a child's laughter, the insights of literature, and the peace of silent reflection belong to a realm beyond political calculation. The question "Whither our life?" therefore deserves serious consideration. If politics continues to expand without limit, we may become increasingly divided, anxious, and unable to recognize our common humanity. But if we learn to balance civic engagement with cultural, moral, intellectual, and spiritual pursuits, we can preserve the richness of human life.

Politics is an important servant of society, but it becomes a dangerous master when it seeks to govern every thought, every conversation, and every relationship. The future of humanity depends not on eliminating politics from life but on ensuring that life remains larger than politics. Only then can we protect the dignity, freedom, and fullness of the human experience.

(The writer is a Thiruvananthapuram-based accountant and freelance contributor.)

## News Items

### COAL DEADLOCK CONTINUES

## GOVERNMENT MAY ORDER BALLOT

LONDON, JUNE 9. THE Government takes a serious view of the breakdown of the coal negotiations. The Government's coal committee met forthwith and considered the situation.

It is believed that the plans discussed included a Government ballot of miners.—Reuter.

### IDLE WORKSHOPS

## WORKLESS FIGURES TAKE UPWARD LEAP

(Special Cable.) LONDON, JUNE 9. As the result of the coal stranglehold, industry is suffering grievously.

Unemployment last week, excluding the miners, was 1,600,000. Textile mills in Lancashire and Yorkshire are limping badly. Cotton spinners handling American cotton have decided to close down in alternate weeks. Clyde industries are crippled, the iron and steel industries being practically brought to a standstill.

Only three blast furnaces are at present operating in Scotland, and shipyards are stagnant.—Copyright.

### PREMIER & SUBSIDY

## LABOUR TO MOVE VOTE OF CENSURE

(BRITISH OFFICIAL WIRELESS.) RUGBY, JUNE 10.

THE coal dispute will again be raised in the House of Commons to-day, when a statement by the Prime Minister in answer to a question by Mr. Ramsay MacDonald will be made. The question concerns the breakdown of Tuesday's conference between the miners and owners. Meanwhile the Labour Party has decided to raise the whole question of the coal stoppage in a debate by moving a vote of censure. If the Labour Party persist in their intention the Government will, it is expected, set aside next Tuesday for the debate.

The opportunity for such a discussion is generally welcomed, and the newspapers anticipate that occasion will be taken by Mr. Baldwin to remove the impression in the minds of a section of the Labour Party that the Government has any intention of exceeding a sum of £3,000,000 for further assistance to the mining industry. This sum, which was mentioned by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Budget statement, was made conditionally on a settlement being reached.

## Crossword | No. 293487

**ACROSS**

6 German composer, hard one, working the mind (9)

8 No terrain curtailed Australian painter (5)

10 Dog in dispute involving old woman? (7)

11 A rugby forward's larger than average, by the way (7)

12 Clergyman overlooking last page (5)

14 Some getting upset with it in the old American park (8)

16 Not sending through full light? Mains broken, with rest requiring generator (15)

19 See about US university working for a small interval (8)

22 Morning publication returned letter (5)

24 Sort of ferret about behind mast, getting tense (7)

25 I caught seabird moving round Arctic feature (7)

27 Principle involved in first-rate networking (5)

28 Missed tea being served up in cup (9)

**DOWN**

1 Nothing before dawn, say, is a burden (4)

2 Pilot here endlessly flying? (8)

3 Lough of questionable status, receiving last of sludge from river (6)

4 Note first pair of traders coming in to target Irish location (6)

5 Wake master roughly after error (10)

6 One who may mock pollsters during half of electioneering (8)

7 Tries initially expediting some late vehicles (7)

9 Boy lifting hot food (4)

13 Persuasive exercises given to students in future (10)

15 Upturn in good crafty things – leg breaks – follow on? (8)

17 Assumed American used drugs – time to get involved (7)

18 Boosts soldiers after a month, way up (8)

20 Provoke enlightenment, we hear, shifting stress (6)

21 Article Ph's written up about grand puzzle (6)

23 Difficult position? Best to roll over (4)

26 A lot of food not originally from China? (4)

**Yesterday's Solution**

B	I	R	C	H	P	E	C	K	M	O	S	S		
U	E	I	H	I	M	W								
R	E	C	O	G	N	I	S	E	D	L	I	M		
N	T	H	S	E	N	N								
S	H	O	R	T	S	H	A	R	P	S	H	O	C	K
R	R													
L	A	P	E	O	P	L	E							
A	A	R	S	R	E	L	A							
W	E	A	R	S										
M	O	S	T	O										
H	U	M	A	N	I	T	A	R	I	A	N	I	S	M
E	O													
A	C	N	E											
R	I	T	G	E	C	O								
D	E	A	N	B	E	A	N	S	H	E	E	N		

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

# INTERNATIONAL EDITORIALS



## The FT View



FINANCIAL TIMES

"Without fear and without favour"

ft.com/opinion

## Hard truths about England's receding coastline

*The entire shoreline cannot be protected, but the state can mitigate future fallout*

King Canute, the 11th-century English monarch, is said to have had his courtiers watch him attempt to command the tide. He was trying to prove that even the sovereign cannot control the waves. Now England is, once again, learning the limits of its power over the sea. A combination of climate change — which is leading to rising sea levels and more severe storms — and man-made shoreline modifications have contributed to faster-than-anticipated coastal erosion. Across the country, 3,500 properties, including homes, businesses and hospitals, could be lost in the next three decades — other vital infrastructure is at risk, too. Nations around the world face a similar threat.

England cannot hold back the tide everywhere. Its North Sea coast is one of

the fastest receding in Europe. Many existing hard defences such as seawalls and groynes are decades old, and replacing them will be expensive, while some protective measures can also worsen erosion elsewhere. The UK's diverse coastline — from soft cliffs and rocky beaches to mudflats — makes it particularly dear to defend. By contrast, more uniform terrain in the Netherlands means lower-cost sea barriers can be deployed. Indeed, in many places fighting the sea is simply unviable. Shoreline management plans developed by local authorities set out how local coastlines should be treated over the next 100 years and policies range from "hold the line" to "no active intervention".

Nor can the state compensate all impacted property owners. Insurers typically argue that coastal erosion is a foreseeable event, meaning homeowners are unlikely to receive a payout if their house has to be demolished as a result of cliff damage. Inlanders will be unwilling to subsidise support for those

who live near the sea either through higher taxes or insurance premiums.

With national funds already stretched, the authorities will need to make difficult but necessary trade-offs. That begins by prioritising what assets need to be protected. For instance, the government might provide targeted support to help insulate key road, rail, port and utilities infrastructure, where sea damage could have repercussions nationwide.

Elsewhere, any protection and financial support for those remaining in vulnerable spots is best managed at a local level. In some places councils and their communities are clubbing together to fund short-term defences, such as rock bags. Other local authorities are providing relocation support, including by buying vulnerable properties at a discount and housing people in new developments further inland. None of this comes cheap, but it is easier to get buy-in for local levies and fundraising than to go cap in hand to Westminster.

*Britain's conundrum is a microcosm of a global problem as pressure from climate change and extreme weather grows*

The UK government should, however, play a greater role in preventing more people and property from being put in harm's way in the future. Requiring coastal erosion and landslide risks to be included as material information in conveyancing and adverts would ensure prospective coastal buyers can make fully informed decisions. It should also ensure that shoreline management plans are integrated into local planning decisions to avoid more development in vulnerable areas.

England's coastal conundrum is a microcosm of a global problem as shorelines everywhere come under pressure from climate change and extreme weather conditions. Not everyone can be bailed out, and even the wealthiest states cannot indefinitely defend every shore. In some places, managed retreat — focusing on adaptation and relocation — will be the most realistic outcome. Nature can be managed, but not controlled.

Email: letters.editor@ft.com

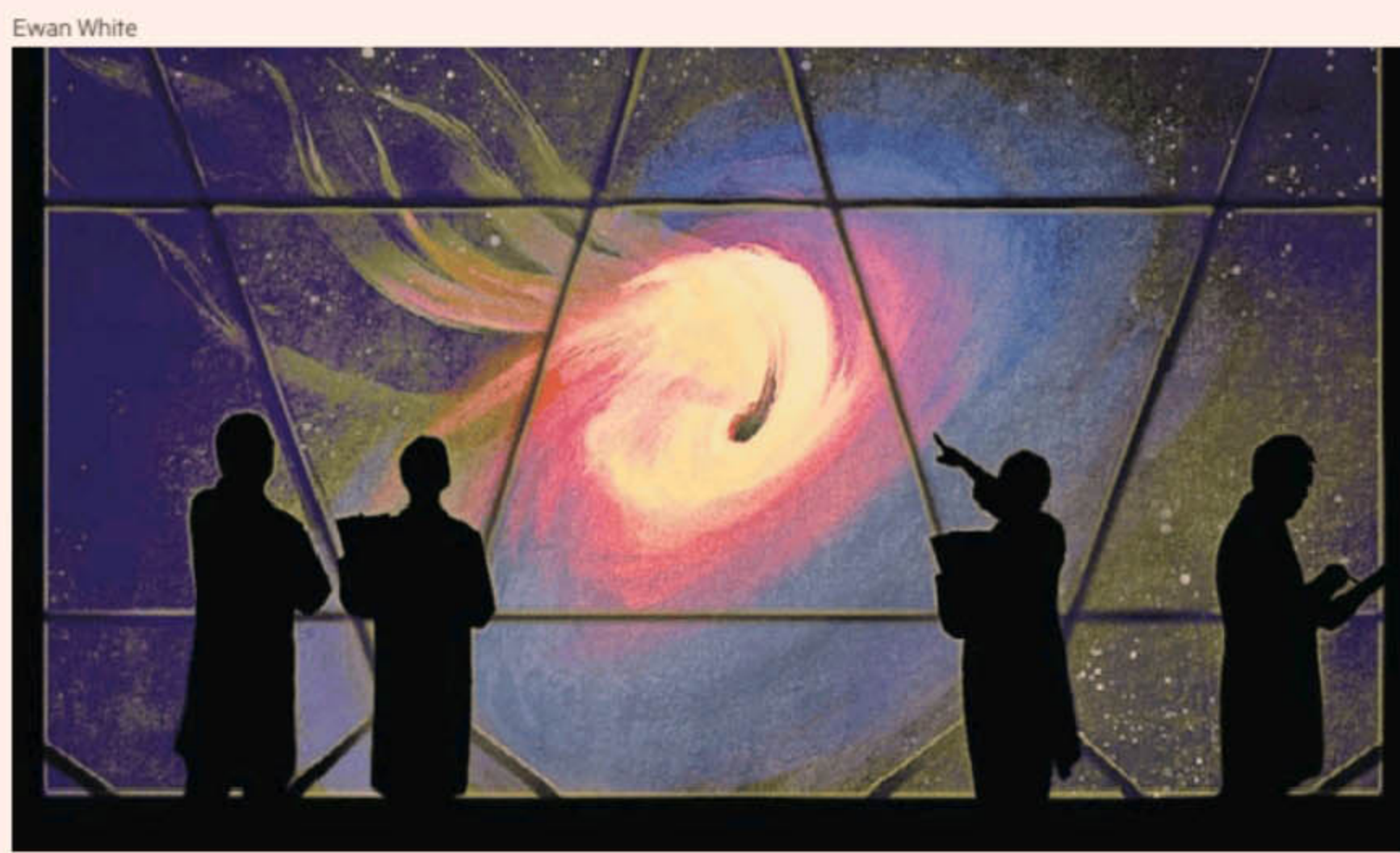
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## Opinion Science

## Do black holes do more than devour matter?



Anjana Ahuja

The giveaway was not so much what was there — but what was missing. When astronomers looked closely at the cold molecular gas shrouding the supermassive black hole at the heart of our own galaxy, the Milky Way, they found a vast blank gap.

From the lip of the monstrous black hole, called Sagittarius A\*, a large cone of nothingness funnelled outwards. This, researchers announced last week, is long-sought evidence of a hot breeze flowing outwards from the black hole and sweeping away the cold gas in its path, and one that has been blowing for around 20,000 years.

The gravitational pull of a black hole, whatever its size, is so intense that not even light can escape once trapped. That makes it impossible to see directly; its presence is inferred

until now proven elusive. The view from Earth is blocked by dust, gas and debris; our nearest black hole is also in a relatively inactive phase of life known as a quiescent state, making it hard to read. Previous observations have given inconclusive results.

Astronomer Mark Gorski and astrophysicist Lena Murchikova from Northwestern University turned to the Alma radio telescope in northern Chile. The telescope, comprising 66 radio antennas, is designed to harvest the faint light from the "cool" universe, made up of extended colder structures, like molecular gas (mostly hydrogen) and dust clouds. These are harder to see than hot, bright objects like stars. The researchers looked at five years of observations of the cold molecular gas within one parsec (about three light years) of the centre of the black hole, blotting out its radio emissions to lay bare the pattern of frigid gas clumped around it.

A conical clearing with sharp edges sprang into view, consistent with a hot breeze from the black hole sweeping away cold gas. Murchikova told me they felt disbelief at seeing "such a large and well-defined wind cone... we just stared at it for a while in silence". They cross-checked their results using Nasa's Chandra X-ray Observatory, and published their findings last week in *The Astrophysical Journal Letters*.

Martin Rees, the Cambridge university astronomer who co-wrote a landmark 1971 paper predicting a supermassive black hole at the centre of our galaxy, cautiously welcomed the work, telling me it improved on previous attempts to find such a wind: "The authors present amazingly detailed maps of the gas and dust near the galactic centre and show how this yields insights into the huge black hole that lurks there."

Rees wondered about other possible explanations; the researchers counter that alternative scenarios, such as heat or wind coming from a supernova explosion or from the stars orbiting the black hole, do not match observations.

One of the biggest surprises, Murchikova says, is that the wind is steady rather than explosive: "We have never seen a breeze from a black hole... Seeing the black hole sitting there, being quiet, but still dumping energy all over the region without doing anything violent, is terribly cute." The important message, she stresses, is that black holes actively shape their surroundings.

It is cheering to think of Sagittarius A\* as our very own galactic grande dame, not quite dead and gone but still delivering her own breezy performance in the twilight of a long cosmic career.

The writer is a science commentator

## Letters

## Warnings from history for the HS2 rail project

The sorry saga of the HS2 high-speed rail project has many of the hallmarks of Concorde, the Anglo-French supersonic airliner ("HS2 cost rises above £100bn with first train due after 2036", Report, May 20).

Although the latter now seems a relatively cheap example of public policy failure (£17bn in today's money), with the cost shared between two sets of taxpayers — British and French — the parallels seem apt.

Both were conceived and protected

by techno enthusiasts; both exhibited massive cost escalation; and the value of speed alone was undermined in both cases by external events. The companies building each project were unable or unwilling to accept much of the financial risk.

There are several key differences. Concorde was a substantial leap in technological terms; HS2 is just a (needlessly) faster example of proven high-speed railway technology.

Concorde was protected by treaty

commitments to the French, which constrained British governmental choices from 1962 to 1976.

The Treasury, the primary guardians of public expenditure, was spot on in predicting the financial disaster that became Concorde — my recent research at the National Archives in Kew reveals just how prescient officials were! I expect a similar story will emerge when the 20-year rule catches up with HS2.

There may be some solace in the fact

## Why audit reform is vital to Britain's capital markets

Michael O'Dwyer's column "Easing of UK audit clampdown leaves Big Four stronger than ever" (Opinion, June 4) highlights a longstanding issue that must be addressed to protect our capital markets.

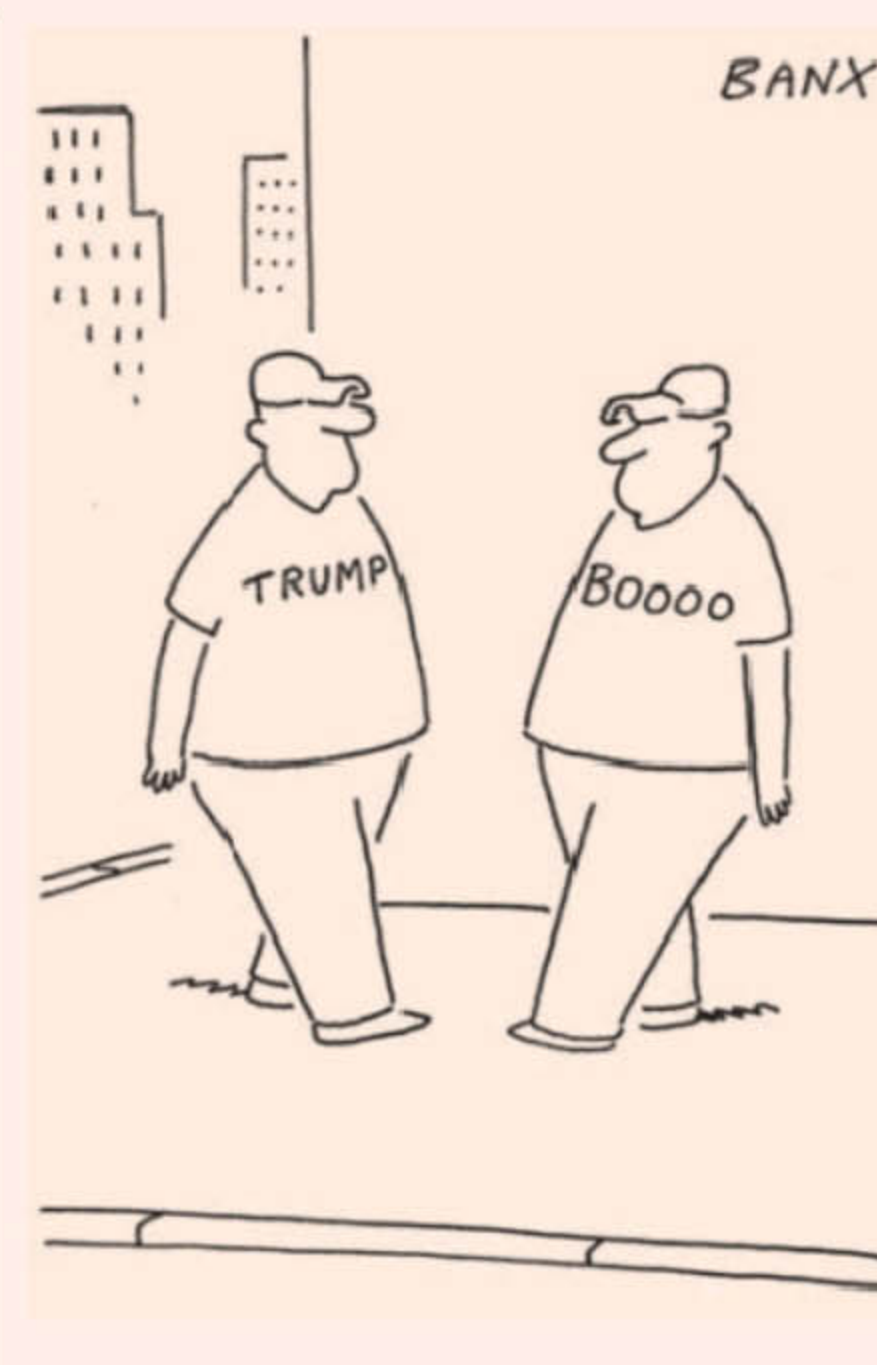
Back in 2011, at the start of the current reform process, the House of Lords economic affairs committee concluded "attempts to introduce greater competition into the audit market have so far failed. Market concentration is as great as ever."

