Rights and wrongs

The government must not clamp down on dissent and protest

The Constitution of India guarantees all citizens the fundamental right to peaceful assembly and protest. The right to organise, assemble, and speak is at the core of democracy, and the curtailment of any of the fundamental rights is a curtailment of democracy itself. That being the promise of the Constitution to every citizen, regardless of gender, caste, or status, it is unsettling that the Government of India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi is brazenly knocking down those rights through police highhandedness across the country, particularly in Delhi, the capital. Youth and student organisations, such as the CJP, the AISA, SFI and AISF, had called for a peaceful protest on October 10. Instead of ensuring peaceful assembly, as per the law of the land, the Centre ordered a countrywide swoop, where thousands of young people were taken into preventive detention and Delhi was locked down as if under martial law. Trains were cancelled and stopped, passengers waylaid, and journalists, activists, academics, and lawyers assaulted and detained, all in shocking misuse and weaponisation of the law against democracy itself. In the heart of Delhi, police personnel without identification badges have been recorded on video. What Delhi witnessed on Saturday was a repeat, in a greater degree, of the police highhandedness in July against youth protesters. Despite video evidence of male police personnel assaulting women protesters during that episode, months later, neither the government nor the Supreme Court of India has held anyone accountable for the law enforcement excesses.

On October 9, the Court had said that a blanket ban on travel or assembly could not be allowed. But that is exactly what was done in Delhi, as people, including several former Chief Ministers, senior politicians, and lawyers, were rounded up from around the city. On Sunday, the Court, in its hearing, acknowledged the urgency and seriousness of the issue, and repeated its directives. But piecemeal orders and half-hearted lamentations by the Court have had no restraining impact on a government that seems to be doubling down on its practice of branding critics as foreign agents and anti-nationals instead of coming clean on its record. The BJP government is going this far in defence of an official – the Chief Election Commissioner of India, Gyanesh Kumar. Instead of calling for accountability from the Election Commission of India, which has disenfranchised millions of Indians in a clear act of illegality, the BJP and its central and State governments are deploying the strong arm of the state to defend him. That itself suggests that Mr. Kumar's relationship with the BJP is different from his relationship with all other parties. The Modi government should play by the rules, and not misuse power against citizens.

Message of peace

The Nobel Committee has redeemed itself by awarding Navi Pillay

By awarding the 2026 Nobel Peace Prize to South African jurist Navi Pillay, the Norwegian Nobel committee has sought not only to restore its credibility, tarnished by controversial decisions in the recent past, but also to strengthen the voices defending international law. Ms. Pillay served on the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and the International Criminal Court (ICC), and chaired the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Born in Durban in 1941 to a family of Indian Tamil origin, Ms. Pillay grew up in apartheid South Africa, opened her own legal firm in the 1960s and defended anti-apartheid political prisoners and activists on the notorious Robben Island, including Nelson Mandela. Her contributions as a jurist have shaped international criminal law. In 1998, as a part of the Rwanda war crimes tribunal, she co-authored the judgment against Jean-Paul Akayesu, a local politician, recognising that rape and sexual violence constitute acts of genocide. Last year, the Palestine commission that she led concluded that Israel had committed acts of genocide in Gaza and that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant had "incited the commission of genocide" in their speeches and statements. Compared to Barack Obama, the 2009 winner who bombed Libya two years later, or Maria Corina Machado, the 2025 winner who supported Washington's economic strangulation of Venezuela and its illegal strikes on boats in the Caribbean, Ms. Pillay has an untarnished record of standing up for the victims of international crimes.

Ms. Pillay has been honoured at a time when the world is witnessing conflicts, which have effectively jeopardised the law-based international order. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a challenge to the fundamental principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. Israel continues to bomb Gaza, Syria and Lebanon and tighten its occupation of Palestinian territories, with impunity. The U.S. under President Donald Trump – who believes he deserved a Nobel Prize – started a war on Iran on February 28 and killed its Supreme Leader, a flagrant violation of international law and norms. He has also launched a frontal attack on international institutions, including the ICC that has been placed under sanctions. What prevents the world from becoming a Hobbesian jungle where the mighty do as they please is the existence of international law and institutions that hold them accountable. The message of the 2026 Peace Prize is that the fight to strengthen those rules and institutions is part of the struggle for a more peaceful and accountable world.

Changing the guard, confronting the democratic crisis



Mehbooba Mufti
President, Jammu and Kashmir Peoples Democratic Party

Will the exit of Chief Election Commissioner of India Gyanesh Kumar be enough to correct an electoral process that, over the years, has come to be seen as increasingly compromised in favour of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government at the Centre and in several States? With protests now growing across the country, he may eventually be forced out, just as Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan was forced to step down following sustained public pressure. But even then, he could simply be replaced by another, perhaps worse, "yes man". Mr. Kumar's exit may therefore be a starting point, but much more will need to be done to restore the credibility of the electoral process in the "mother of democracy".

Under a cloud

The present controversy is not merely about one Election Commissioner. It is about the credibility of the institution. The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls has already resulted in over 13 crore names being excluded from draft rolls. This has raised grave concerns about the fate of millions of genuine voters and their basic right to vote – concerns that cannot be dismissed so arbitrarily. There are also apprehensions about the integrity and transparency of electronic voting machines (EVMs), including the security of electoral technology, the custody of machines and the auditing process.

Today, all institutions meant to act as checks and balances, including the media, judiciary and executive, are increasingly seen as influenced by a particular ideology, with their independence compromised. The Anna Hazare movement became so powerful largely because the media then did its job with honesty, neutrality and without fear or favour. It questioned those in power relentlessly and brought the concerns of ordinary citizens into every living room. That kind of fearless and independent media scrutiny is nowhere to be seen today.

Then there is the judiciary, which is supposed to oversee the functioning of the executive and intervene whenever constitutional rights are threatened. Where required, it can take *suo motu* cognisance and provide the last line of institutional protection to citizens whose rights have been violated. Yet, during the SIR controversy, serious allegations of wrongful deletions, including cases in which living voters were shown as dead and physically produced before the courts, have not resulted in any tangible action.

The crisis extends beyond one Election Commissioner to democracy's weakened institutional safeguards

In West Bengal, the then Mamata Banerjee government also approached the judiciary over the Election Commission of India (ECI)'s handling of the SIR process. The response, however, has been deeply disappointing, to say the least. The possible disenfranchisement of genuine voters deserved the most rigorous scrutiny, yet the process appears to have been gradually normalised. When institutions meant to safeguard citizens' rights and hold the executive accountable appear compromised, the government acquires enormous power without having to fear the consequences.

It is not just the SIR or the EVMs. It is also the raids and investigations involving Opposition leaders around election time, followed by media narratives that often criminalise individuals before a court has established their guilt. We have seen this over the last decade in the manner in which central investigative agencies have been weaponised not only against political opponents but also against individuals who dare to question the government. Sitting Chief Ministers, Members of Parliament, Ministers and political leaders have faced arrests and investigations over allegations that have yet to be established at trial. The repeated selective targeting of individuals, combined with the amplification of such accusations by sections of the media, has proved beyond doubt the nexus between the present regime and a system it is alleged to have corrupted to the hilt.



The great weakening of democratic checks

When the executive acts, the media amplifies its actions, and the judiciary appears reluctant to intervene, all three pillars of democracy can appear to be working in tandem against the public interest. Anyone who dares to speak up risks being pushed out of the system.

We have seen this within the ECI itself. Election Commissioner Ashok Lavasa openly dissented from decisions giving clean chits to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP president Amit Shah over alleged violations of the Model Code of Conduct during the 2019 Lok Sabha campaign. He subsequently left the ECI before the end of his tenure to take up a position in a lead bank.

Today, one cannot help but ask what fate awaits Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi, who have reportedly recorded objections to several decisions of the ECI under Mr. Kumar, thereby exposing the rot within the system.

This is why the ongoing protests by political parties, civil society groups, non-governmental organisations, the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) and others cannot remain isolated demonstrations. They must evolve into a sustained democratic movement, perhaps closer in spirit to Gandhiji's Satyagraha, to reclaim what has been lost or weakened over the last decade.