Fifteen years on, despite initiatives throughout the period from the Competition and Markets Authority, the Department for Business and Trade and the Financial Reporting Council the same could, in effect, be said today. In how many other business spheres has there been no new major player in the market since the 1970s with the principal changes since then being the collapse of Arthur Andersen and mergers reducing the Big Eight to the Big Four? This prolonged high level of market concentration highlights the deep-seated barriers to market entry and the need for governments and regulators to have the determination to overcome the powerful resistance to change.

The failure to do so, most importantly, reduces the resilience of the capital markets and leaves many leading companies with a practical choice between at most two of the Big Four auditors as the incumbent completes their maximum term and another is ruled out for conflict of interest purposes. The impact of one of the dominant firms leaving the market, whether voluntarily or for other reasons, as happened in the case of Arthur Andersen in 2002 following the collapse of Enron, would have far greater impact now than then. Andersen's share at the top end of the market was relatively limited in the UK and, as O'Dwyer pointed out, the largest audit firms are now rejecting more listed companies on grounds of risk. The prospect of the government seeking to persuade reluctant audit firms to act as auditor of possibly a number of large listed companies, and failing to find one were the Big Four to reduce to the Big Three, would hardly calm markets already in a state of shock.

As Richard Moriarty, CEO of the Financial Reporting Council, has pointed out, audit reform is far better achieved in peacetime than in times of crisis and with the changes in AI potentially posing future challenges for many companies, including some with extremely high market valuations, action is needed now.

The government should review its decision to withdraw audit reform legislation or alternatively the competition authorities should return to their review of how to reform the audit market that they paused while



legislation was seen as the best way forward. An independent root cause analysis exercise should be conducted to understand why, after so much effort, so little change has occurred to date and, most importantly, the FRC should substantially change its approach to reviewing audits so that the major emphasis is on those of leading companies that would pose a systemic threat to the markets were substantial problems to arise in them.

Anthony Carey  
London HA5, UK

## EU not eager to replicate Switzerland's arrangement

Martin Wolf is right to point out the deleterious consequences of Brexit ("A 'big bang' reversal of Brexit is both unrealistic and unnecessary", Opinion, June 8).

But at the risk of adding to his tale of woe, he may be over-optimistic if he believes that the EU is eager to replicate its arrangement with Switzerland which Brussels regards as exceptional if not troublesome.

Indeed, the EU has for many years sought, though unsuccessfully, to persuade Switzerland to join the European Economic Area. But, even if it is willing to replicate the Swiss arrangement, the EU would be unlikely to allow cherry-picking.

If it offers selective access to the single market, it will almost certainly require us to accept new obligations in terms of financial contributions, alignment with relevant EU law and European dispute settlement mechanisms as well as some degree of least of freedom of movement.

It has been a long and costly illusion that the interests of other countries and organisations revolve around Britain's needs, and that they are charitable institutions designed to help us resolve problems that we have not been able to resolve for ourselves.

Sir Vernon Bogdanor  
Professor of Government, King's College, London WC2, UK; author of 'Britain and Europe in a Troubled World'

## More Treasury 'control' is last thing the fast jet needs

If the Global Combat Air Programme fast jet project (GCAP) is to succeed, the last thing it needs is greater Treasury control and oversight ("Treasury seizes fighter jet budget from MoD after long record of cost overruns", Report, June 4).

A complex programme like this needs clarity of approach from the start, to build confidence and momentum with international and industry partners, and to begin to de-risk serious technology challenges. Instead — and this is understandable given wider strategic and financial challenges — the programme has been managing through a series of short-term rolling approvals, often only months at a time. The long-awaited Defence Investment Plan is an opportunity to set this programme up properly for success.

The Treasury and Ministry of Defence would do better to look to the Defence Nuclear Enterprise as a model, with strong commitment, budget clarity and freedom to deliver. Or to last summer's report from The Office for Value for Money on running "mega-projects" by bringing in streamlined decision-making designed to "avoid unnecessary delays through multiple layers of non-value adding review and scrutiny".

One can only hope!

David Williams  
Former MoD Permanent Secretary, UK

## US universities will require more than a court ruling

Ella Lee's reporting (June 8) on the federal court's ruling against the \$100,000 H-1B visa fee confirms what many in the international education and talent communities understood from the start — that this was never really a policy instrument, it was a barrier dressed up as one.

The judge is right that the fee functions as an unauthorised tax. But the deeper cost isn't legal — it's reputational.

The global competition for talent is far more intense than many Americans realise. Countries around the world are actively recruiting the same students, researchers and founders the US has historically attracted. Policies that create uncertainty around visas or long-term opportunities don't happen in a vacuum.

Talented people increasingly have other options, and we're seeing that play out across the pipeline, from education through to career choice. Even measures that get struck down leave a mark. The US built its innovation edge on its ability to attract and retain the world's best minds. That capacity, once eroded, isn't fully restored by a court ruling.

Shaun Carver  
CEO, International House, University of California, Berkeley, CA, US

## Fifa gets off lightly in your analysis of its finances

I read with interest Josh Noble's article on Fifa's finances (Report, June 8). Fifa got off lightly in the reporting. Despite quoting an expert describing the finances of football's governing body as opaque, the article failed to explain how it will account for the \$13bn it is expecting to generate from the 2026 World Cup that starts tomorrow.

The article also failed to mention Fifa's chequered financial history. It was less than two World Cups ago that scores of Fifa individuals and entities were indicted on corruption charges. The scandal eventually forced out its then president Sepp Blatter.

I was working for the anti-corruption NGO Transparency International on corruption in sport at the time. We proposed many governance reforms, including a reduction in the number of committees, which it turned out had facilitated far too many opportunities for bribery and corruption. Some of the reforms were initially implemented. Twenty-six standing committees were reduced to nine by 2017. Over the years these reforms appear to have been rolled back. The bloated committee system, for example, has returned. There are now close to 40 committees.

It made me smile to read the quotes from Fifa brushing aside the suggestion that annual distributions to Fifa members from World Cup revenues were linked to voting decisions. They sounded remarkably like what we heard prior to Fifa giving the 2018 World Cup to Russia and the 2022 tournament to Qatar. That was until the US justice department, brandishing arrest warrants, gatecrashed Fifa's annual meeting at one of Geneva's fanciest five-star hotels in 2015, in what was the first wave of arrests.

Deborah Unger  
London NW6, UK

## Hedgehog banknote appeal

We are delighted that the Bank of England has launched a public consultation to decide which UK wildlife species could feature on future banknotes — and that the hedgehog is among those being considered ("The wrong kind of money on the brain", Opinion, March 13).

Featuring hedgehogs on UK banknotes would be a wonderful way to celebrate our natural heritage while raising awareness of the challenges facing these remarkable spiny mammals. Greater visibility can help inspire more people to support conservation efforts and take simple actions to make their gardens and communities more hedgehog-friendly.

We encourage everyone who would like to see hedgehogs represented on future banknotes to vote before July 3.

Fay Vass  
CEO, British Hedgehog Preservation Society, Ludlow, Shropshire, UK

# Opinion

## Trump is becoming Carter

POLITICS

Edward Luce



that," Trump said last week when asked if he planned to seize Iran's stash of highly enriched uranium. "I didn't want to be Jimmy Carter."

Yet that is who Trump is becoming. Once the idea forms that a US president is prisoner to what others decide, the scent of impotence is hard to shake. That invites danger. Carter's inability to free the hostages fed into the Soviet Union's decision to invade Afghanistan a few weeks after the US embassy in Tehran was stormed. But for the actions of Pope John Paul II and Carter's national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, the Soviets would probably have invaded Poland.

Trump is the hostage at the heart of today's Middle Eastern maze. This weekend the president told me: "I call the shots. I call all the shots." That seems doubtful.

Though he urged Israel not to retaliate against Iran's missile attacks on Sunday, Israel went ahead anyway. Hours later, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered an attack on Iran. It is possible that Trump tacitly approved Israel's response. But the near-universal

impression that he is unable to control Netanyahu could be fatal to his prospects of ending this war. Iran will not concede anything big to a president who cannot control Israel's response.

Trump is thus also hostage to Iran's mindset. As a precondition to talks, Iran insists on a complete ceasefire in Lebanon. Whenever Israel strikes targets in Lebanon, including in response to

Once a US president is seen as prisoner to what others decide, the scent of impotence is hard to shake

Hizbollah's rocket attacks, Trump's bar to reaching a deal is raised. That Hizbollah, Iran's proxy, has not agreed to any ceasefires rubs it in. Iran is undermining any chance of peace in Lebanon. That only reinforces Trump's powerlessness; Iran and Israel are now dictating the direction and duration of this war.

How can he escape this nightmare? By doing three things that he will be loath

to do. The first would be to prove he has a veto on Israel by threatening to cut off US military aid unless Israel sticks to a ceasefire and withdraws forces from all but a narrow strip of Lebanon. The second would be to array as much expertise as the Iranians to haggle over detail and for as long as necessary. The third would be to communicate consistently that he will stick to those two paths. But he lacks the patience. Character U-turns are rare in people turning 80.

Which leaves compensating actions. This is where Trump diverges from Carter. America's 39th president turned the hostage crisis into a barometer of his power. He adopted the "Rose Garden strategy" of refusing to campaign for re-election — and even left the National Christmas Tree near the White House dark. In so doing, he handed control of the narrative to the Iranians. Trump has also lost control of the plot. But he is a showman, not a preacher, so his instinct is to change it. That means actions in theatres where he can prevail.

The meat of Trump's national security strategy published last December was to reassert US dominance in the

western hemisphere. The word Iran appeared three times but only to brag that last summer's Israel-Iran ceasefire was one of the eight supposed peace deals Trump had negotiated. This document was published soon after the Nobel Peace Prize was announced. The winner, Maria Corina Machado, Venezuela's opposition leader, donated her trophy to Trump, who had brazenly campaigned for the prize. Though Trump now controls Venezuela's regime, Machado has yet to see any benefit from her gesture.

Here is where Trump and Carter enter parallel universes. Carter rejected the Monroe Doctrine on which America had based its original hemispheric dominance. Trump has revived it. Cuba should watch out. Canada can never sleep easily. Denmark should note that Greenland is still in Trump's sights. Carter won the Nobel Peace Prize partly for brokering peace between Israel and Egypt. Trump has shown he is not in a position to broker anything outside his own backyard.

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## The Fed is going to have to rethink its global role

Josh Lipsky

The most difficult decisions facing the US Federal Reserve, and its new chair Kevin Warsh, in the months ahead won't be where to set the federal funds rate. Instead, it will be finding a way to navigate the central bank's unofficial mandate to protect global economic stability.

Since the 2008 financial crisis, the Fed has become the world's lender of last resort, and it is a role the leadership of the US central bank has welcomed.

The template was created in late 1998 and early 1999, during the Asian financial crisis, by Fed chair Alan Greenspan, working with Treasury secretary Robert Rubin and his deputy, Lawrence Summers. The trio helped contain the economic fallout.

In 2007 and 2008, as the global financial crisis was developing and dollars were in high demand, Ben Bernanke vastly expanded the use of "swap lines" — a tool through which the Fed gives dollars to a foreign central bank in return for its local currency. By 2009, 14 central banks had joined its network.

The arrangements were initially limited to a select group of trusted central banks who played key roles in the global economy and the tool was supposed to be temporary. But it never went away and swaps became a seemingly permanent fixture of the Fed's firefighting arsenal. In 2026, far removed from the financial crisis and the pandemic, the Fed still has five active swap lines.

Of course, the concept behind them is that the Fed makes decisions based solely on liquidity need and the

When the central bank acts to stabilise another country's finances, it is a foreign policy decision

reliability of partner central banks. But given the way Donald Trump has treated allies, particularly those in Europe, America's friends have started to wonder quietly if the same kind of lifeline might be available in the next financial crisis.

A report last year noted that, after the confrontation over Greenland, European officials had been "gaming out" scenarios where dollars would be cut off during a dispute with the president.

Warsh has done little to allay European concerns so far. In his written response to questions from the Senate, he made clear that the Fed's work in international affairs doesn't come with the same independence as its interest-rate-setting function. Translation? Geopolitics — and national security priorities — may affect who gets our help.

The issue is not theoretical — just look at what is happening at the US Treasury, where Scott Bessent has used its own swap lines as geopolitical tools — whether to support the Milei government in Argentina or potentially to aid Gulf allies during the war in Iran.

Meanwhile, in minutes released from the last Fed meeting, a group of governors pushed for the permanent extension of the Fed's swap lines to America's most trusted allies in Europe and Asia, as opposed to a yearly renewal process.

No decision has yet been made. And Warsh is right to acknowledge that the Fed's international role is fundamentally different from its congressional mandate to fight inflation and maximise employment. When America's central bank helps stabilise the finances of another country, it is not just making an economic decision; it is making a foreign policy one as well.

Previously the Fed has tried to insulate itself from geopolitics to ensure the US dollar is treated as a safe haven, no matter the conflicts of the moment. But the best way for it to respond to the current situation is not to ignore geopolitics and certainly not to cut off allies in a crisis. That approach would benefit China, which already has at least 30 active swap lines of its own and counting.

Instead, it should shore up shaky trust with transparency. By creating a new framework under which swap lines are used and issued — one that combines financial stability, a central bank's ability to repay and, yes, foreign policy considerations — the Fed can ensure that countries don't start looking elsewhere.

The writer is vice-president and chair of international economics at the Atlantic Council

## Why the world must agree to regulate AI

ECONOMICS

Martin Wolf



Is the comparison between AI and nuclear weapons unreasonable? No, because the former might also bring great harms. These fall into three rough categories: a collapse in fundamental human values; some huge specific dangers; and widespread disruption.

Humans think, create and act. What will happen when (or if) machines do the thinking and even the creating and acting for us? Will humans still struggle to understand or will we become spoon-fed? In brief, will AI change not just what humans do, but who we are?

A core aspect of what it means to be human is accountability. This issue became visible when Javier Milei, president of Argentina, announced the creation of "the non-human corporation." As Yuval Harari responded, "Countries granting AIs legal personhood risk becoming something for which the historical record offers no analogy: not a company state, but an AI state."

Legally, companies are "persons". But AI companies might make decisions with no people. How and to whom would an AI programme be responsible? Criminal chief executives can go to prison. What is the equivalent for AI? As the Pope says, AI is a "tool". It is not a person. Does it suffer? Does it bleed? Can it bear moral responsibility? Can it be accountable in any meaningful way? No. Moreover, this question of responsibility is not limited to business. Who is accountable for war crimes once AI directs robot armies?

The issue of accountability also arises for other institutions able to use



resources made available by the integration of AI with other technologies. The possibilities for mass surveillance are huge. So are those for creating autonomous weapons. The fabrication of falsehoods, deepfakes and scams is already hugely enhanced. Such developments could be used by states, private actors or both. How might the law and political accountability work in such a world? In a provocative Substack, economist Noah Smith even argues that AI will seize the world.

Then there are more specific dangers. An obvious one is the ability to disrupt our cyber-enabled civilisation. We had a glimpse of this when Anthropic warned of the threat of Mythos to cyber security. Just about everything we depend on depends, in turn, on such systems. If

A sensible way forward would be for America and China to decide on an AI disarmament treaty

AI could disrupt these, life would become radically insecure and the possibilities for extortion would be unbounded. The possibility of designing lethal pathogens is also terrifying.

The Hoover Institution's Niall Ferguson warns that part of what makes AI uncontrollable is that it is being driven by two simultaneous arms races, one among a small number of companies and the other between the US and China. The US has so far decided not to regulate the race among its businesses, while it and China are not trying to control the one between them. Ferguson argues that the former is largely explained by the latter. A US-China agreement on AI regulation is, he argues, a necessary condition for controlling the "mafia-like" competition of leading US companies.

Thus, we are caught in a trap: the technologists are catapulting us, at extraordinary speed, into a new world whose implications we neither understand nor control. This is partly because AI is the most "general" of general-purpose technologies. Potentially, it might

even mean the replacement of human with machine intelligence. The implications go far beyond concerns about specific dangers. AI will also affect both our sense of identity as humans and the way we organise and understand society: should programmes be able to act as people, when they neither feel nor are conscious nor have consciences?

In any case, we would surely like to contain the biggest dangers, especially those discussed above. Thus, a sensible way forward would be for the US and China to identify and agree on some sort of AI disarmament treaty. That could make everybody feel more secure.

There is one piece of good news: fear of the economic and social disruptions ahead is making people worried. They believe, rightly, that the future is too important to be left to a few "tech masters", just as war is too important to be left to generals. Given this, room for regulation might open. Next week I will consider what might be done in response.

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## Lessons from Germany's (entirely predictable) UN Security Council defeat

EUROPE

Constanze Stelzenmüller



Western European and Other States group.

Regional groups often agree on candidates to maximise their chances. The countries that enter the race sometimes campaign for these seats for more than a decade, lobbying every single member state. Yet Germany went in years after Portugal and Austria had already declared. It would have needed at least 127 votes. Last week, Berlin was beaten with 104 votes to Lisbon's 134 and Vienna's 131.

But, as my grandfather liked to say: "Must we cry?" The rivals deserved their wins. Portugal expertly leverages its relations with former colonies in Africa, Asia and South America to punch above its weight internationally (UN secretary-general António Guterres and European Council president António Costa are both Portuguese); its recognition of Palestinian statehood is likely to have added to support in the global south. Austria is the Schrödinger's cat of diplomacy, discreetly supporting Israel and Ukraine while touting its constitutional neutrality to the non-western world.

Germany, meanwhile, appears to have presumed too much and not tried hard enough. It is the fourth-largest funder of the UN, the world's third-largest economy and Europe's largest. It has won each of its six previous Security Council bids and has long argued that its stature ought to merit a permanent seat. Its campaign slogan was "Respect, Justice, Peace", but Chancellor Friedrich Merz did not even show up at

Berlin must learn to forge alliances, especially with nations that do not share its values and interests

September's annual General Assembly meeting to work the room. Austria sent its president, chancellor and foreign minister. So much for respect.

As for justice, Berlin prides itself on being a staunch defender of international institutions and law, of right over might. But it has made significant cuts to development and humanitarian aid.

And Merz — who has a tendency to think after speaking — has refused to condemn US strikes against Venezuela (he called them legally "complex") and said Israel was "doing the dirty work for us" with strikes on Iran.

And peace is an elusive goal in a moment when Russia, China and Donald Trump's US are vying to reshape the global order to their liking through coercion and military force. Germany is re-arming at speed and is now Ukraine's biggest national provider of military aid; allegations of a Kremlin campaign against Berlin's candidature for the Security Council are entirely plausible.