Reclaiming the India we knew

The most difficult task, awakening public consciousness, may already have begun. The challenge now is to turn that awakening into a people's movement powerful enough to reclaim the India we once knew – an India where the judiciary could hold even a sitting Prime Minister, such as Indira Gandhi, accountable; where a robust media could question a Prime Minister without fear; and where an Election Commissioner such as T.N. Seshan could exercise his constitutional authority without fear or favour. The beginning has to be a genuinely free and fair electoral process. Removing Gyanesh Kumar may therefore be a necessary starting point, but it is certainly not the end. A democracy survives on public trust. Today, that trust has been severely eroded.

To expect a fully credible election without first rebuilding confidence in the institutions that conduct, monitor and adjudicate elections is like asking for water in the Sahara. What India needs is not merely a change of one Election Commissioner, but an independent system capable of organising elections whose fairness is beyond suspicion. Is the present BJP government willing to do that?

Much more than Gyanesh Kumar has to go if India is to restore the credibility of its electoral system and become a fully fledged democracy. The entire ecosystem that is eating away at the vitals of India's democracy has to go.

Barricades cannot silence the voice of democracy



M.A. Baby
General Secretary, Communist Party of India (Marxist)

The past few months have seen considerable action at the barricades of Jantar Mantar. A recent media investigation on happenings in the Election Commission of India (ECI) sparked a new wave of protests, this time against the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar. The demand for Mr. Kumar's resignation has become a demand for electoral integrity itself. On October 2, 2026, prohibitory orders under Section 163 were imposed across the New Delhi district ahead of the protest against the CEC at Jantar Mantar. A number of Metro stations were closed, and major traffic restrictions were announced.

These measures did not deter protesters, but the mass detentions and restrictions imposed by the Delhi Police raise difficult questions that await answers: Whose capital is this? Whose streets are these? In July 2026, Jantar Mantar, the capital's designated protest site, witnessed one of the biggest youth protests of the year, which eventually culminated in a major victory for the protesters. Since the July 20 NEET protests, the Delhi Police have substantially increased barricading in the area. Closing of the streets and manipulation of the ballot are two sides of the same coin. To protest against the government, citizens must first seek the government's permission. At Jantar Mantar, the Delhi Police have reportedly made it mandatory to submit applications 10 days in advance. The oppressed are allowed to speak against the oppressor only when the oppressor allows it.

The erasure of protest geography

The history of Delhi's protest geography is slowly being erased. The Boat Club was once the designated site for demonstrations before they were shifted to Jantar Mantar. Although Jantar Mantar remains the designated protest site, it is routinely blocked on the pretext of "permission denied". Until the COVID-19 lockdown, the customary rally route ran from Mandi House to Jantar Mantar or the Parliament Street Police Station. Large rallies often began at Ramlila Maidan and culminated on Parliament Street. Since the lockdown, barring a few exceptions, almost no permissions have been granted. Parliament Street was where people symbolically expressed their dissent before their elected representatives.

The legal instrument enabling these blockades is Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), which replaced Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Repeated prohibitory orders have raised concerns about whether restrictions intended to regulate demonstrations are, in practice, preventing them altogether, and unchecked discretion to deny permission for demonstrations challenging the government or its policies.

As protest spaces shrink, citizens must unite to defend the right to dissent

In its 2018 judgment in *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan vs Union of India*, the Supreme Court recognised peaceful protest as a fundamental right and directed the authorities to formulate guidelines permitting regulated demonstrations at Jantar Mantar. Before that, in the Ramlila Maidan case of 2012, the Court affirmed the same principle.

It is not just Delhi. In Bengaluru, protests once held at Town Hall were moved to Freedom Park, only to face restrictions there as well. In 2022, the Karnataka High Court confined demonstrations to Freedom Park. In December 2025, the park was closed entirely for "redevelopment", with electricity and water supplies cut off. In Hyderabad, protests are permitted only at Dharna Chowk. Farmers marching to Delhi in early 2024 faced barricades, barbed wire, tear gas and even trenches along the Haryana border. Preventive detentions, prohibitory orders targeting workers' strikes and student marches, and Internet shutdowns have become standard responses across States. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is the main driver of this national pattern: protests are first relocated, then confined, and finally banned.



Dissent cannot be contained

History shows that whenever those in power curb, restrict or seal the public sphere, the masses always find a way around. The 2011 Tahrir Square movement, Occupy Wall Street, the Paris Commune and the Petrograd Soviets are some examples.

India, too, has witnessed major protests in recent years, including the historic Shaheen Bagh sit-in against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC), the 2020-21 farmers' protests on Delhi's borders, and Left-led workers' and peasants' mobilisations such as the Mahapadav and the Kisan Long March. The Mahapadav of November 2023 brought workers and farmers onto the streets of State capitals across the country for a three-day sit-in.

Spaces are produced through struggle. When the state seals the formal public sphere, resistance creates new spaces at borders, on highways and campuses, across digital networks and in *mohallas*. Repression creates the conditions for such resistance. Every barricade becomes a symbol of dissent and a rallying point. Mohan Bhagwat, Narendra Modi and Amit Shah must understand that dissent cannot be abolished by decree. Internet shutdowns, Metro closures, preventive detentions and imprisonment have not ended people's democratic aspirations. As Pablo Neruda said, they can cut all the flowers, but they cannot prevent spring from arriving. Authoritarian confidence is brittle, and repression is often a sign of political insecurity.

On electoral exclusion

The fight for space is part of a larger fight to defend the Constitution and democratic institutions. The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls threatens mass disenfranchisement of the poor, migrants, minorities, and women. The ECI's data shows that vulnerable sections including short-term migrants, illiterate voters and married women risk being deleted from the rolls. The 2023 Act on the appointment of Election Commissioners removed the Chief Justice of India from the selection panel and gave control to the executive. The Act gives total lifelong protection to the Election Commissioner from civil and criminal prosecution. Even the President of India has protection only as long as he or she is holding office.

By blocking dissent in public and tampering with rolls in private, the BJP regime is hollowing out our democratic republic from both ends. The democratic and secular forces need to link the street, the court, and the ballot into a single democratic offensive. The right to protest is the people's inherent right, won through the freedom struggle and enshrined in Article 19. We demand the restoration of the right to assemble and march at Jantar Mantar and along Parliament Street, and an end to the blanket, permanent use of Section 163 of the BNSS in New Delhi. The government must stop detentions and the violent suppression of peaceful protests. If the authorities barricade Jantar Mantar, we will not only defy those barricades but also, as the people of India, create countless Jantar Mantars in every nook and corner of the country.

Democracy can only be defended when it is practised, and our task is to build the broadest struggle to practise it.

Spring will come.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Electoral transparency

If a 'centralised computer system' can remove millions of voters — as if by a sleight of hand — can millions of aggrieved citizens not collectively demand accountability from a Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) of India whose functioning raises serious questions? Power cannot remain concentrated in one Commissioner, with opaque control over electoral data and arbitrary changes, without inviting public scrutiny. Nor can immunity become a licence for impunity. The ballot cannot be protected by machinery that risks eroding public faith in it.

M. Jameel Ahmed,
Mysuru

It is imperative that all citizens who value democracy, particularly the youth, come together to defend constitutional freedoms through peaceful and non-violent means. Their movement should draw inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi's principles of non-violence and civil resistance. As an octogenarian, I cannot help but feel anxious about the kind of India we will leave behind for future generations. We owe our young people a country in which democratic institutions remain independent, dissent is respected, elections inspire public confidence, and the government is accountable to the people. The time has come for all democratic-minded citizens to reflect seriously on these concerns.

Tharcius S. Fernando,
Chennai

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

The need to preserve the shine of Indian elections



Akshay Rout
Former Director General, Election Commission of India and a public policy commentator

The intense and unabated protests happening around and about the Election Commission of India (ECI) have thrown up a bigger question – whether the much vaunted Indian election is losing its shine. This concern is irrespective of when and how the immediate fire is doused, for the smoke could linger. The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls and its management have raised many questions during the last year, inviting attention, litigation and agitation. But the malaise facing the Indian electoral system is even wider. The unidimensional nature of the present noise might be drowning a larger challenge; the current scenario may only be a wakeup call.