Berlin's defeat at the UN, however, is rooted in a larger dilemma. Before his election, Merz gave a speech in which he said he wanted Germany to become "a leading middle power". But the remark famously attributed to Henry Kissinger — "poor old Germany: too big for Europe, too small for the world" — is if anything truer today than during his lifetime.

Russia regularly blocks the Security Council with vetoes, while China has

been working assiduously to gain power and the ability to set standards in UN institutions. The US announced in January that it would retrench or retreat from more than 60 international bodies; the Board of Peace, Trump's ersatz Security Council, is bereft of funds. Germany's diplomats, meanwhile, invoke "multilateralism" like a mantra.

To navigate (never mind lead) in a world of aggressive great powers, a middle power like Germany must learn to forge alliances, especially with countries that do not share its values and interests. Berlin does actually have a group of like-minded allies in the EU — but then it would have to concentrate on solving problems within the bloc, rather than elbowing out smaller member states in pursuit of empty prestige.

Respect, Justice, Peace: nice work if you can get it. But meanwhile maybe Germany should give generosity, consistency, humility a try.

The writer directs the Center on the US and Europe at the Brookings Institution

# Opinion

The New York Times

## Don't Be a World Cup Hater

**Bill Saporito**

An editor for Times Opinion and an amateur soccer player and coach.

**T**HE soccer haters are at it again. You can count on them every four years in the weeks before the World Cup, telling us how terrible the tournament is going to be, how bad the American team is and how awfully the people who run FIFA, soccer's ruling body, have behaved. I wrote that last one, too.

This year, there's even more to complain about, beginning with FIFA's extortionate effort to sell tickets to matches such as Cape Verde versus Saudi Arabia or Jordan versus Algeria as if they were Brazil versus Spain. About how hotel rooms are going unsold. And how the expanded tournament has allowed too many minnows into the tournament that will get chopped up.

All this will soon be beside the point. When the match between the co-host Mexico and South Africa kicks off in the cauldron that is Azteca Stadium on Thursday, the place will be a frenzy of support for El Tri. Expect similar energy for the United States versus Paraguay the next day in Los Angeles and Canada versus Bosnia-Herzegovina in Toronto. The Canadians, coached by an American, have something extra to play for, since it's possible they could face the United States in the knockout round. Fifty-first state? Let's see about that.

Despite the prices, nearly all the tickets are sold. What we don't know is who will be in the seats. FIFA's "dynamic ticketing" — scam-namic ticketing is a better term — forced fans to pay beyond what they probably could afford. Unsold hotel rooms indicate that many will unload their seats on the secondary market. That also tells us that many overseas supporters either can't get into the United States or fear Donald Trump's draconian immigration policies. As a result, maybe more Americans will be able to afford to take their kids to a World Cup match, which isn't all bad.

In 1994, the first time the Cup was staged in the United States, the haters could barely contain themselves, braying about how no one, especially Americans, would show up for such a snooze of a sport. But when Italy played Ireland at the sold-out Giants Stadium, the atmosphere was as thrilling as any match I had experienced in the World Cup in Italy four years earlier. The green-draped Irish fans, the ones from Ireland and the ones from Queens, were singing in full force, as were those of the Azzurri, both those from Italy and Little Italy, Brooklyn and every other Italian American neighborhood in the area. Sure, it was a low-scoring match, 1-0 to the Irish, but a brilliant night.

When the unfancied American team beat the highly rated Colombians, the tournament erupted. The Yanks had finally learned how to play in the big time. In the meantime, fans from the Netherlands, Germany, Brazil, Nigeria, South Korea and Norway toured the country, drinking in the Budweiser and the sights from Orlando to San Francisco. Sunburn was their biggest risk. The cops had little to do. Major League Soccer, now in its 30th season, got off the ground because FIFA demanded that the United States start a top-level pro soccer league to win the bid.

**Soccer fans always find ways to enjoy their beloved tournament.**



ILLUSTRATION BY SAM WHITNEY/THE NEW YORK TIMES; SOURCE PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER DAZELEY AND ALE-KS/GETTY IMAGES

In France in 1998, Parisians seemed initially blasé about their team, which included the incomparable Zinedine Zidane, as well as Thierry Henry and Marcel Desailly, a trio that represented France's colonial past — their ethnicity tied to Algeria, the French Caribbean and West Africa. The "Black, Blanc, Beur" team (Black, white, North African) was culturally challenging for a country that had done little to reckon with its colonial past. By the time France found two second-half goals to beat a wonderful Croatia team and advance to the final, the nation had fallen in love with Les Bleus. France became world champion. It might again this World Cup.

In 2010, skepticism about whether an African nation could even host the Cup hung over South Africa like the clouds on Table Mountain. Then Bafana Bafana, as the South African team is known, tied its first match with Mexico, and the Soccer City sta-

dium bordering Soweto drowned in the deafening noise created by the vuvuzela horns that fans blew incessantly. Happiness seemed to envelop the country everywhere you traveled. The United States faced England in the mining town of Rustenburg, which featured a newly renovated stadium surrounded by a neighborhood of tin-roofed houses. The locals were overjoyed that fans and journalists showed up to their country, to their town, pressing their hands into ours with gratitude as we walked toward the stadium. Even better, the Americans held England to a draw.

Once these tournaments starts, the Brazilians will show up with the catchy cadence of their drum bands — just try not to dance — and a dedication to partying. The Dutch will be orange from head to toe, welcoming anyone into their fold (OK, anyone who isn't German); Australians are so passionate about sports they'd watch a worm race if

one of the contestants were wearing green and gold. Supporters from Senegal and Ghana and the Democratic Republic of Congo will be painted in national colors and rocking nonstop for 90 minutes in support of their players. And this year sees the return of the Scots, who are absolutely over the moon about being in the World Cup. They'll be a counterweight to the often overserved and gloomy England fans who drag around the unbearable weight of expectations. It's been 60 years since their country won a major title.

Yes, it's true that one of the tournament hosts is led by a xenophobic greedbag who has done his best to alienate allies and cozy up to autocrats. Soccer fans will overlook it. They had to do so for the leadership of Russia (2018) and Qatar (2022). The fans, unlike the anti-World Cup crowd, are not haters. They are here because they love the beautiful game. And so do I.

COLUMNIST | THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

## Everybody Is a Loser in This Mideast War

**T**HE LEADERS of Israel, Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas and the United States have one thing in common: None of them want a commission of inquiry looking into their performance in the latest Middle East conflict. So I have decided to do it for them, and I can summarize my conclusions in two words that apply to them all: "You lost." There — I've saved you all the time and money of an internal investigation. You're welcome.

This truly is the Middle East war that everybody lost. Even though it's not over, I can see that. In fact, one reason this war may linger is because most of the leaders of these countries and militias know that history has its eyes on them and the minute the guns fall silent there will be a moral, political and economic accounting that will be devastating for each one of these fools.

Let's go around the table. Hamas started this latest Middle East conflict on Oct. 7, 2023, with an invasion of Israel from Gaza in which in one day it murdered more than 1,200 people — men, women and children — and abducted more than 250.

What was Hamas's war aim? As far as we can tell, its fantasy was that by invading Israel it would spark a regional uprising in which "resistance" forces — including Hezbollah, Iran and even some Arab nations — would help it to annihilate the Jewish state.

Hamas did not launch this war with any peaceful intent — that is, with a gun in one hand and a peace map in the other showing how two indigenous people, Jews and Palestinians, might coexist between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. No, the only maps Hamas fighters carried showed them where to find the most Jews to kill in the border communities they invaded, including at elementary schools and a youth center.

It is hard to forget the phone call, released by the Israeli Army, of a Hamas gunman who took part in the Oct. 7 onslaught and who excitedly tells his parents that he is in Mefalim, a kibbutz near the Gaza border, and that he alone killed 10 Jews. "Look how many I

killed with my own hands! Your son killed Jews!" he says, according to an English translation. "Mom, your son is a hero."

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel and his far-right government of Jewish supremacists launched a war of annihilation right back. The only map he offered was one in which only Jews would control the area from the river to the sea.

Because Hamas embedded itself inside Gaza's civilian population, and because it refused to allow Gazans to take shelter inside the hundreds of miles of war-fighting tunnels it had dug under Gaza, the civilian population was ravaged by Israel's ferocious retaliation. According to the Gaza Ministry of Health, Israel killed more than 70,000 people — a majority civilians, including thousands of children — and wounded at least 170,000. That's a shameful total — about 10 percent of the approximately 2.2 million people living in Gaza before the war.

The Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar reportedly described such losses as "necessary sacrifices" to advance the Palestinian cause globally. It worked. His human sacrifice of Palestinian civilians has delegitimized Israel around the world to a degree never seen before.

The Jewish people's movement for self-termination in their biblical homeland — called Zionism — has become a dirty word on college campuses and in liberal political parties, and increasingly in some conservative ones. Israeli artists and academics are simply no longer welcome in many corners of the world today. Israel's brutal war has also given cover for antisemites to crawl out from under the rocks.

No surprise. Because, though Netanyahu defeated Hamas militarily, he never nurtured or welcomed a moderate Palestinian alternative. So, killing all those Palestinian civilians during the war looked to the rest of the world just like that: killing, pure and simple, not to clear the way for better Palestinian governance but to clear the way for NO Palestinians in Gaza.

As for Hamas, it too will have no commission of inquiry. Whatever tactical P.R. victory it has won for the Palestinian cause, it cannot translate it into a lasting political gain for Palestinian statehood, because it, like Netanyahu, refuses to embrace the idea that the land between the river and the sea can be shared by two peoples. So the roughly two million Palestinians in Gaza are now living in greater misery than ever. Some victory.

It is rivaled only by Hezbollah's "victory" in Lebanon. Hezbollah dragged all of Lebanon into a war with Israel that no one in Lebanon voted for and that was obviously done at the behest of, and for the interests of, Iran. Because before Oct. 7, 2023, Israel was not occupying an inch of Lebanese territory. Israel now has troops all over southern Lebanon and has responded to Hezbollah's attacks on northern Israel by smashing Shiite villages there and Shiite neighborhoods in Beirut.

Roughly one million Lebanese have been turned into refugees in their own country, and Hezbollah has exposed itself for what it is: a mercenary army acting in the interests of its Iranian paymasters, not the interests of Lebanon or even Lebanese Shiites.

So, don't hold your breath for a commission of inquiry from Hezbollah.

As for the Iran front, it is now clear that President Trump and Netanyahu started a war with the Islamic regime to topple it by aerial bombardments and had no Plan B, if Plan A failed — which it did.

Iran, alas, had a Plan B and a Plan C. Once the regime survived the initial U.S.-Israeli attack — albeit with the loss of dozens of senior officials and military commanders and much military equipment — Iran blockaded the Strait of Hormuz, choking off some 20 percent of global crude oil supplies. It also attacked America's Gulf Arab allies, in effect sending Trump the message that "if you kill us, we will destabilize them and then you will really see a global oil crisis."

Iran's shadowy leaders want no part of any commission of inquiry, because while they

**Hezbollah, Hamas, Israel, Iran and the U.S. will all look like fools when the fighting stops.**

did have Plans B and C to ensure that their regime survived, they had no Plan D for the Iranian people to thrive.

The first question an Iranian inquiry commission would surely ask would be: "Exactly what have you achieved from the billions of dollars you have spent trying to build a nuclear weapon and to extend Iranian imperialism over Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, Syria and the Arab Gulf states?" Iran's leaders know that question is coming from their own people, so it's better for them to keep the war going so they don't have to answer it. (No surprise to me that they just shot down, according to Trump, a U.S. helicopter in the Strait of Hormuz.)

As for Trump, he can still salvage something from this war if he can persuade Tehran to turn over all its near bomb-grade uranium. I hope so. That would be important. But at this stage, it happens only if Trump gives a new lease on life to this terrible regime in Tehran.

That is because Iran will surely not agree to abandon its nuclear materials unless Trump, at least tacitly, accepts Iran's de facto control over the Strait of Hormuz (Iran's new weapon of mass disruption), the transfer to Iran of billions of dollars in frozen assets and the lifting of economic sanctions. A U.S. president who promised Iran's "unconditional surrender" will be delivering its unlimited survival. I don't think Trump will want any congressional commission of inquiry examining the art of that deal.

Bottom line: The war that started on Oct. 7, 2023, was launched and prosecuted by very bad men, who consistently put their own interests and fantasies ahead of their people's simple dreams for a decent life. If you are looking for a ray of hope, it would be that the pain of it all forces them all into a cease-fire. And then that this cease-fire creates space for politics — for the people's inquiry commissions that say to the leaders of Iran, Gaza, Hezbollah, Israel and America who made this mess: "What were you thinking? Begone with you."

COLUMNIST | BRET STEPHENS

# Platner's Candidacy Offers an Opportunity

IT ISN'T CLEAR what effect, if any, Graham Platner's multiplying personal scandals will have on his chances in the Maine Democratic primary that's occurring as I write this, to say nothing of November's general election against Susan Collins, the incumbent Republican senator. But there are at least two good, if contradictory, possibilities.

The first is absolution — not only for Platner, but for every nominee or candidate, Republican or Democratic, with a blemished personal history — on the grounds that we elect or install people in high office to achieve the results we desire, not to serve as paragons of moral rectitude. If nothing else, this could make our politics less repellent to talented if imperfect people who now steer clear of public service because they don't want to put themselves or their families through the inevitable media inquisition that comes with every campaign.

The second is consistent judgment of anyone, Democrat or Republican, who falls far short of clear and unyielding standards of moral conduct. Perhaps this will finally erect the political barriers that formerly prevented shameless people, our current president not least, from degrading our politics and setting a putrescent example of what is — and what isn't — necessary to reach the high places of American life.

What ought to stop is what we have now: inconsistent standards selectively applied according to our political bias.

Let's you've been wintering in Antarctica, here's what's lately been learned about Platner, the 41-year-old combat veteran and oyster farmer:

That his wife had told a campaign aide that he had been trading sexually explicit messages with six women, and perhaps as many as a dozen, before the beginning of his political run. That a former girlfriend, Lyndsey Fifield, alleges that he lied when he claimed he did not know a chest tattoo he

had gotten during his military service strongly resembled an official insignia of the Nazi SS, and that he had once referred to it as "my Totenkopf." That Fifield also alleges that he had once "twisted her arm behind her back, shoved her into a bedroom and held the door closed from the other side so she couldn't get out" and that she later described him as "the most toxic literally abusive man on earth." That she said he referred to women as "hatchet wounds," using a crude word for female genitalia. That other women romantically connected to Platner also described unsettling behavior.

Fifield also told The Times this: "He said this a lot: If anybody ever broke in here, I would rape them," adding that he told her it

## Voters in Maine have a chance to say no to partisan double standards.

would be in "a sexual way, not in a gay way. He was like, I would rape them to show them that I'm dominant."

Disqualifying? Platner has rejected some of the allegations and acknowledged others, all the while trying to put them in the context of the emotionally turbulent period amid and after multiple deployments. OK, uh-huh, maybe.

Less OK is to watch some of the same progressives who thought that Brett Kavanaugh's alleged misbehavior as a teenager and a college student made him unfit for the Supreme Court suddenly become dismissive of the allegations against Platner. "Seems like a lot of nothing," said Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, Democrat of Rhode Island, who once thundered over the meaning of the word "ralph" in Kavanaugh's high school yearbook. Democrats like Elizabeth Warren and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez have

also been notably agnostic when it comes to the charges against their Maine favorite. What ever happened to #BelieveWomen?

The term for this is "double standard," if not outright hypocrisy, and among the consequences is that it merely fuels the pervasive national cynicism about any moral judgments made about any political leader. If Platner can pass muster among Democratic primary voters, then the differences between him and Donald Trump are mainly of degree, not of kind. You may still agree with Platner's politics, and if you're in Maine, you may still think he's a better choice than Collins.

What you can no longer do, at least not with any intellectual integrity, is to use moral litmus tests to try to disqualify political figures from the opposing party. To be fine with Platner, knowing what you know now, should also require burying #MeToo in the graveyard of discarded progressive shibboleths.

There's an alternative: Democrats can operate according to the standards they have set, the ones they've sought to apply to Trump and his epigones. They can live by the view that no election is so important that they're willing to discard the things they once fervently claimed to believe in order to win it. They can hold themselves accountable so that they can more credibly and effectively hold their opponents accountable. They can cherish the idea that what counts in politics is more than just a relentless quest for a majority, and for power, and that staying true to principle isn't just a game for suckers. They can refuse to follow the president into the moral tar pit in which he long ago sank the Republican Party.

As this column goes to press, the honorable and perfectly respectable governor of Maine, Janet Mills, remains on the Democratic primary ballot. There's still a choice for Democratic voters to make — and honest conclusions to draw from it.

LETTERS

## The Dangers of Ignoring America's Past

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "The Fire of Stupidity Cannot Be Contained," by David French (column, June 2):

As a historian, I welcome Mr. French's warning that our ignorance of the past is dooming us to repeat its tragedies. But he does not mention one key dimension of our blindness: our retreat from the commitment to multiracial democracy that was the crowning achievement of the civil rights movement.

The overwhelmingly white Republican Party in the South has greeted the Supreme Court's destruction of the 1965 Voting Rights Act with glee, threatening to disempower Black Americans and embracing a politics suited to the era of Jim Crow. This dangerous turn toward an era of searing injustice should be decried alongside the other echoes of the past Mr. French describes.

I grew up in those terrible years. We must ensure that those who come after us do not forget them.

DREW GILPIN FAUST  
CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

The writer is a university research professor and the president emerita at Harvard University.

TO THE EDITOR:

David French's powerful column captures the challenges that our 250-year-old democratic experiment faces, including the two central threats that could lead to a collapse: younger generations who have no experience with what fascist or Communist governments really are and a collective amnesia for the rest of us.

Preying on the hard truth that democratic institutions have left many behind in societies seemingly rigged to benefit the rich, the second iteration of Donald Trump's presidency has cravenly pressed its authoritarian mission to tear down democratic institutions in the name of bringing the oppression to an end. Millions of citizens, young and old, either with zero experience or ignorant of the horrendous outcomes, have forgotten the lessons from our war-ravaged past.

But as Mr. French suggests, the blatantly overt corruption at the core of what is happening now may just be the denouement of this administration's effort to destroy what has been built over these last 250 years.

Let us all have hope that this is so.

EDWARD SHOHAT, MIAMI

## Trump's Tax Burden

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "Win for Trump in a Long Feud With the I.R.S." (front page, June 7):

Contrary to this story's assumption, neither President Trump nor his administration is empowered constitutionally to confer civil tax immunity for himself or his family from Internal Revenue Service investigations or tax penalties. No president can tie the civil law enforcement hands of a successor under Article 2 of the Constitution.

While the Constitution gives the president the power to pardon criminal offenses, he has no such power — constitutional or statutory — to immunize people from civil law enforcement. Mr. Trump's retroactive immunity from I.R.S. audits is as valueless as a munificent bequest in a pauper's will.

BRUCE FEIN, WASHINGTON

The writer is a former associate deputy attorney general under President Ronald Reagan and the author of "Constitutional Peril: The Life and Death Struggle for Our Constitution and Democracy."

The Times welcomes letters from readers. Letters must include the writer's name, address and telephone number. Those selected may be edited, and shortened to fit allotted space. Email: letters@nytimes.com

## Time to Rebuild Trust

TO THE EDITOR:

This year marks the 250th birthday of the United States, a time to reflect on where we began and where we stand today. For me, this became personal when I learned that my ancestor John Morton, a delegate from Pennsylvania, cast the deciding vote for independence in 1776. His courage helped shape history.

The founders, despite their flaws, risked everything to build a system based on law, balance and limits on power. Critics argue that in recent years, especially under Donald Trump, important norms have been tested, with concerns about the rule of law and weakened checks and balances.

At the same time, many Americans feel that money and media influence distort truth. Trust in institutions has declined, and citizens increasingly treat one another with anger instead of respect. Around the world, America's image has suffered.

And yet, giving up is not an option. The spirit of 1776 still lives. Rebuilding trust will take honesty, courage and a return to fairness and accountability. I am proud of my ancestor, but I will be prouder of those who hold onto the hope that America can still become a stronger, wiser nation for all.

DEBORAH METKE  
FRANKSVILLE, WIS.



PENN CHAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

# The End of Erdogan and Putin's Unlikely Partnership

Gonul Tol

A senior fellow at the Middle East Institute and the author of "Erdogan's War: A Strongman's Struggle at Home and in Syria."

ABOUT a decade ago, the war in Syria helped to forge an unlikely partnership in the Middle East between Turkey and Russia. It is now unraveling. In its place, Turkey is helping Ukraine to establish a foothold in a part of the world where President Vladimir Putin of Russia previously enjoyed considerable influence.

The partnership between Mr. Putin and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey has always been equivocal, and for a time, it seemed that the war in Syria might draw them into a direct confrontation. Ankara was supporting the rebels trying to topple Bashar al-Assad, Syria's brutal dictator, while Moscow was intervening to prop him up. Ultimately, however, both powers accommodated each other.

When Turkey launched an incursion into northern Syria in 2016, for example, it was able to do so only because Russia, which controlled Syrian airspace at the time, allowed it. Turkey, in turn, imposed limits on its help to the rebels. Arrangements like this reflected a broader understanding between the two: Each tolerated and reinforced the other's presence in the country, to the benefit of both.

For Mr. Putin, the benefit was Turkey's acquiescence to Russia asserting its power in Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East and the cracks that their cooperation created in Western alliances. Mr. Erdogan benefited from a regional ally at a time when his relations with NATO were strained.

In the early years, Mr. Erdogan was the junior partner of the two, but the war in Ukraine has shifted the balance. Isolated by the West, Mr. Putin increasingly relied on the Turkish president, who refused to join Western sanc-



POOL PHOTO BY ALEXANDER ZEMLIANCHENKO

tions. Turkey became a hub for Russian trade, investment and energy flows, and Ankara found itself with greater leverage.

The real turning point in the partnership came when Mr. al-Assad was ousted in late 2024 and Russia, bogged down in Ukraine, did not come to his rescue. Instead, Moscow moved quickly to try to build ties with Syria's interim leader, Ahmed al-Sharaa, and contin-

ues to supply the country with oil. Russia was left in the position of negotiating with a government staffed with people it had bombed relentlessly for years. And Turkey, which had supported the rebels, emerged newly dominant.

For Turkey, this is a big moment — an opportunity to reposition itself as a pivotal ally of NATO, rebalance its relationship with Rus-

## Turkey is helping Ukraine forge new alliances in the Middle East.

sia and help Ukraine to cultivate new relationships in the Middle East.

In April, President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine, traveling on a Turkish state aircraft, made his first visit to Syria for talks with Mr. al-Sharaa and the Turkish foreign minister, where they discussed military and energy cooperation. Turkey is involved in rebuilding the Syrian Army into a modern force that can move beyond decades of Soviet-style influence. For Ukraine, this is an opportunity to contribute its expertise in military production and drone warfare, shaped by years of war with Russia, while cultivating a relationship with a country that was once in Moscow's orbit.

Ukraine has already been capitalizing on the Iran war by cultivating closer military ties with Gulf states. When Iran attacked neighboring countries with Shahed-136 kamikazes, the same drones that Russia has used in Ukraine, Mr. Zelensky quickly sought to leverage Ukraine's experience, dispatching air defense teams to Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Turkey, which has strong military ties with the Gulf, sees Ukraine's growing role as a complement to Ankara's relationships that will allow it to expand what it's offering. For Russia, which has spent years developing closer economic and security ties with Gulf monarchies, the shift is yet another setback.

Ukraine badly needs allies and revenue streams, and its entry into the Middle East will establish its role as a security provider. That Mr. Erdogan is helping to open the doors for Ukraine starkly underscores Mr. Putin's waning ability to project global power and how much has changed in the relationship.

It's clear that Ankara is no longer balancing between Moscow and NATO and is tilting the field against Mr. Putin. Russia's decline has given Turkey, after a decade of deference to Moscow, the freedom to pursue its interests. Ukraine is the beneficiary.

# COMMENT & FEATURES

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## THE JERUSALEM POST

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## Not above the law

Democracies often reveal themselves not through the cases that are easy but through the ones that are uncomfortable.

Few figures in politics inspire stronger reactions than Likud MK Tally Gotliv. To her supporters, she is a fearless truth-teller who is willing to challenge institutions that many have come to distrust. To her critics, she is a provocateur whose rhetoric frequently crosses lines that public officials should respect. It is precisely because opinions about her are so deeply entrenched that the debate surrounding her request for parliamentary immunity deserves to be viewed through a wider lens.

The question before the Knesset is not whether one likes Tally Gotliv. It is whether parliamentary immunity remains a shield for democratic representation or becomes a shelter from accountability.

Parliamentary immunity exists for an important reason. Democracies require elected officials who can challenge institutions without fear of political retaliation. MKs must be able to criticize the government, the courts, and the security establishment. They must be free to ask uncomfortable questions and express unpopular opinions. Without such protections, parliamentary oversight becomes little more than theater. But immunity was never intended to place lawmakers above the law.

The distinction matters. A democracy cannot function if prosecutors are permitted to silence elected representatives through politically motivated investigations. It also cannot function if elected officials are able to avoid legal scrutiny simply by invoking their office. The purpose of immunity is to navigate that tension, not erase it.

That principle is particularly important in Israel today. The years leading up to and following the October 7 massacre have produced a profound crisis of trust. Confidence in political leaders has eroded. Public faith in state institutions has weakened.

Every controversy increasingly becomes a tribal test in which citizens are expected to choose sides. The courts are either defenders of democracy or enemies of it. The Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency) is either beyond criticism or part of a conspiracy. The government is either saving the nation or destroying it.

Lost in this atmosphere is a simpler democratic truth: Institutions are neither sacred nor criminal by default. They are accountable. So are elected officials. The debate over Gotliv's immunity extends beyond the particulars of one case. It is a test of whether Israelis still believe that public office carries responsibilities as well as privileges.

If parliamentary immunity automatically applies whenever an MK claims to be acting in the public interest, then immunity ceases to be a limited protection and becomes a blanket exemption. Such an approach would undermine the very principle of equality before the law that democratic societies depend upon.

Citizens are expected to answer for their actions. Elected officials should not be categorically exempt from that expectation. Also, lawmakers should be careful not to weaken legitimate parliamentary protections in pursuit of a short-term political victory. Today's controversial politician may be tomorrow's opposition whistle-blower.

Immunity exists because democratic systems recognize that power can be abused from multiple directions. The challenge is preserving that safeguard without allowing it to become a loophole.

This is why the Knesset should approach the issue with restraint and seriousness rather than partisanship. The goal should not be to reward or punish a particular politician. The goal should be to preserve public confidence in the principle itself.

Israel has spent years trapped in cycles of institutional warfare. The result has been a public increasingly convinced that rules apply only to political opponents. That perception is corrosive. A nation cannot sustain democratic trust if every legal question is interpreted exclusively through the lens of tribal loyalty.

The broader lesson of the Gotliv case is straightforward: Parliamentary immunity is an essential democratic protection. It allows lawmakers to speak freely, challenge authority, and represent their constituents without intimidation. But immunity is not impunity. It was designed to protect democratic debate, not to eliminate accountability.

Whatever one thinks of Tally Gotliv, that distinction is worth defending. Because once immunity becomes synonymous with exemption, it ceases to protect democracy and begins to weaken it.

INBAR ASHKENAZI, CEO Jerusalem Post Group

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## Hope among the goons

CENTER FIELD  
• By GIL TROY

To say this was a tough week is like calling the Hezbollah war a border skirmish. The latest ballistic missile barrage against Israel exposed Iran's regime's evil to an increasingly somnolent world.

The renewed attacks produced one minor miracle: Israelis Left and Right united, still appreciating America's cooperation while dumbstruck by President Donald Trump's new fear of confronting this enemy with the firepower the regime's pathological behavior invites.

Meanwhile, in my old haunt, Montreal, anti-Zionists expressed their built-in Jew-hatred – again – by firebombing Temple Emanuel-El-Beth Shalom on Sherbrooke Street – Montreal's Fifth Avenue.

Anti-Zionist bigots also reflected their disdain for Canadian values, liberal democracy, and basic civility – again – by disrupting McGill's convocation, what Canadians call commencement.

Curious how this university I long cherished repudiated these hooligans, I clicked onto McGill's Website. Predictably, the university ignored the disturbance, guaranteeing future repeats.

There's no need to worry, however. The homepage, spewing modern academic psychobabble, calls McGill: "A community that puts well-being front and centre." They should add: "unless you're Jewish or believe in the sanctity of ceremonies honoring our graduates and their families."

Fortunately, Prime Minister Mark Carney rushed to the rescue. True, his speech denouncing antisemitism had "no mention of Israel and no acknowledgment that, for Jews, Israel is part of the Jewish people's covenantal reality," former Canadian justice minister Irwin Cotler noted. But no matter,

Carney created a paper-tiger commission to playact at fighting antisemitism, featuring at least one Jihadi apologist.

New York – the Big Apple – is equally rotten. There, T'ruah, an organization of 2,300 rabbis claiming to be for "human rights" and "pro-Israel," warmly welcomed the obsessively anti-Zionist Mayor Zohran Mamdani while granting its Raphael Lemkin Human Rights Award to an activist who accuses Israel of "apartheid" and "genocide."

Having defined the term, Lemkin knew that countries must demonstrate a comprehensive, lethal intent to be guilty of "genocide." That makes the award as preposterous as granting an Elie Wiesel anti-Nazi award or a Betty Friedan feminist award to Maine's senatorial hopeful Graham Platner, sporting an SS Totenkopf tattoo and a history of abusing girlfriends.

ALAS, IN ISRAEL, goons also roamed. Over 60 haredi (ultra-Orthodox) thugs somehow bypassed Alon Shvut's security gate to vandalize the house and car of Justice Noam Sohlberg. They singled out Sohlberg, but his opinion, demanding that jail evaders be arrested, even if they're haredi, was unanimous.

Why didn't neighbors in this tight-knit community mobilize to protect Sohlberg's wife and grandchildren? And why does Israel keep failing to punish rioters, Left, Right, and haredi, effectively – meaning equally and harshly?

The Knesset needs a civility caucus, drafting tougher legislation while compelling police and prosecutors to implement the law aggressively but evenhandedly.

It shouldn't matter if you're a bullying Bibist, a crazed Kaplanist or a depraved draft-dodger.

Criminal behavior – not speech – must be prosecuted relentlessly. Then, everyone involved in these conspiracies against democracy – including the bus drivers – should receive bankruptcy-inducing civil penalties too.

The Hooligans' Veto is hijacking Israeli politics. Unless the state cracks down, the next elections' sore losers will block traffic, menace police, and harass political rivals and their families at home.

All this barbarism encourages despair. But that's only if you live Israel and Jewish life through headlines and hostility – a central structural problem afflicting both Diaspora Zionists and increasingly disaffiliated Diaspora Jews.

My non-Israeli friends marvel at the Jerusalem Troys' calendar overflowing with weddings and life-cycle events. And the blessing of ongoing contact with IGG – Israel's Greatest Generation – our reservists and soldiers – is our own personalized defibrillator, jolting me with hope, again and again.

Last Friday, our kids who are working in Montreal with Jewish students visited and hosted a party for their friends. They picked the perfect spot for a Friday brunch, Piccolino, a Jerusalem landmark. It's famous for delicious Italian food and its owners' legendary generosity, offering free Friday buffets to dozens of lone soldiers for thirteen years now.

Twelve couples under 30 attended. At least one spouse of each couple has defended Israel for hundreds of days since October 7.

They've served as army doctors, infantry warriors, paramedics, homefront commanders, tank commanders, logistics officers, sailors, and commandos. But they generated a stroller traffic jam.

Nine of the women have given birth to some of the world's cutest babies since October 7 – contributing to Israel's wartime baby boom.

The kids' names created a



CANADIAN PRIME MINISTER Mark Carney is seen giving a statement in Ottawa, on Monday. Carney created a paper-tiger commission to playact at fighting antisemitism, featuring at least one jihadi apologist, the writer says. (Adrian Wyld/Pool via Reuters)

symphony of values – generating wellsprings of optimism. *Amichai*, the Jewish people live. *Ariel* – the lion of God – symbolizing Jerusalem, where both parents were born, as well as the eternal hope for redemption. *Chaya* – life! – celebrated a beloved grandmother.

*Eliyah* – our Lord is God – with the parents explaining that "Especially in this world of uncertainty, following October 7, with the antisemitism worldwide and all the death and destruction we have experienced – we put our faith and our lives in God's hands."

*Hannah* – "honoring a great-grandmother whose kindness, generosity, and love left a lasting impact on her family." *Lavi* – young lion – saluted last June's war against Iran. *Nil* – a Hebrew acronym for The Jewish People Will Forever Endure.

*T'chelet* – evoking the azure blue of a tallit reflecting the purity of holiness. *Yedidia*, God's beloved friend. The kids

were named after Holocaust survivors, Israelis, Americans, and, inevitably, some of the fallen since October 7.

Barack Obama once warned: "You get the politicians you deserve." In Israel, we don't deserve the politicians we've got. But they don't define us. These happy warriors – their actions, values, aspirations – saved Israel from destruction, and will save it from self-destruction, while continuing to inspire the rest of us.

The writer is an American presidential historian and a senior fellow in Zionist thought at the Jewish People Policy Institute in Jerusalem. Last year he published *To Resist the Academic Intifada: Letters to My Students on Defending the Zionist Dream and The Essential Guide to Zionism, Anti-Zionism, Antisemitism and Jew-hatred, available on the JPPI website. Next month, he will publish The Essential Guide to the U.S-Israel Partnership, the 250th Edition.*

## Israel's enemies are my enemies

So why can't Democrats see that?

• By BRIANNA WU

The last time I was at Ben-Gurion Airport, I found myself scrambling into a bomb shelter as the Houthi launched missiles at civilians. A year later, returning to Israel, I barely escaped the airport before Iran did the same. Last night, my phone lit up with missile alerts as my taxi left the airport.

Quite a welcome back to Israel. I am an American, a Democratic operative, and not Jewish. I have no personal stake in this conflict beyond the dire consequences of allowing Iran to endlessly destabilize the region. Yet, back home, I find myself having surreal conversations with people in my own party who seem unwilling to process the reality of Iranian-backed Islamic terrorists repeatedly targeting Israeli civilians.

I am part of a delegation this week working with the Israeli consulate during Pride Week. It is surprising that this even needs to be said, but Israel remains the only country in the region where LGBT people like me can live openly and with dignity.

Yet at home, none of this seems to matter.

I have had conversations with American feminists mourning the death of the ayatollah, gay men rooting for a regime that would forcibly castrate them, and trans women insisting that the country our Palestinian sisters dream of escaping to is somehow killing trans women. It is a moral Disneyland populated by Americans so thoroughly conditioned by anti-Western propaganda that they can no longer distinguish terrorists from the victims of terrorism.

The situation feels even more surreal as a high-profile transsexual woman in the Democratic Party. At home, Donald Trump is stripping away my access to civil society. Just this week, he weaponized the Justice Department to rescind civil protections in employment, housing, and education.

Yet my left-versus-right politics end at



THOUSANDS TAKE part in the annual Jerusalem Pride Parade last week. (Yonatan Sindel/Flash90)

the water's edge.

I find myself in an uneasy alliance with Republicans, the only major political force in America currently willing to take the threat posed by the IRGC seriously.

I often watch interviews with Mike Huckabee speaking plainly about the security situation in Judea and Samara and find myself grateful he represents America here, despite belonging to another party. I hear Marco Rubio speak with clarity about responding when Iran attacks our allies and wish Democrats displayed similar moral certainty.

Yet I also doubt either man would extend to me the simple human dignity of calling me "she." American domestic politics have become so consumed with presenting transsexual women as a threat that basic human decency is increasingly treated as a partisan issue.

So where is my loyalty supposed to lie?

I want a Democratic Party willing to confront the enemies of Western democracy. I want a Republican Party willing to treat transsexual women as

human beings. I find myself choosing between a left increasingly willing to tolerate antisemitism and a right increasingly comfortable treating people like me as an enemy to be destroyed.

The Democratic Party stands with LGBT people, yet has become remarkably willing to excuse anti-Jewish extremism in spaces where it would never tolerate other forms of bigotry. The Republican Party is more willing to confront those threats, yet is led by a president who often seems more interested in short-term political advantage than permanently dismantling the IRGC and the machinery of terror it exports across the region.

And yet the choice is not as simple as left versus right. Israel's enemies are my enemies, even if many people in my own party are too propagandized to recognize it. While President Trump may speak about people like me with contempt, he is also willing to confront the Islamic political project that would gladly throw me off a roof.

That is the contradiction I cannot escape. And I do not think I am alone in feeling torn.

"There are no easy answers" It is impossible to overstate how betrayed many American Jews feel, especially LGBT Jews. Most have been loyal supporters of the Democratic Party for their entire lives. Yet our party has made it painfully clear that the relationship is not being reciprocated.

And there are no easy answers. The left and right urgently need to work together to tell Americans the truth about theocratic Islam and the threat it poses to both our countries. This did not happen overnight. The people spreading these narratives built institutions, networks, and influence over decades. They invested patiently. They played a long game.

Anyone serious about preserving Western democracy must be willing to do the same.

It will take patience. It will take resources, meaning tens of millions of dollars of investment. And it will require people who disagree on almost everything else to stand together in defense of shared values and common survival. We are going to have to build institutions capable of telling the truth more effectively than our adversaries can spread lies.

My work in Israel this week is officially about celebrating Israel's commitment to LGBT rights. But for me, it is about something larger.

It is about recognizing that the fight for Israel's survival and the fight for liberal democracy are increasingly inseparable. And about deciding whether America is still willing to defend either one.

The writer is a Democratic strategist and former congressional candidate and is best known for her role in the 2014 Gamergate scandal. In the aftermath of October 7, she had a public break with the American progressive movement over antisemitism.

## INVESTING IN THE FUTURE:

# Israel's youth at heart of 2026 Paamonim parley

*From optimism to action: Equipping Israel's youth for a more resilient financial future*

• By SHARON LEVIN

As Israel navigates an era of unprecedented economic and security uncertainty, the question of financial resilience has never been more critical. Today, June 10, 2026, the 5th Paamonim Conference for Economic Resilience, titled "Youth & Money: Let's Talk About It", is taking place at the Ono Academic College. This year, the spotlight is firmly fixed on a demographic that holds the key to the nation's future: young Israelis.

## A strategic pivot toward the next generation

Paamonim, a leading Israeli nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting financial resilience and responsible economic behavior, has made a strategic decision to focus on young adults (ages 18-35). This is not merely a theme for this single event; it represents Paamonim's core long-term strategy. The organization recognizes that early adulthood is a "make or break" period where financial habits are formed and life-altering decisions, from education and career paths to starting a family, are made.

Recent statistics highlight the urgency: between 2021 and 2025, approximately 43% of all inquiries made to Paamonim came from young adults. By equipping this population with the right tools today, Paamonim aims to build a more resilient Israeli society for decades to come.

## The unique challenges of the Swords of Iron generation

While young people worldwide face rising costs of living,



EDUCATION AT the Paamonim conference. (Courtesy of Paamonim)

the Israeli experience is compounded by unique local pressures. The ongoing impact of the Swords of Iron War has disrupted the lives of thousands of young adults. Frequent and prolonged reserve duty has caused significant gaps in employment and education, leading to lost income and career instability.

According to Paamonim's 2025 Economic Resilience Index, the findings are sobering:

- 37% of young Israelis report that their expenses exceed their income.
- 42% find it increasingly difficult to make ends meet.
- 28% have had to rely on loans, overdrafts, or increased debt to stay afloat.
- 25% have been forced to forgo

essential goods, such as basic food or medicine, due to financial strain.

Furthermore, this generation is the first to navigate a complex digital financial landscape. They are heavily influenced by social media "finfluencers" and a culture of immediate gratification. In fact, 44% of young adults report making purchases based on influencer recommendations, and 37% engage in unplanned impulse buying on international shopping sites.

## The optimism gap: Hope vs reality

Interestingly, despite these hardships, young Israelis remain remarkably optimistic. The index shows that 59% of

them believe their financial situation will improve, a rate significantly higher than the general population's 42%. However, there is a concerning gap between this optimism and actual financial behavior. This "literacy gap", where theoretical knowledge does not translate into consistent financial management, is exactly what the conference aims to bridge.

## A professional platform for dialogue and change

Today's 2026 conference is designed as a high-level professional summit. It brings together a diverse range of stakeholders, including policymakers and public sector representatives from various government ministries and local authori-

ties, the academic and research community, including experts in economics, behavioral psychology, and social work; the business and HR sector, with managers looking to support the financial well-being of their young employees, as well as educators and students studying economics, business administration, and education. Paamonim's goal is to move beyond theory into practical, "eye-level" discussions that combine personal stories from young adults, with rigorous professional data.

## Innovative discourse and recommendations

The conference features specialized discussion groups, focusing on the



SHARON LEVIN (David Moskovitz)

intersection of modern life and finance, including: "The Psychology of Wealth," a discussion on "Being Rich vs Looking Rich," exploring the impact of social media and FOMO on spending; "Future Tech," examining how artificial intelligence (AI) can serve as a tool for personal money management rather than just a digital curiosity; and "Mental-Economic Resilience," addressing the deep connection between financial stress and mental health.

Paamonim's mission at the conference is threefold.

First, it offers recommendations to policymakers to build public infrastructures that reduce financial fra-

gility. Second, it provides practical tools for households to maintain balance during economic shocks. Finally, it empowers young people to move from theoretical knowledge to experience-based learning and strengthen their digital financial literacy.

By bringing these issues to the forefront, Paamonim is spearheading a movement to ensure that Israel's younger generation can turn their inherent optimism into a stable, prosperous reality. As the conference title suggests, the time to invest in the future is not tomorrow, but now.

The writer is director of communications and public affairs at Paamonim.

## TOWARDS PEACE:

# Europe vs the new US-Israel-Arab alliance

• By GOL KALEV

This week, Israel was attacked by missiles from the North (Lebanon), East (Iran) and South (Yemen), but the most lethal missiles are the ideological ones coming from the West (Europe).

These ideological missiles – also aimed at the United States – demonstrate that we are in the midst of a fast-moving attempt to negate the idea of the Jewish state, and through it the idea of Judaism.

As discussed in my 2024 book, *The Assault on Judaism*, this existential threat to Israel, and a strategic one for the United States, requires a comprehensive national security strategy.

The physical missiles – also aimed at Israel's Arab neighbors – demonstrate that Israelis and Arabs are on the same side. Contrary to European perception, the Arab interest is not for a weak Israel, but for a strong and prosperous Jewish state. Indeed, the Iran war showcased that there is a Middle East-wide dependency on the military and economic might of Israel.

Putting those two factors together,

we are now witnessing a dramatic paradigm shift towards new Middle East alliances and peace frameworks, such as those outlined in my new book, *From Survival to Peace*.

This paradigm shift was evident in last week's peace negotiations between Lebanon and Israel. The talks underscored that the enemy of Lebanon is not Israel, but outside forces that colonized it and exploited the country once known as the "Switzerland of the Middle East".

## Colonization of Lebanon

In the 1970s, it was the Palestinians: The PLO, expelled from Jordan after a string of terrorist attacks, took over southern Lebanon and established a de facto Palestinian state, known as "Fathahland" (a "no-go zone" that some see as a prototype for what could come in Europe).

In the 2000s, it was Iran: They too created "a state within the state," through its proxy, Hezbollah, providing healthcare, social services, and municipal services for much of southern Lebanon.

Both the PLO and Hezbollah used their occupied Lebanese land

as a launchpad for terrorist attacks against Israel, leading Israel to invade the "state within a state," such as in 1982 and 2026. Both of those invasions led Lebanon and Israel to peace talks.

Palestinians and Iranians were not the first ones to colonize Lebanon.

The French invasion of Lebanon and Syria in 1920 not only plunged the Middle East into a century of war, but also into a century of Western-imposed "peace frameworks" that have nothing to do with the Middle East, such as the idea of using land as currency for peace ("the depth of withdrawal as the depth of peace"), and various other academic "peace through appeasement" formulas.

## De-colonization through de-Europeanization

A century after kick-starting the conflict, it seems that Europe is on its way out of the Middle East. This is evident in its noticeable absence from the Iran war, the Lebanon peace talks, and the newly-formed Board of Peace.

This in turn provides an unprecedented opportunity for sustainable

peace, based on organic Middle East realities and local interests.

Moreover, de-Europeanization of the Middle East would free Europe to focus its energy and capital on the growing threat to global stability and US national security stemming from Europe itself – an ideological threat acknowledged in the 2025 US national security strategy.

European vs Arabs: Sanctions vs peace

But Europe is resisting: Instead of looking for ways to help and benefit from the new US-Israeli-Arab alliance, anchored in the light emanating from Zion, Europe seems to go out of its way to undermine it.

This week's Iranian missiles were fired in reaction to Israel bombing Hezbollah targets in Beirut. But Europe's ideological missiles were unprovoked – they were fired for the sake of firing. Europe targeted Israeli infrastructure in Judea and Samaria, home to scientists, professors and entrepreneurs that advance humanity and save lives – in Europe, the Middle East and around the world.

The EU sanctioned this month organizations involved with land purchase, security for residents,

and promotion of the rule of law. Such organizations were labeled by the EU as "extremists." As my EU friends often reiterate, any form of Jewish life in the West Bank is "extremism" and illegitimate.

In this realm, French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot gloated: "The European Union is sanctioning today the main Israeli organizations guilty of supporting the extremist and violent colonization of the West Bank."

And so, a new divide is emerging: Arabs wishing to benefit from the light coming from Judea, Samaria, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and other parts of the Jewish state (peace) vs. Europeans wishing to block this light (sanctions).

This relates to the Lebanon peace talks, led by Israel's Ambassador to the United States, Michael Leiter. The ambassador is not only a settler living in the West Bank, but is part and parcel of its infrastructure, having served in leadership roles in the Judea and Samaria council.

And so another dichotomy is formed:

For Lebanon, Ambassador Leiter represents its conduit towards

peace. For Europe, he represents "extremist and violent colonization of the West Bank".

Adding one plus one, it seems Europe is on a mad rush to sanction the path to peace.

Indeed, Europe is trying to cling to the twilight of its disruptive intervention in the Middle East.

This as the United States seems to be shifting from a Europe-facing Middle East strategy, based on legacy obligations – such as NATO, the special relationship with the UK, and ancestral bonds – towards an "America First"-facing strategy, based on reciprocal cooperation with its "model ally" Israel, and its Arab partners:

The new US-Israel-Arab alliance. The writer is the author of the new book *From Survival to Peace: Turning the Assault on Judaism around (2026)*. He is also the author of *The Assault on Judaism: The Existential Threat is Coming from the West (2024)*, and of *Judaism 3.0: Judaism's Transformation to Zionism (2022)*. He is chairman of the *Judaism 3.0 think tank*. For his geopolitical analysis, visit [EuropeAndJerusalem.com](http://EuropeAndJerusalem.com)

## LETTERS

### Complete victory?

US President Donald Trump says he will soon declare "complete victory" in the war with Iran. Iran will presumably do the same.

Trump will wave a treaty that may sound somewhat reasonable, but in any case will not be worth the paper it's written on.

Iran has demonstrated that it can control the Straits of Hormuz and strangle the world's economy. It can elicit pressure on the US from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar at will, by firing at them. It can dictate to Trump, insisting that he prevent Israel from bringing Hezbollah to heel or jeopardize his "wonderful" deal. Trump, to show that he's not a complete loser, is reduced to ranting at Netanyahu and continually bragging about how Netanyahu has to obey his orders. It looks very much like the victim of bullying taking it out on someone even smaller than he is.

So who has the real victory?

NAOMI SANDLER  
Jerusalem

### Forgetting Trump's restraint

The premise behind Amine Ayoub's position that Iran's hostilities throughout the region may very well be the catalyst for increased readiness for normalization with Israel ("Iran is the Abraham Accords' best sales agent," June 9, 2026) is based on the ancient philosophy that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." Historically, this principle has proven to be anything but reliable; there have been many alliances forged to defeat a mutual threat only to dissolve once that threat has been neutralized. Ayoub has not provided a convincing argument that the Middle East will be an exception.

On the contrary, the geopolitical dynamics of this region more often than not defy the soundness and logic of the white papers and policy statements that come out of think tanks such as the Middle East Forum. Any sort of long-term alliance demands, in the first place, an officially acknowledged acceptance of Israel's right to exist. Qatar and Kuwait, I'd say, are nowhere near that point.

Ayoub, oddly, makes no mention of President Trump's recent demand that Israel's traditional enemies join the

Abraham Accords as a prerequisite for any deal with Iran. The response, as headlined in *The Jerusalem Post*, was that demanding any such partnership was "premature" and that the president was "disconnected." The White House decided, wisely, not to pursue the matter.

Missing from Ayoub's take on the matter is the restraint that President Trump is exerting on Jerusalem. Without Israel's participation in the conflict, Iran will quickly rebuild its traditional arsenal and find a way to camouflage its nuclear capability. The real impact affecting the entire region is not a growing readiness to shake hands with Israel but Washington's refusal to let Israel "finish the job."

AMI SHIMON BEN-BARUCH  
Be'er Ya'acov

### World Cup wake-up

"Is this the most dangerous World Cup ever? Climatologists fear summer sports are just one heat wave away from major heat-related tragedy" (June 9, 2026) should be a wake-up call about the major threats to humanity's future due to climate change.

The world has been rapidly warming up. Every decade since the 1970s has been warmer than the previous decade. All 26 years in this century are among the 27 hottest years on record. Seas are rising rapidly due to the melting of glaciers and polar ice caps, and there has been a significant increase in the frequency and severity of heat waves, droughts, wildfires, storms, and floods.

The primary driver of climate change is animal-based agriculture. Cows emit methane, a very potent greenhouse gas. Over 40% of the world's ice-free land is used for grazing and growing crops to feed animals. Over the course of human history, the number of trees on Earth has been reduced from an estimated six trillion to just three trillion. Their loss has played a major role in raising atmospheric CO2 to very hazardous levels.

It is essential that animal-based diets be sharply reduced to enable extensive reforestation. That would reduce atmospheric CO2 to a much safer level, increasing chances for a habitable, healthy, environmentally sustainable world for future generations.

RICHARD H. SCHWARTZ, PHD  
Shoreh

# A divided Gaza is not a bad outcome

• By EFRAIM INBAR

Discussions over the future of the Gaza Strip have been eclipsed by the US-Israeli war on Iran.

Yet keen observers believe that Trump's Gaza Plan is doomed. No international stabilization force is ready to step in, while the planned technocrat interim government has been intimidated out of entering the Strip by Hamas.

Moreover, Nikolay Mladenov, the High Representative for the Board of Peace for Gaza, reported to the UN Security Council that establishing an effective transitional civilian authority in Gaza is not possible without first overcoming Hamas's resistance to disarmament.

The war against Iran may end soon, as neither the US nor Iran appears eager to continue it. Subsequently, attention will move to other arenas. Iran's proxy in Lebanon, Hezbollah, has been weakened but remains well-armed and holds veto power over the Lebanese government's decisions.

Similarly, Hamas in Gaza has resisted pressure to disarm and remains the de facto ruler of the territory it controls – over 30% of the Strip.

Unsurprisingly, terror armies such as Hezbollah and Hamas cannot be eliminated when their ideology commands broad support among

the populations in which they operate and when they continue to receive military aid from abroad. Iran has enabled its proxies to survive.

In Israel, the IDF has presented plans to renew its assault on Hamas in order to achieve disarmament and deliver the "total victory" demanded by politicians.

Yet this goal is entirely unrealistic. Notably, Israel has not succeeded in eliminating or disarming Hamas in the West Bank, a territory that has been under IDF military control since 1967.

Meanwhile, polls consistently show that Hamas remains popular among Palestinians despite the immense suffering brought on by the October 7, 2023 massacre in Israel. Furthermore, Hamas has rebuilt its weapons-smuggling networks to recover from the blows dealt by the IDF, and is actively recruiting and training new fighters in preparation for an Israeli offensive.

While the IDF could take over the entirety of the Gaza Strip – and the prospect of a "decisive" victory is tempting – the wisdom of "finishing the job" is questionable for several reasons.

A conquest of the entire Gaza Strip would make its impoverished population of approximately two million people Israel's direct responsibility.

Preserving the status quo –



PALESTINIANS GATHER at the site of an Israeli strike on a house whose residents were warned to evacuate before the attack, in Zawayda, central Gaza Strip, last week. (Mahmoud Issa/Reuters)

a divided Gaza – spares Israel this burden, which has already become a challenge for the international community following the adoption of the Trump Plan for Gaza by the UN Security Council.

Such a conquest would also transform the IDF, which currently operates in the roughly 60% of Gaza it controls – areas largely empty of civilian population – into an occupation army functioning among civilians who have been educated for years by

Hamas to hate Israelis.

This kind of population provides fertile ground for Hamas to wage guerrilla warfare against Israeli forces. A "hearts and minds" strategy is not a realistic option for Israel, and any ambitious deradicalization project faces slim prospects of success, requiring a multi-generational timeframe. Israeli energies would be better directed elsewhere.

THE MULTI-FRONT WAR since October 7, 2023 has been

the longest military engagement in Israel's history. While Israeli society has displayed remarkable resilience and its economy has demonstrated considerable strength, Israel would welcome a respite.

The current deployment in Gaza – defending border communities that were in close proximity to Hamas – requires relatively few troops. Reigniting the Gaza front would necessitate a significant reserve mobilization and would be costly in both lives

and resources.

The case for a full takeover of Gaza is not compelling enough at a time when Israelis are longing for some degree of normalcy.

A divided Gaza – one that leaves Hamas in control of a portion of the territory – also preserves the schism within the Palestinian national movement, Israel's principal long-term adversary, which shows little sign of moderating its deep hostility toward the Jewish state.

This approach reflects Israel's Gaza strategy following Hamas's expulsion of the Palestinian Authority from the territory in June 2007.

That separation policy weakened the Palestinian national movement and its push for statehood, which is currently opposed by a large majority of Israelis who are not convinced that the Palestinians can become a reliable neighbor in the foreseeable future.

October 7, 2023, did not represent a failure of the separation policy per se. The failure lay in the IDF intelligence branch's complacency and, more broadly, in Israel's policy of restraint and containment.

The separation strategy wrongly embraced a "quiet for quiet" approach, tolerating recurrent missile attacks on its civilian population while allowing Hamas to substantially expand its military capabilities.

Israel failed to act aggressively enough to prevent that buildup. In a protracted and intractable conflict, "mowing the grass" – using military force periodically to degrade enemy capabilities, restore temporary deterrence, and extend the intervals between violent confrontations – is the only viable approach to adversaries, whether hostile states, terrorist organizations, or terrorist armies.

This concept offers no definitive endpoint and no decisive victory. It requires ongoing vigilance and periodic action, while acknowledging that the threat may always reemerge. In Gaza, Israel neglected this imperative.

A Hamas-controlled enclave in Gaza is therefore a bearable outcome – provided Israel remembers to "mow the grass" frequently enough. It also frees the IDF from occupation duties, which carry their own costs and complications.

Finally, restraint in Gaza may spare Israel the reflexive international criticism that so often greets its use of force, criticism that frequently rests on a fundamental misreading of the situation.

The writer is the founder of the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security (JISS) and currently a Senior Researcher there. He also serves as Chair of the Program for Strategy, Diplomacy and Security at the Shalem Academic Center.

## The repricing of Iran

Why the Persian Gulf's economic future runs through Tehran

• By AMIR REZA OVEISSI and SAEED GHASSEMINEJAD

For over a decade, the Arab states of the Persian Gulf made a compelling argument to the world – and the world listened.

The message was simple: move here, invest, and stay. Be a part of the community that's redefining what's possible not just in the Middle East but the world.

Dubai became a genuine destination, not just for vacationers passing through duty-free but for professionals making real decisions about where to plan their lives. Western executives made Dubai their home, and capital followed them.

Saudi Arabia embarked on its own lofty ambitions with Vision 2030. Its Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman set his sights high. At the Future Investment Initiative forum in Riyadh in 2018, he famously declared that "the new Europe will be in the Middle East." It was beginning to look like he might actually pull it off.

Then came the 2026 conflict, culminating in disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz. And with it, a reminder of how quickly it can all unravel.

War – or even the prospect of it – doesn't just destroy things. It stops things from starting. The professional weighing a Dubai posting decides to wait. The fund moving toward a regional allocation pulls back. The company scouting office space in Riyadh puts the project on hold and then forgets about it.

None of this shows up cleanly in any dataset. But it accumulates. The case for the region was always built on a specific premise: stability here was structural, not situational. That argument got harder to make.

Rebuilding confidence after a shock like this is not a communications problem. You can't message your way back to where you were. What's required is the removal of the thing that broke the confidence in the first place – not its management, not its containment, but its resolution.

And that conversation, followed wherever it honestly leads, ends up in the same place every time: Iran.

There is a version of this discussion that treats Iran purely as a security problem, a source of regional instability to be deterred, negotiated with, or, in some formulations, confronted.

That framing is not wrong, exactly, but it is badly incomplete. This is because Iran is also – and this tends to get lost – one of the most economically underperforming countries on Earth relative to what it actually has.

We're talking about a country with a population of 90+ million, vast energy resources, a strategic geography, highly educated people, and a diaspora scattered from Silicon Valley to London to Toronto to Houston. None of it is running anywhere near what it should be. The gap between Iran's endowments and its output is, by any reasonable



A MAP of the Persian Gulf region. The ceiling on what the region can ultimately become is not set by what happens in Dubai or Riyadh, but Tehran, the writers say. (Shutterstock)

measure, extraordinary.

The explanation isn't complicated: isolation and sanctions. A political system that made both inevitable and then made them worse. Remove those things – actually remove them, not temporarily suspend them – and the trajectory shifts fast.

This is not optimism talking. History showed this. South Korea in the 1960s. China after Deng. India after 1991. Countries with educated populations and productive capacity do not recover incrementally after long periods of restriction. They accelerate. Capital returns. Talent reconnects.

Iran fits that pattern as well as any country you could name. The ingredients have been sitting there. What's been missing is the political context that would let them work.

Economic logic alone doesn't drive transitions. What a transition needs is a focal point, a person or institution that can credibly signal that the change is real and lasting.

Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi is the only figure in Iranian political life today who can plausibly play that role.

His standing rests on a few distinct pillars. Recognition, first – he is simply the most widely known Iranian opposition figure in the world, with genuine familiarity across the diaspora and real visibility inside Iran, where his calls to action have produced responses not easily dismissed.

Then there is how he has defined his own position: not as a ruler waiting to reclaim a throne, but as someone who could hold the center of a fractured opposition long enough for Iranians themselves to determine what comes next. That framing matters. Transitions succeed or fail largely on whether participants believe the key actors are invested in the outcome rather than in themselves.

But there is a third dimension here rooted in Iran's own experience.

In 1971, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi organized the 2,500-year celebration of the Persian monarchy at Persepolis. The event drew heads of state from across the world, generated enormous international press coverage, and served as more than a ceremony. What it actually was, in economic terms, was a signal that Iran was serious, that it saw itself as a country with a future worth engaging, and that the door was open.

Attention came. Capital and tourism followed. Momentum became self-sustaining. Brand is not a soft concept. The way a country presents itself to the world – and who is doing the presenting – shapes decisions that aggregate into real economic outcomes. Iran knew this once.

Today the form would be different, but the function would be identical. A credible transition, anchored by a figure who carries the kind of recognition and legitimacy Pahlavi does, would land not merely as a political development but as a repricing event.

Sanctions relief reconnects Iran to global finance almost immediately. Energy exports scale. Infrastructure draws capital. The basic plumbing of economic participation comes back online. Growth in the first decade would be transformative.

A stable, open Iran – one where human capital, energy wealth, and geographic position are finally allowed to compound – could become one of the world's significant economies within a generation. A GDP in the range of two to three trillion dollars is not a stretch; it is simply what happens when you stop artificially suppressing a country with Iran's endowments.

At that scale, Iran would be the largest economy in the Middle East by a considerable margin, a major

energy corridor, a manufacturing and engineering hub, and a critical connector between Asian and European markets.

A rising Iranian economy changes the math for the entire neighborhood. The Arab states that have spent years and real money building the infrastructure of a diversified, trade-oriented future would find, on their doorstep, a market and a partner rather than a source of instability, cementing the gains of the last two decades.

Saudi Arabia and its neighbors built something real. The ambition was genuine, the investment was real, and the results – before the shock – were visible. But the ceiling on what the region can ultimately become is not set by what happens in Dubai or Riyadh. It is set, in significant part, by what happens in Tehran.

Containment is not an answer to that. It is a way of not answering it while the costs accumulate.

The path to a Middle East that can finally realize what it has always promised – as an investment destination, as a trade hub, as a place people genuinely want to build their lives – runs through a resolution of the Iran question, not around it.

And the most credible path to that resolution, the one grounded in both historical logic and present political reality, runs through Reza Pahlavi.

The Arab states of the Persian Gulf built something real. Iran could make it permanent.

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## Israel's deterrence is on the line

• By YONI MICHANIE

Since its founding in 1948, Israel has survived not merely through military hardware or geographic fortune, but through the strategic logic of deterrence.

Surrounded by hostile neighbors and lacking the strategic depth that larger nations take for granted, Israel learned early that its security depended not just on its capacity to inflict punishment, but on its enemies' belief that it would.

That perception – cultivated through decades of swift, disproportionate, and credible responses to provocation – has been the invisible shield behind every peace agreement Israel has ever signed, every normalization deal it has ever struck, and every war it has managed to avoid.

Deterrence is not a supplement to Israeli national security. It is its foundation.

That foundation is now cracking – and the pressure is coming not only from Tehran, but from Washington.

The events of the past 24 hours have exposed a dangerous misalignment between American diplomatic imperatives and Israeli strategic realities.

When Hezbollah fired rockets at civilian communities in northern Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered strikes on what Israel identified as a Hezbollah headquarters in the southern suburbs of Beirut – defying President Donald Trump's explicit request to hold back as negotiations with Iran proceeded.

Tehran then escalated, launching waves of ballistic missiles at northern Israel. Trump again urged restraint. Israel again responded, targeting Iranian petrochemical infrastructure and air-defense systems in what it called a large-scale strike.

Now, with Iran declaring it has delivered its "painful response" and signaling a pause contingent on no further Israeli action in Lebanon, Washington appears to believe a fragile equilibrium has been restored.

It has not. What has happened is far more consequential than a ceasefire interruption.

Iran's missile barrage was not an act of desperation. It was a carefully calibrated read of the strategic environment. Tehran has watched Washington pressure Jerusalem to stand down repeatedly in recent weeks – tense phone calls, public rebukes, demands to spare Beirut – and drawn the obvious conclusion: American restraint is now a variable Israel must factor into its own cost-benefit calculus.

Iran is not simply defending Hezbollah. It is racing to reshape the deterrence architecture of the entire Middle East before a potential nuclear deal closes the window. Every missile fired is a data point. Every Israeli hesitation is a lesson learned.

DETERRENCE, AT its core, is about

an adversary's perception of your cost-benefit calculation. It is not about what you are capable of doing – it is about what your enemy believes you will do, and at what cost to themselves.

For decades, Israel's enemies understood that the cost of attacking Israeli civilians was swift, severe, and unconditional retaliation.

That perception was the deterrent. If Israel now fails to respond with sufficient force – or worse, is seen to be subordinating its security decisions to the preferences of an American president navigating midterm elections and oil prices – Iran's updated perception will be devastating: that the costs of complying with Washington outweigh the benefits of maintaining Israeli deterrence. That is an extraordinarily dangerous recalibration.

There is a path back, but it requires strategic clarity that the current moment seems to be discouraging. Iran has declared it is done launching missiles at Israel – provided no further strikes are directed at Hezbollah.

That condition should be read for what it is: an attempt to codify Israeli restraint as the price of regional calm. Jerusalem cannot accept that framing.

The only credible response to an adversary that has just tested your red lines with ballistic missiles is to demonstrate, unambiguously, that the cost of that test was higher than Iran calculated.

That means increasing – not decreasing – the depth and intensity of operations against Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, Beirut, and the Bekaa Valley.

This is not a call for escalation for its own sake. It is a recognition of what deterrence requires. The logic is not punitive; it is perceptual. Israel must restore the enemy's belief that aggression carries consequences that no American diplomatic intervention can neutralize.

Trump's instincts on Iran have, in other contexts, been sound. His maximum pressure campaign rattled Tehran economically in ways that years of multilateral diplomacy could not.

But pressure works only when the adversary believes the pressuring party is unified and resolute. When Iran looks at Washington and Jerusalem today, it does not see unity. It sees an opening. And it is moving through that opening with purpose.

Israel's deterrence has been purchased across 77 years at an extraordinary price – in wars fought, soldiers lost, and a nation perpetually mobilized for its own survival. It cannot be traded away at the negotiating table in exchange for a deal that may not hold and a ceasefire that already isn't. Jerusalem has every right, and every strategic obligation, to act accordingly.

The writer holds a PhD in International Relations Theory from Northeastern University.

# Xi hails shared vision at end of North Korea summit

• By HEEJIN KIM and JOSH ARSLAN

SEOUL/BEIJING (Reuters) – Chinese President Xi Jinping wrapped up on Tuesday his first visit to North Korea in seven years, saying it had established a deeper, more comprehensive understanding yielding a clearer path for development of ties, the official *Xinhua News Agency* said.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and Xi agreed to expand cooperation in the areas of politics, economy, and culture at a summit in Pyongyang that opened a new chapter in ties, the North's official KCNA news agency said.

"The mutual understanding between China and North Korea has become deeper and more comprehensive, and the direction of future development has become clearer and more defined," Xi told his hosts at a luncheon before his departure, *Xinhua* added.

Kim waved both hands as Xi's plane taxied down the tarmac, in footage from China's state broadcaster CCTV, after an enthusiastic send-off by Pyongyang residents, who lined the road to the airport, waving flags and shouting friendship slogans.

Earlier, the leaders jointly planted a fir tree in the grounds of a key political training school for party cadres, which *Xinhua* said symbolized "ever-renewing friendship."

On the second day of his visit to China's only formal treaty ally, Xi had also visited Pyongyang's Sino-Korean Friendship Tower that commemorates Chinese soldiers who died in the Korean War, the agency added.

Both agreed to strive for closer strategic communication through visits by high-level officials, KCNA said.

Kim told Xi he would fully support the "One China principle," which Beijing views as meaning that both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one



CHINESE PRESIDENT Xi Jinping and his wife, first lady Peng Liyuan, are welcomed by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and his wife Ri Sol Ju, during Xi's state visit to Pyongyang earlier this week. (KCNA via Reuters)

country, regardless of changes in the international situation.

China views democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory and has never renounced the use of force to bring the island under Beijing's control, although Taipei rejects the sovereignty claims.

Despite the expressions of goodwill, however, analysts saw contrasting priorities in the official summaries of the visit.

While *Xinhua* detailed proposals ranging from high-level exchanges to trade and agriculture, along with restoration of transport links, KCNA cast the summit more broadly as a pact of equal partners, the analysts said.

Pyongyang stressed regime dignity and the neighbors' "special relationship," added Lim Eul-chul, a professor at South Korea's Kyungnam University, while Beijing emphasized practical state-to-state ties and its initiatives for international order.

China is North Korea's biggest trade partner, and analysts have said Xi's trip could focus on trade and tourism.

"North Korea removed elements that could make it look like a subordinate, dependent, or beneficiary party and rewrote the relationship as one between equals," said Hong Min, a senior research fellow at the Korea Institute for National Unification.

"It amplified signals of solidarity, such as anti-US and Taiwan-related messages, while erasing signals of dependence or subordination."

China is North Korea's biggest trade partner, and analysts have said Xi's trip could focus on trade and tourism.

"I feel that sometimes the two countries may appear quite friendly on the surface, but in reality there are still many issues," said Zhu, a 43-year-old doctor in Beijing who declined to give her full name.

## PATRIOTIC SONGS

Xi and First Lady Peng Liyuan attended a performance of Chinese and North Korean songs, accompanied by Kim and his wife, Ri Sol-ju, that highlighted "the value and closeness of DPRK-China friendship," KCNA said.

It was referring to the North's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Chinese-North Korean relations had reached a "new historical starting point," Xi said at a banquet hosted by Kim for the 65th anniversary of the neighbors' friendship treaty, KCNA added.

Xi vowed that Beijing would not swerve from its commitment to safeguard common interests, *Xinhua* said on Monday.

But North Korean media did not mention if Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program or relations with the United States figured in the talks. Such an absence suggests Beijing would like the visit cast in terms of neighborly ties, said Ja Ian Chong, a political science professor at the National University of Singapore.

# Platner's past under scrutiny in key Maine Senate primary

• By ANDY SULLIVAN

Maine oyster farmer Graham Platner faced Democratic voters on Tuesday under scrutiny over online posts, a Nazi-linked tattoo, and allegations he sent explicit texts in a Senate race that could determine whether his party wins control of the US Senate in November.

Platner, a Marine veteran who has campaigned as a populist outsider, is seen as the likely winner of Tuesday's primary.

A newcomer to politics, he faces persistent questions about his past behavior that will loom large if he wins the nomination to take on incumbent Republican Senator Susan Collins, 73, a moderate who has won comfortable election victories since 1996 despite the state trending Democratic.

He faces allegations that he sent sexually explicit texts to multiple women last year, while former girlfriends told *The New York Times* that at times he behaved in ways they described as unsettling.

Platner, 41, has apologized for his behavior and said he struggled with post-traumatic stress disorder and depression following combat duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. He said he didn't know the tattoo resembled a Nazi insignia and had it covered up last year.

The Maine Senate race is seen by analysts as one of the most competitive in the November midterm elections, when control of the Senate and the House of Representatives is at stake. Democrats need to pick up four seats from Republicans to win a majority in the 100-seat Senate.

While some Democrats have called the revelations about Platner's past disturbing, progressive backers like Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont have stuck with him, and no prominent figures in the party have called for him to drop out. Platner did not mention the controversies – nor was he asked about them – at an hour-long town hall in Portland, Maine, on Sunday.



DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE for Senate Graham Platner holds up a handmade card given to him by an audience member, reading 'We are your Graham! and we've got your back,' during a campaign town hall meeting in Portland, Maine, this week. (Brian Snyder/Reuters)

Platner's background may not be disqualifying for Democratic voters, but it may be a more significant factor in the match-up against Collins.

"She doesn't always vote the way I like, but I call her the lesser of two evils. I hate to say it, but the other side is... there's a lot of negative things coming out that I wouldn't want in a dog catcher in my town," Barbara Fenlason, 76, a piano teacher from Verona Island, Maine, told Reuters last week.

Democrats aren't without options if more controversies emerge. The party can replace Platner if he wins the primary but drops out before July 13, according to state law. His top rival, Governor Janet Mills, suspended her campaign in April but said last week that she remains on the ballot.

Maine Democrats will also pick a candidate to help them retain control of a Republican-leaning House seat that covers the state's forested interior.

With centrist Democrat Jared Golden retiring, Democrats will choose between State Senator Joe Baldacci, who is seen as the most moderate candidate, and a trio of progressives: Matt Dunlap, the state auditor, former congressional aide Jordan Wood, and social worker Paige Loud.

Paul LePage, the combative former governor, is expected to win the Republican nomination.

The winner of these contests might not be known for days, as the state uses a ranked-choice voting system that can take time to tabulate.

Voters in Nevada, North Dakota, and South Carolina also cast ballots on Tuesday.

In South Carolina, the crowded Republican gubernatorial primary includes Representative Nancy Mace, who has occasionally tangled with other members of her party, and Lieutenant Governor Pamela Evette, who has been endorsed by her fellow Republican, President Donald Trump.

In Nevada, video game composer Marty O'Donnell has won Trump's endorsement and is seen as the leading candidate to take on incumbent Democratic Representative Susie Lee in a Republican-leaning Las Vegas district.

Other Republican candidates include Jeff Gunter, a former ambassador to Iceland, and neurosurgeon Aury Nagy.

Lee also faces a primary challenger in cardiologist James Lally, who has criticized her support for Israel. (Reuters)

## FROM CARTEL PRISON TO CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND:

# The transformation of Mexican World Cup host Monterrey

• By LAURA GOTTSIEDNER and DANIEL BECERRIL

MONTERREY (Reuters) – On a recent afternoon in northern Mexico, about a dozen children played soccer in an idyllic park on a site where, a decade earlier, 49 people had died in a vicious battle between two warring cartels fighting for control of one of Mexico's most violent prisons.

The episode – in which many inmates were hacked to death with knives or bludgeoned with chairs – in the notorious Topo Chico prison was one of the bloodiest in the violence that consumed the metropolitan area of Monterrey in the early 2010s.

The same drug war is still ravaging parts of Mexico, sparking concerns for the security of fans at the World Cup that kicks off this week. Guadalajara – where in February cartel members torched cars and set up roadblocks in retaliation for the US-backed capture of one of the most wanted drug lords – is particularly under the spotlight.

But in Monterrey, which is slated to host four World Cup matches, residents and tourists are more concerned about traffic and smog than security. Public safety has improved dramatically over the past 15 years, with heavy investment in policing and a broader economic rise helping to make Monterrey one of Mexico's safest major cities.

Perhaps nowhere represents the city's transformation more than this expanse of trees, fields, and playgrounds called Liberty Park, located on the site of the old Topo Chico prison. The city has constructed the park, first opened in 2021, in various stages, adding a new playground and sports pitch ahead of the World Cup.

"We could hear the riots, the explosions, the helicop-

ters, and the soldiers' patrols all over this area," recalled Francisco Rodriguez Castillo, 66, who has lived a few blocks from the prison-turned-park for decades.

Now, Rodriguez, a retired accountant, jogs with a running group in the park in the mornings and marvels at the children playing there well after dark.

"It's an enormous change," he said. When authorities dismantled the 76-year-old prison in 2019, one of the final jobs was to sweep the prison's soccer field and the rest of the facility in search of clandestine graves, although none were found.

The city then turned the site into a park, and for residents like Gala Jazmin Rojas Cruz, it felt like a momentous opportunity – especially for children in the neighborhood.

"When I was a child, I had nowhere to play," said the 30-year-old lawyer.

She recalled how it was too dangerous to play in the street outside and how she and other families often took shelter when the sound of gunshots rang out, alerting residents to a prison riot.

"(We knew) that at that very moment people were being killed," she said.

In 2023, officials announced the planned construction of a children's hospital on the grounds of the former prison.

But the plan sparked fierce resistance from residents, including Rojas and Rodriguez, who staged protests and mounted legal challenges that ultimately succeeded in preserving Liberty Park.

To ward against future efforts to build on the land, the group then campaigned for authorities to declare the park a natural protected area. State officials are in the process of finalizing its new status.



CHILDREN TAKE part in a soccer match in Monterrey in March. (Raquel Cunha/Reuters)

# Climate cost of expanded tourney under scrutiny as emissions soar

• By LORI EWING

MANCHESTER, England (Reuters) – The World Cup kicks off on Thursday as a celebration of goals, drama, and global fandom, but it is also expected to carry a climate cost more than double that of Qatar 2022, throwing a harsh spotlight on the environmental price of football's expanding showpiece.

The tournament's enlarged footprint will see 48 teams and venues scattered across North America and an assessment published last week by global carbon accounting platform Greenly estimates it could generate 7.8 million metric tons of carbon dioxide.

That is roughly equivalent to the annual emissions of 1.7 million cars, or the yearly emissions of Sierra Leone, making it the most polluting World Cup ever staged, according to academics and campaigners, driven mostly by the vast distances that teams, fans, and media will travel across the three-country, 16-city format.

"I think the World Cup, in theory, is really fun for the sport and for visibility – but bad from a climate standpoint," author and sports ecologist Madeleine Orr told Reuters.

The numbers underline that concern. Researchers estimate that as much as 87% of the tournament's emissions will come from travel – chiefly flights – as millions of fans cross continents to follow their teams.

The sheer geographical spread of the tournament that stretches 2,800 miles from Vancouver to Miami makes it inherently more carbon-intensive than the compact Qatar event, which was criticized for building seven new stadiums. Greenhouse gas emissions from Qatar were calculated at approximately 3.8 million tons.

While no new stadiums were built this time around, expanding to more teams and spreading matches across distant host cities simply shifted the overall environmental cost, according to David Gogishvili, a geographer at the University of Lausanne.

"Increase the number of the teams and then put them in a country where there needs to be significant travel first to get there by air, and then signifi-

cant travel between the host locations, okay, we're getting rid of one source of negative environmental influence, but then we are increasing it in another," Gogishvili told Reuters.

The World Cup venues are divided into three regional clusters – Western, Central, and Eastern – in an effort to reduce travel distances.

England and its fans have the heaviest travel burden among the tournament favorites, with their three group games in Dallas, Boston, and New Jersey covering 1,721 miles.

At the United Nations COP26 climate summit in 2021, FIFA pledged to halve its carbon emissions by 2030, and reach net zero by 2040 as part of the UN Sports for Climate Action Framework.

FIFA has not set a specific carbon target for the World Cup.

Gogishvili compared football's global body to the International Olympic Committee, which is "more or less actually following the reduction target" to halve the carbon footprint by 2050.

"At least they are on the right path," Gogishvili said.

FIFA said it welcomed scrutiny. "Numerous environmental initiatives related to the tournament are being implemented by FIFA and the Host Cities before, during, and after the tournament," the body said in a statement to Reuters.

FIFA pointed to the use of existing stadiums, encouraging fans to use public transport, reducing reliance on diesel generators, and recycling and food waste initiatives.

## Modern viewing habits

The expansion means an extra 16 teams, including four debutants: Cape Verde, Curacao, Jordan, and Uzbekistan.

"That's great [for those countries], but at what cost?" said Orr, who wrote "Warming Up: How Climate Change is Changing Sport."

The competition is not only growing – how fans consume it, via multiple devices and platforms, is also changing. And that shift points to an often overlooked slice of the tournament's

carbon footprint: the digital ecosystem that underpins modern sport.

"The part of the carbon footprint that never gets discussed, but is massive, massive, is the digital footprint," Orr said.

Broadcasting, streaming, data feeds, and betting platforms all require enormous energy inputs, from data centers to satellites to the billions of devices fans use to follow matches, the Canadian explained.

The cumulative effect is vast, particularly in an era of multi-screen viewing.

The United Kingdom's National Energy System Operator estimated each of Scotland and England's group games could see 600 megawatts more electricity being used nationally, the equivalent of the total electricity demand for Glasgow and Leeds combined.

"You have to consider that everybody watching in every place all around the world is part of this," Orr said. "And the vast majority of them are watching on two screens, they're watching on their TV, and then they're following on their phone."

Unlike flights or stadium construction, those emissions are rarely factored into official sustainability calculations.

"When we think about the impact of these events, we do actually have to think about the whole scope," Orr said. FIFA said it was committed to integrating sustainability into the World Cup "guided by a comprehensive Sustainability and Human Rights Strategy that focuses on addressing emissions, improving resource efficiency and creating a positive legacy across host communities."

Gogishvili pointed to what he sees as a lack of urgency within the governing body.

"I love football, by the way," said the Georgian and lifelong Manchester United fan.

"[But] FIFA clearly does not prioritize reduction of its negative environmental influence... there needs to be pressure on them from media, from players, and association countries, from researchers, from the governments, from the public."

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## EDITORIALS

# If California trusts voters on new taxes, why doesn't Illinois?

Why do Californians routinely weigh in on tax hikes while Illinoisans rarely get the chance?

Here's why we ask: While much of the national attention following California's June 2 elections focused on Los Angeles' mayoral race (wherein the fiscal conservative reality TV star did not advance), another instructive story emerged elsewhere on the ballot: voters all across the state repeatedly rejected requests for higher taxes.

Even in Los Angeles, the fate of a sales tax hike pitched as a way to gin up health care funds is still uncertain — as of Tuesday, “yes” votes were ahead of the “no” votes by less than a percentage point, 50.35% to 49.65%, hardly a ringing endorsement for a tax increase even in deep-blue Los Angeles County. (As reported elsewhere at length, California vote tallying is a long and drawn out process, meaning some results may take weeks to be confirmed.)

In Illinois, if politicians decide to raise the sales tax, they don't ask us first. They just do it. Wonder why.

In California, on the other hand, voters get a say. And they say no a whole lot.

For example, San Diego voters appear to have rejected a second homes tax — of \$8,000 in 2027 and \$10,000 in 2028 — that would've levied fees on residences left unoccupied for more than half the year.

Oakland voters bucked a union-backed property tax hike. Measure E, which was voted down 54.28% to 45.72%, would've created a new “parcel tax” of \$192 on single-family homes expected to generate \$34 million per year “for nine years” — assuming the good folks in charge at the time the tax expires don't push for a renewal. Fortunately, Oakland voters would get to weigh in again, if that would've been the case. Unlike their counterparts in Illinois, where “temporary” tax hikes tend to stick around.

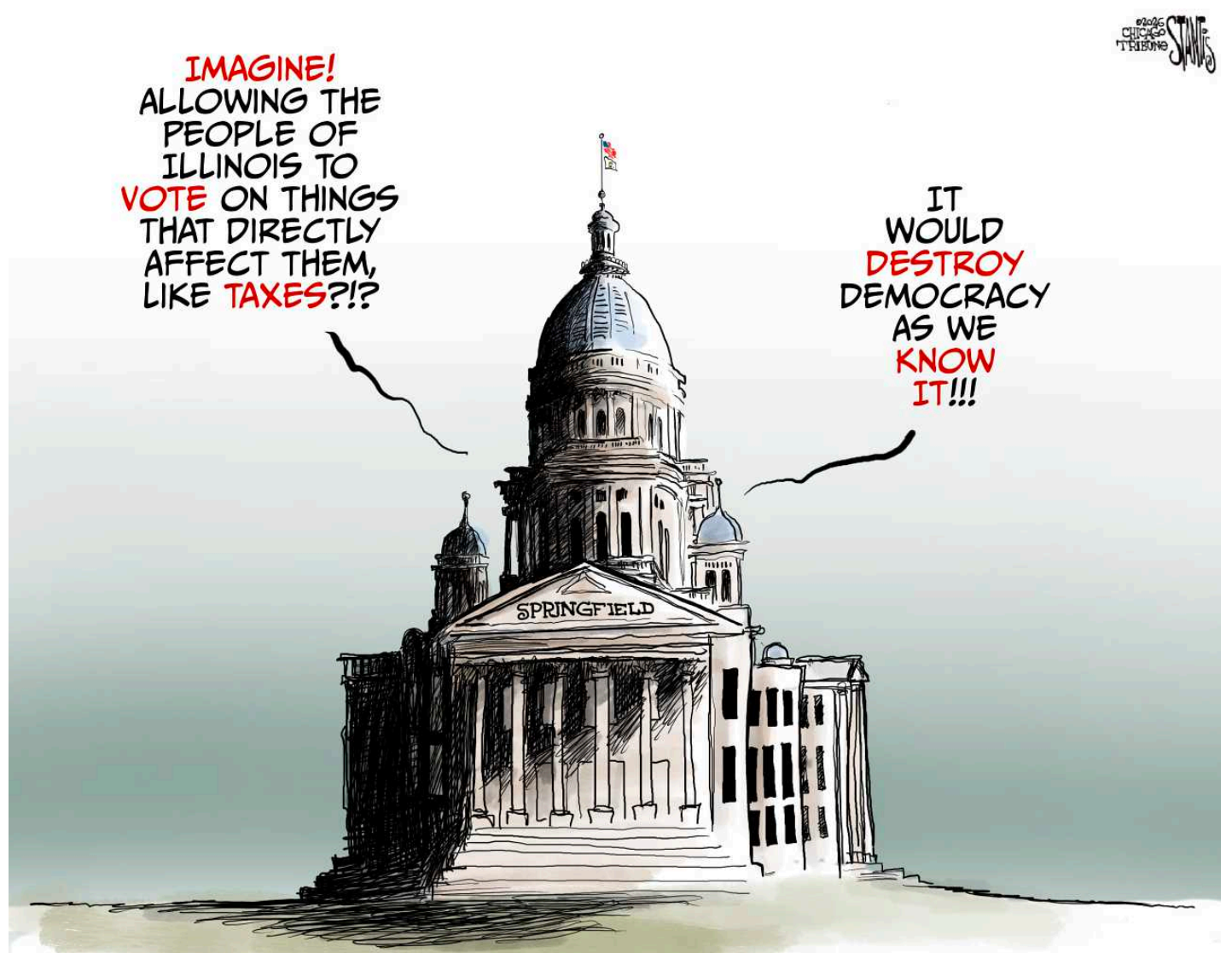
Even San Francisco overwhelmingly rejected a proposal to increase taxes on large companies after approving a similar tax six years ago that drove jobs out of the city.

These are blue cities in a blue state. All have Democratic mayors, and each one voted for former Vice President Kamala Harris in 2024.

Just like Chicago.

But they don't like tax hikes, especially when folks there are already paying through the nose. California, like Illinois, is home to some of the highest taxes in the country. The cost of living isn't cheap, either.

California voters' power comes from Proposition 218, the “Right to Vote on Taxes Act,” a constitutional amendment



SCOTT STANTIS/FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

voters approved in 1996, which strengthens existing protections and requires voter approval on local tax increases.

When given the chance, voters here have shown the same distaste and distrust for new taxation.

In March 2024, Mayor Brandon Johnson suffered his first major public defeat when Chicago voters shot down his signature “Bring Chicago Home” initiative, which would have tripled the transfer tax on property sales over \$1 million and quadrupled that tax on any portion of property sales over \$1.5 million, affecting not just single-family homes but also multifamily buildings and commercial property.

And in 2020, despite Gov. JB Pritzker pouring \$58 million of his own money behind a push to replace Illinois' flat income tax with a graduated one, Illi-

noisians voted it down. As we wrote after the vote, this campaign fell flat because it was built on a disingenuous premise: The amendment would have given Springfield lawmakers the freedom to set different rates on all, not just the rich. And Springfield has not earned voters' trust.

That trust is sacred and, once broken, merits better safeguards against the perpetual threat of regular folks paying more.

Much like California before Prop 218, the protections offered to Illinois taxpayers are insufficient. Illinois taxpayers do have a limited referendum mechanism under the Property Tax Extension Limitation Law. But unlike California's Prop 218, which broadly requires voter approval for many local tax increases, Illinois generally allows elected officials to raise taxes without direct voter consent. What Illinois lacks is anything resembling California's broad

taxpayer veto over local tax increases.

The question here is not whether taxes are good or bad, but whether tax increases should require direct voter consent rather than being enacted exclusively through legislative action. In states where generations of legislators and local officials have presided over increasing tax burdens and worsening finances, we think taxpayers deserve a mechanism to stop the madness if the people they elected to represent them are unwilling to do the hard work of reform.

Supporters of California's system argue that essential public services can still be funded because voters often approve taxes they believe are justified. The key difference is that the government must make its case directly to taxpayers and accept the verdict rather than simply imposing the increase.

## Johnson is hamstringing City Council's duties on the hated parking meter sale

We're nearing the point at which the City Council must decide whether to approve the pending sale of Chicago's despised and detested parking meter privatization from 2008 from an initial group of purchasers known as Chicago Parking Meters LLC and led by Morgan Stanley to the New York-based investment firm Stonepeak Partners.

Not so shockingly, it has sparked a battle between Mayor Brandon Johnson's office and a large group of aldermen.

One would think that, given the myriad disagreements between Johnson and a bloc of council members over the budget, public safety and other issues, a unified approach to taking all steps possible to improve the awful meter situation as much as possible would be desirable. It doesn't appear so.

Twenty-two aldermen signed a strongly worded letter on Monday addressed to Johnson. They threatened to vote no on the proposed sale of the parking windfall to Stonepeak, and we believe more aldermen support their position, bringing that number to a majority of the 50-member body.

Their reason isn't that they think the city has the legal standing to “just say no” to the sale. One of the signatories, 32nd Ward Ald. Scott Waguespack has said publicly more

than once that the original meter deal negotiated by Mayor Richard M. Daley's administration and quickly muscled through the council, is “ironclad.” (Waguespack was one of just five council members smart enough to vote against the original meter deal in 2008.)

Instead, they accuse the mayor's office of withholding basic information from them, including the details of the administration's bid, which it later decided not to finalize, to buy back the meters and all the analyses performed by the city's finance and legal teams on the issue. They say the mayor's office told them only on May 18 of the existence of a nondisclosure agreement with Morgan Stanley that prevented City Hall from sharing those details with aldermen.

In the letter, the aldermen expressed disbelief that a mayoral administration would enter into an arrangement in which its own subject matter experts couldn't speak in depth with the council on a matter that required council approval.

“This is, to our knowledge, without precedent in Chicago city government,” they wrote.

Sounds like a terrible predicament. Except it's not.

We've confirmed from two sources that

Morgan Stanley lifted the NDA last week.

So the mayor's office should have informed the council right away of that development and quickly furnished the materials, right?

That didn't happen, and the alders felt compelled on Monday to air their grievances with the fifth floor in public. As we write, the mayor's office hasn't responded officially to the council members.

We asked the mayor's office whether it would cooperate with the council now that the NDA issue is moot. Imagine our surprise when they told us the confidentiality agreement “is still in effect.”

It seems to us as if the administration wants its hands to be tied.

So what's going on here? What should be a simple, straightforward matter of an administration and council rowing in the same direction on an issue on which both ostensibly agree has become a needlessly convoluted tug-of-war. All Chicagoans hate the parking-meter deal. It exacerbates the annual budget shortfalls that have plagued Johnson's term more than any other single issue.

Why, if you're Brandon Johnson, would you want to be perceived as obstructionist on something that unites Chicagoans?

We also understand that representatives of Stonepeak are expected to answer questions from and provide feedback to aldermen next week.

So time is growing short. Under the terms of the original deal, the council has about six weeks to make a determination on the sale, we're told.

That's why the mayor's office's lack of cooperation with the council is so aggravating. The issue of the NDA should have been a non-issue weeks ago. The council and its attorneys and counselors should have had access to the same information the mayor's office had weeks ago as well.

We don't know how much difference this information blackout ultimately will make in terms of winning concessions from Stonepeak; we've already editorialized that Stonepeak, which has a high-minded set of purposes, should make some meaningful concessions to get this likely lucrative deal done, not just as a goodwill gesture but as a deposit in the favor bank it might well need in the future.

Chicagoans expect Mayor Johnson and the council to work together to turn over every rock in order to make this debilitating meter situation less onerous. Why is our mayor not doing that?

### ON THIS DAY 61 YEARS AGO ANOTHER SCANDAL IN TRAFFIC COURT

Wholesale bribery in the Chicago Traffic court has been revealed by a Tribune investigation. The evidence so far developed indicates that 150 or more payoffs were made daily to fix tickets for traffic violations and that hundreds of other tickets were “taken care of” for politicians. The payoffs ranged from \$10 for a minor violation to \$1,800 for a drunk driving charge.

This scandal is the worst in the Traffic court since 1959, when an investigation aided by The Tribune led to the resignation of 70 court employes and indictments of 33 persons. The grand jury at that time heard evidence that hundreds of thousands of dollars in traffic fines vanished into various pockets when cases were recorded as dismissed although the fines were paid.

The 1959 scandal led to a study of the Traffic court ... list-

ing 74 recommendations to end the graft, waste, and chaos. One of the recommendations was for a merit system in the hiring of the 250 deputy court clerks and other employes.

This recommendation was not adopted. Court employes still owe their jobs to the Democratic party organization. Many of them are precinct captains. Apparently nothing much has been changed, in spite of the traffic institute study and the judicial amendment to the state constitution which was expected to bring reforms to all the courts. ...

It is inconceivable that large scale bribery to evade punishment for traffic offenses could be carried on without the collusion or connivance of some judges and magistrates. Tickets for moving traffic violations require that the defendants appear in court. ... Suspension of any

judge connected with the racket should be followed by his removal ...

... The Tribune found that some violators managed to obtain several licenses and thus escaped suspension or revocation in spite of numerous offenses. Apparently it is possible to get a second driver license merely by changing a single numeral in the applicant's birth date.

The latest scandal is much more serious because it concerns motorists who ought to be fined, jailed, or deprived of their licenses.

It is one thing to fix a parking ticket as a favor to a motorist in the hope of getting his vote. It is quite another thing when political jobholders permit drunk and reckless drivers to escape punishment by paying bribes.

Tribune editorial board, June 10, 1965

## OPINION

# CPS needs the federal government to be a partner, not a ringleader in show trials

By Taneesha Henderson  
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

The same people in Washington who are making students hungrier, removing their families' access to healthcare and stripping resources from our schools are subpoenaing Chicago Public Schools CEO Macquiline King and holding a hearing about parental rights and the content in our classrooms.

As a Black mother of a CPS student and as a 10-year educator in our schools, I can tell you that if they want to see what's harming students, they should look in the mirror. If they want to see how to protect and support student success, especially in a majority Black and brown school district like ours, they should be investing in our district, not investigating it.

In Chicago, we're reconstructing after the damage done when then-Mayor Rahm Emanuel closed 50 schools in predominantly Black and low-income neighborhoods in the city. We're rebuilding from the generations of disinvestment. And we are creating schools that can provide world-class education by also addressing the systemic inequities of trauma, poverty and racism — whose impact doesn't go away just because a school bell rings.

The school my daughter attended had teachers who brought in programs that helped her understand who she was and why that mattered, who refused to let her disappear into the middle of the room. She just graduated eighth grade with straight A's. I am proud of her. I am also clear-eyed about what it took to get her there, the extra work so many Black families put in for our children's success and what is still missing from our district to make that universal.

We need the federal government to be a partner in that effort, not a ringleader in political show trials. In the past, the U.S. Department of Education played a crucial role in upholding civil rights and making our schools more welcoming. When the Departments of Education and Justice issued guidelines warning against zero-tolerance discipline



Chicago Public Schools CEO Macquiline King, center, chats at an event at Edmund Burke Elementary School on April 13. ANTONIO PEREZ/TRIBUNE

policies pushing Black students out of classrooms, Illinois passed landmark legislation making suspension and expulsion a last resort. In Chicago, Black students had been suspended at more than six times the rate of white students in 2017, according to an analysis by The Chicago Reporter. That is what accountability from Washington looks like when it works.

This week's hearing is a warning that the federal government is now doing the opposite.

Instead of advancing civil rights, it is outright attacking them. Instead of supporting civics education, it is deeming that kind of education inappropriate.

Programs that lift all, such as CPS' Black Student Success Plan, are not just mandated by Illinois state law, they are designed to

reduce discipline disparities, put more Black teachers in classrooms, bring culturally responsive teaching into schools and close a gap that I have been watching widen my entire career.

My first college paper 20 years ago was on that gap. We are still having the same conversation in 2026.

This plan is Chicago's attempt to finally change that. It is a reflection of our values today to make better the impact of segregationist values from yesterday.

But now President Donald Trump's administration is calling it racial discrimination. These officials are gutting the very Department of Education that once forced this city to reckon with how it was treating Black children. They want to eliminate that kind of accountability

permanently, and they want every other city watching to know what happens when you refuse to go along.

This is not about parents or the content of our curriculum. It is not about fairness to other students. Good schools recognize a need and respond to it — whether it be for students with disabilities, English learners, students experiencing homelessness or students in communities affected by racism. When you bring mental health support into a school, every child benefits. When you bring culturally responsive teaching into a classroom, every child in that building learns in a richer environment.

Chicago is not being investigated for any reason other than one of the largest and most diverse school districts in the country is

actually welcoming and affirming its student body. This is an anathema to the vision this administration has for the country, and it wants to make an example of us.

I come to work every day because I believe in what Chicago is trying to build for its children. Federal officials can call it whatever they want. As a mother, a teacher and someone who has spent years studying what children need to thrive, I know what it actually is. A city that decided its Black children are worth fighting for.

That is the Chicago they are afraid of.

*Taneesha Henderson, M.Ed., MSW, is a Chicago special education teacher of 10 years and a member of the Chicago Teachers Union.*

## Six years after George Floyd's murder, a hard-won shift in public safety is under threat

By Diane Goldstein  
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

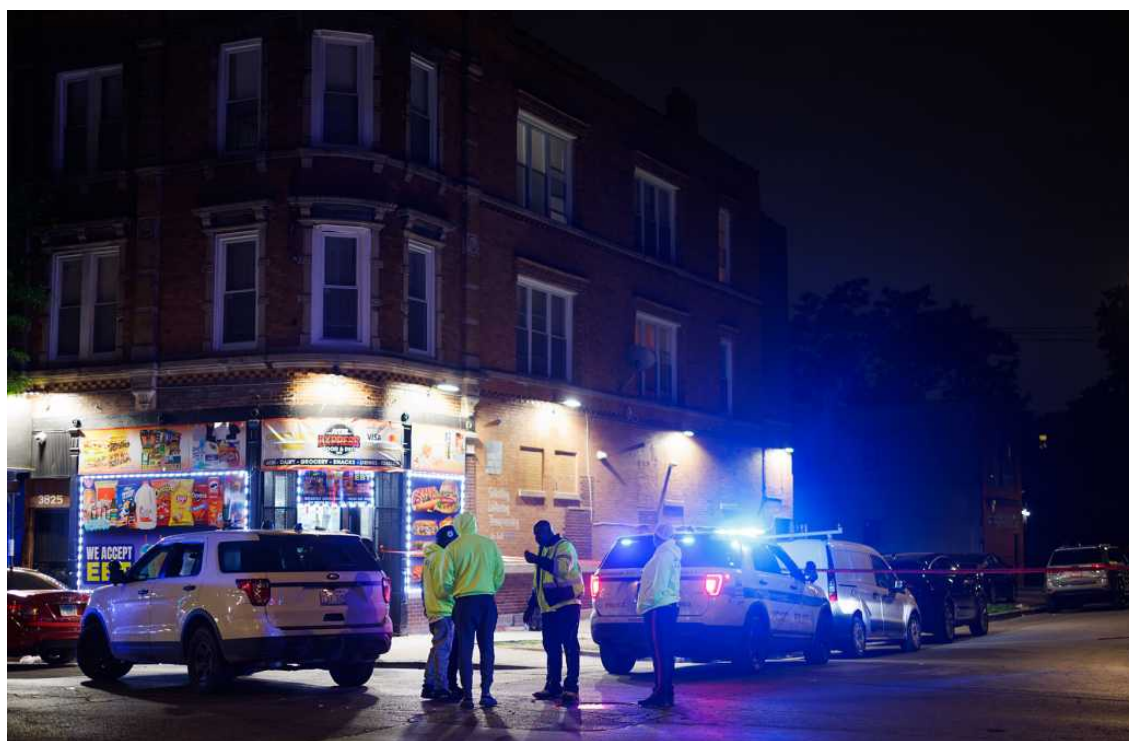
Six years ago, in the midst of a national reckoning over race, policing and public safety ignited by the murder of George Floyd, few people would have predicted where the country would find itself today. Following sharp declines in violent crime, many communities across the nation are now safer than they've ever been before. But even fewer would have predicted how we got here — or how quickly we might now be at risk of undermining that progress.

Not long ago, the outlook was grim. In the years following 2020, cities nationwide experienced alarming increases in homicides, shootings and other crime as the COVID-19 pandemic upended daily life, destabilized local economies and deepened distrust in public institutions.

As a career law enforcement professional, I watched the national debate over public safety after Floyd's murder quickly harden into a false binary. On one side were demands to respond to rising crime by doubling down on traditional enforcement and expanding police budgets. On the other were calls to shift resources away from policing and toward social supports and services.

In practice, many communities charted a path somewhere in between. Police continued to play a critical role in public safety, but state and local governments also invested heavily in community-based approaches through federal COVID-19 recovery dollars, increased local spending and public-private partnerships. That funding expanded violence interruption programs, behavioral health response teams, youth outreach initiatives, victim support services, hospital-based intervention programs and other community-centered safety strategies. In many places, law enforcement officials championed these efforts, recognizing them as an asset — not a threat — to the shared goal of keeping communities safe.

Now, many of those same



Violence interrupters stand near officers investigating the scene where two women were shot while sitting in a vehicle in the 700 block of North Avers Avenue in the Humboldt Park neighborhood of Chicago during Memorial Day weekend on May 22. ARMANDO L. SANCHEZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

programs are facing an uncertain future as federal, state and local leaders retreat from the investments that helped communities stabilize after the pandemic. As COVID-19-era funding expires, policymakers are redirecting resources away from these community-centered approaches and toward more politically familiar enforcement-first responses. If this trend continues, it could threaten to undercut the public safety gains communities have fought hard to achieve.

We are already seeing the impact of these shifting priorities. Across the country, community-based organizations are being forced to reduce staffing and capacity. Violence prevention groups in Chicago, New York, Oakland, California, and other cities have warned that they may have to scale back operations despite promising declines in shootings and homicides. Shootings in Chicago crept up over the first quarter of 2026. And with violence historically rising during

the summer months, there is a looming possibility of further backsliding.

The warning signs are equally clear at the federal level. The Department of Justice has already canceled hundreds of grants supporting violence prevention, victim services, youth programming, addiction treatment and other community-based safety efforts while redirecting resources toward more traditional enforcement priorities. Organizations that relied on this funding are now paring back the work many communities have come to depend on.

I've spent more than two decades in law enforcement. This policy direction suggests a fundamental misunderstanding of how public safety is actually created and sustained.

One of the most important lessons I learned in policing is that real, sustainable public safety cannot be built through enforcement alone. Safe communities depend on a broader ecosystem of

responses, where police co-exist with violence prevention workers, behavioral health responders, outreach teams, service providers and neighborhood organizations that help address problems before they escalate.

For too long, law enforcement has been treated as the default response to every societal ill. Those of us who have worn the badge understand its limits. We cannot effectively solve issues connected to addiction, mental illness, homelessness, trauma, poverty or instability — nor should we be expected to.

The investments of the past several years reflected the beginning of a long-overdue recognition that public safety must extend beyond policing. Many communities started reinforcing systems that uplifted prevention, treatment, crisis response and community-based support as essential tools for reducing harm before it occurs.

The irony is that many law enforcement professionals have

spent years advocating for exactly the kinds of partnerships now at risk. Police officers routinely respond to service calls involving social problems we are not equipped to handle. In many cases, our presence only increases the likelihood of violence or other negative outcomes. When we invest in violence prevention workers, community responder programs and support services, it strengthens public safety and acts as a force multiplier for police, freeing up officers to focus on more serious crime.

This is why the current moment carries both promise and danger.

During this period of significant safety, the country has an opportunity to finally move beyond the false choices that dominated the public safety debate after 2020 and build a more durable, effective framework for keeping communities safe. We can acknowledge the value of policing while also recognizing that safer communities require a wider network of response, support and intervention. We can back law enforcement while also investing in approaches that reduce violence before it occurs. And as many police officers will attest, those investments make policing more effective, not less.

The past several years have shown what becomes possible when communities treat public safety as a shared responsibility rather than a task assigned almost exclusively to law enforcement. At a moment when many cities are experiencing remarkable reductions in crime, the question now is whether policymakers will build on that progress — or retreat into the same shortsighted approaches that left too many communities struggling in the first place.

*Retired Lt. Diane Goldstein is a 21-year police veteran and executive director of the Law Enforcement Action Partnership, known as LEAP, a nonprofit group of police, judges and other law enforcement professionals who support policies that improve public safety and police-community relations.*

## OPINION



Several hundred people participate in the Alba Homes neighborhood bicentennial parade on June 19, 1976, near 1324 S. Loomis Blvd. in Chicago. MICHAEL BUDRYS/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

# What makes the US so special

By Jon Boorstin  
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

President Donald Trump is proud of America, and he wants you to be proud too. He chides the head of the Smithsonian Institution for his 250th anniversary exhibits because they don't say we're special enough, and he issues a directive to "Celebrate American Exceptionalism."

Fifty years ago, when my father, Daniel Boorstin, was librarian of Congress during our nation's 200th anniversary, he was derided for saying we were too special. His bestselling three-volume epic "The Americans" won the Pulitzer Prize. He appeared on television and in Esquire, Time, Reader's Digest and Woman's World; wrote children's history and school texts; and counseled our leaders. But the naysayers called him "the Fourth of July fireworks historian." Trump's

kind of guy, you'd think. Quite the opposite.

The problem for Trump is that what he sees as our great weakness is exactly what my father said makes us special.

Trump sees us as a model for the world. Daniel said that "nothing could be more un-American than to urge other countries to imitate America." Because they can't.

What makes the United States special is how we were formed by the infusion of people eager to find common ground.

"In Western Europe, with insignificant exceptions," Daniel writes, "men found themselves wherever they were in the nineteenth century because they were born there. The act of choice, of consciously choosing their particular community, had been made, if ever, only by remote ancestors — the contemporaries of Beowulf, William the Conqueror, Siegfried,

or Aeneas. On the other hand, because we were an immigrant nation, everybody here, except the Indians and the Negroes and those others who had been forcibly transported, was here because he or a recent ancestor (a father, a grandfather, or great-grandfather) had chosen this place.

"The sense of community was inevitably more vivid and more personal because, for so many in the community, living here had been an act of choice."

In America, community came first. "The voluntary collaborative activities of members of the community were there first, and it was government that came into the interstices," my father writes. "Seldom have people been more anxious than Americans have been to share their common purposes. We are desperately earnest to make our community include as much as possible of our daily life. ... We seldom require

people to subscribe to explicit beliefs; but we still expect people to act and feel as if they believed the same thing."

Before he was librarian of Congress, Daniel headed what is now called the Smithsonian Museum of American History. He laid the groundwork for its bicentennial exhibit "A Nation of Nations."

"In a nation with a tradition of charity," he said, "of harboring and warming the persecuted, the oppressed and the misunderstood, our stock of charity seems to have become large enough for everyone except our nation itself. We have become obsessed by the limits of our achievement and have almost forgotten its extent.

"Here we can demonstrate and celebrate what Americans — all Americans — have accomplished. What we have accomplished individually, but especially what

we have accomplished together. The mood is first person plural. Here we can see what we have done. Here all earlier Americans become ancestors of us all."

Daniel's grandfather was a kosher butcher in Gdansk, Poland. Pauperized by pogroms, he left his pregnant wife and arrived here penniless in Newport News, Virginia. For three years, he was a peddler in the South, going house to house to raise the money to bring over his family. He saw his son, Daniel's father, for the first time in a small town in Georgia.

Daniel believed that all Americans were his ancestors. Let us all think like Dan.

Jon Boorstin is the author of "The American: The Hidden History of Daniel J. Boorstin and His Twentieth Century," publishing on Aug. 1 from University of Georgia Press.

## Voice of the people

### Bears have wasted goodwill

Like all Bears fans, I'm outraged and saddened that the Bears have chosen to abandon their fans and the state, after the Chicago area has supported them for over 100 years (most of which have been losing years). Though there is plenty of blame to go around, the majority of it lies with the Bears, which always take a great idea and find a way to screw it up.

Leave it to the Bears to take all the goodwill created by head coach Ben Johnson and quarterback Caleb Williams and trash it over a new stadium.

The Bears bought the Arlington Heights site and announced they were breaking their lease at Soldier Field. Nobody forced them to do this. Almost immediately, majority owners the McCaskeys and team President and CEO Kevin Warren began looking for a deal. The state proposed megaprojects tax-incentive legislation. A great idea not just for the Bears but also for attracting other businesses. But if we're to believe Bill Cunningham and other Chicago state legislators, when they were considering tax incentives, Warren was meeting with the city about building a stadium in Chicago. How foolish of the Bears.

To the Bears' credit, the Arlington Heights location is ideal. It's close to the airport (for out-of-town Bears fans), major expressways and Metra rail. A great place for the restaurants, bars and hotels the Bears want to build around the stadium for additional revenue and in close proximity to the majority of the Bears fanbase.

Hammond? Not so much. Sorry, but we're not driving from the western and northern suburbs into the Loop, then through the South Side and across the border, so we can enjoy a night out among the steel mills, gun shops and tattoo parlors, only to reverse the trip at the end of the evening.

Again, a great idea screwed up by the Bears.

— Frank Kern, Chicago

### Let Indiana live with decision

Regarding the editorial "Get used to 'Bear Down, Hammond Bears' as Illinois' reputation



After years of speculation that the Bears would move to Arlington Heights, team President Kevin Warren, left, alongside Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson, announces a new plan for a domed lakefront stadium on April 24, 2024. BRIAN CASSELLA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

gets tackled for a loss" (June 7): The Illinois legislature refusing to allow taxpayers to subsidize the billionaire McCaskeys is an "embarrassment"? Au contraire, mes freres.

The greedy owners of the local NFL franchise have played Illinois pols (hurting Illinois taxpayers in the process) for far too long. Indiana's legislature and governor passed the legislation necessary to subsidize a Hammond stadium. This time, Gov. JB Pritzker and the legislature appear to have called the McCaskeys' bluff. Good. Let Indiana taxpayers subsidize a stadium built on a slag heap. They are the proverbial dog that caught the passing car — they now have to live with their impulsive decision. They will rue the day.

— Jay Gerak, Chicago

### Editorial board should ask 'why'

Why? That is one the question never raised in the editorial regarding the Bears' threatened relocation to Hammond. Why should taxpayers have to subsidize an \$8 billion franchise owned by billionaires? Why should Illinois taxpayers, in times when many residents can't afford to meet their basic needs, help wealthy owners price them out of attending the very games their taxes have paid for?

Saying an NFL team is worth keeping, without providing any

analysis, presumes a fact not available anywhere in public record: How do the Bears benefit the city?

— Maulik Sharma, Naperville

### Seeking egregious exemption

I agree with every assertion the Tribune Editorial Board makes in its postmortem on the Bears debacle in the Illinois legislature ("Chicago tanks the Chicago Bears," June 2), especially the one branding the Bears as liars.

But let's be clear: The Bears always have had their much-coveted "property tax certainty," though not quite the version they'd like. Just ask any Cook County homeowner. Everyone knows that property taxes are always certain to rise. The Bears wanted an egregious exemption from this ironclad law, and it just wasn't going to happen.

— Jim Daly, Mount Prospect

### What about the public good?

Go ahead, Indiana, make my day. As described in the Tribune, Springfield ended its spring session scrambling to assemble \$1 billion to \$2 billion in subsidies for one of the wealthiest families in Illinois to build a football stadium. Meanwhile, three safety-net hospitals serving Chicago's most vulnerable residents have collapsed under private equity mismanagement. Westlake is

gone. Weiss Memorial closed last August. West Suburban shut its doors in March and remains mired in court battles over tens of millions in unpaid debt, misappropriated state loans and a billing system failure that wiped out \$500 million in revenue.

We apparently cannot find public money to keep hospitals open to maintain the health of Chicagoans and suburban residents, but we can find it to subsidize "civic pride."

Let the Bears play in Hammond. We can still pack Grant Park for a Super Bowl parade for the Bears, whatever side of the state line they play on. Spare us the tax bill for a vanity project.

Let's find the political will to use public funds for the public good.

— Mohiuddin Ahmed, River Forest

### It is possible to be successful

Much of the value of the Bears brand comes from having "Chicago" as part of their name. For decades, the Bears owners have complained about not getting enough from Chicago, yet the team is one of the highest valued franchises in the NFL.

If the Bears owners feel they are not getting enough, they should move elsewhere and leave the name "Chicago" for another team that is willing to give back to the city.

It is possible to run a successful sports franchise in Chicago. Just ask the Rickettses, Reinsdorfs, Wirtzes or Mansuetos. They can explain how to do it.

— Marilyn Kelly, Chicago

### This is not my team anymore

I've been a Bears fan as long as I can remember, no doubt a result of being born and raised in Chicago. I've been looking forward to next season, spending more time than I should reading about players, coaches, strategies and what may happen. Hopefully, it will be even better than last season.

Then I heard the news that the Bears are likely moving to

Hammond. While hardly unexpected, it was still a shock.

After a while, I surprised myself when I realized my enthusiasm for the Bears had waned. This was not my team anymore.

Perhaps the feeling will come back, but I doubt it will be the same. Maybe it's just me, but if many other fans feel the same, then management will have damaged a once-great franchise.

But it doesn't matter. I no longer care.

— George Ritzlin, Highland Park

### Change to cream and crimson?

I wonder if anyone in Bears management has realized that they will have to rewrite a verse of the team fight song: "You're the pride and joy of Illinois."

Let's not forget the team colors are the same as the University of Illinois. Are they changing to Indiana University colors?

— Frank Chambers Jr., Chicago

### Suggestion for a new name

If the Bears move to Hammond, I believe they should also give up their right to use "Chicago" in their team name. Instead, they could become "the Hammond 'Organ' Grinders."

Works on so many levels.

— Ronda Schiess, River Forest

### Work schedule for lawmakers

The only thing more surprising than the Illinois General Assembly botching the Bears stadium deal was learning that lawmakers won't convene again for five months.

If that's all my tax dollars get in return, I think we need to demand a tougher work schedule.

— Steven Fortuna, Naperville

### Note to readers

The Obama Presidential Center is opening on June 19. Do you have memories of former President Barack Obama you'd like to share? (Sincere thoughts only.) Send a letter of no more than 400 words by Thursday, June 11 to letters@chicagotribune.com. Include your full name and city/town.

For online-exclusive letters, go to [www.chicagotribune.com/letters](http://www.chicagotribune.com/letters). Email your letter submissions, 400 words or less, to [letters@chicagotribune.com](mailto:letters@chicagotribune.com). Include your full name, address and phone number.