Elections, branded as among India's topmost soft powers for decades, may have finally hit a phase of devaluation. The country's enviable delivery of democratic elections, compared to dozens of countries in Asia, Africa and West Asia, which became independent around the same time, might have had the evil eye cast on them. Not only election managers, but the executive, the legislature, the judiciary, the winners and the losers in elections, as well as the wider voting community need to be play an alert remedial role in order to properly address the concerns of the electoral system.

Prime asset

Popular and credible elections have given the Indian nation critical stability, reasonable governance, post-colonial reconstruction and a pathway to development, besides the tenacity to counter external threats. The exercise of equal franchise by the sick and the elderly and by a people who are unequal socially and economically is part of India's electoral folklore as also are the latest trends of women activism in voting. Despite rampart poverty and illiteracy at the time of independence, ordinary Indians have learned about the strength of their votes, and have nurtured a respect for the polling process. They wait for their turn periodically to place or remove candidates at positions of decision making.

The process has worked remarkably well compared to other parts of Indian enterprise. Apart from the framers of the Constitution led by Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, who laid the seeds of parliamentary democracy, the credit duly rests on the ECI machinery, from the Nirvachan Sadan in New Delhi to the million plus polling booths across the country. The scale of the task – the 2024 national elections saw about 98 crore electors spread across India's vast and varied topography – with the massive logistics that it entails, and the finesse of its disposal, have kept advanced nations wonder-struck. The ECI has justifiably emerged as a school for election managers from a range of countries which are still groping for ways to execute such a huge and sensitive mandate. Further, the Commission set up the India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM) to impart lessons in conducting flawless elections. Younger nations look up to India's election management as a guiding star amidst other falling models.

However, there are grey, if not dark clouds on the horizon. It may still be an exaggeration to suggest that the Indian elections are corroded but malignant encroachments cause an unsettling feeling. While elections have always been fiercely contested, with even a few social faultlines such as caste and community getting interwoven into the outcome, the results were mostly received with stoic calm. But no more. What has taken over are chronic allegations about the partisan conduct of the poll body, and aggressive grievance bordering on a rejection of the electoral results. The argument that this is part of a global decline of democratic values, and has also infected developed democracies such as the U.S., holds no consolation. No country on earth needs democracy more than India does. No country needs elections more than India does.

A different game

Elections in India have changed with the times. Ground level campaigns and door-to-door canvassing have given way to digital battles where fast moving disinformation and deep fakes are the new weaponry. While muscular assaults such as booth capturing, voter intimidation, and bogus voting of the earlier decades were bad enough, they were still limited to certain pockets. Now, the possibility of manipulating the voter database through undue enfranchisement or disenfranchisement poses a threat at a larger scale.

The influence of money power over elections, with its ability to upset the sacred level-playing field, has grown enormously compared to localised distribution of cash or goodies in the past. Expenditure reports of candidates submitted to the ECI post-election, and accounted party spends are just tip of the icebergs; unofficial estimates of poll finances are much larger. The institutional release of cash into the wallets of population segments, touted as welfare, has distorted electoral integrity, besides public finance. The Economic Survey 2026 puts the strain of such unconditional cash transfers on States at a staggering ₹1.7 lakh crore. Such brazen transactions through the front door have subverted policy and candidate level contest, causing worries to the ECI and the Supreme Court.

Post poll subversion casts a darker shadow. Wholesale defections increasingly undermine the people's mandate for a candidate and party. Instead of reining in party hoppers, the anti-defection law has induced the bulk transfer of elected legislators thanks to exceptions allowed in the 10th Schedule. Opportunistic realignments have made a mockery of voters' choice in the absence of a recall system. The stream of present-day lawmakers dumping manifesto and ideology and switching parties at ease, make the earlier 'Aya Ram Gaya Rams' in Indian politics look like timid angels. The Speaker's recognition and symbol allocation by the ECI are critical follow ups to such mutations which have also not been free of partisan accusations.



Election management itself has got embroiled in institutional issues sparking opposition and street protests. The SIR exercise, which began a year ago, has left a trail of dust while approaching the finish line. Meanwhile, the provision of appointing Election Commissioners through a collegium under the 2023 enactment has not helped matters; and is still under the study of Supreme Court. The usual regulatory functions of the ECI such as the preparation of the electoral roll, the administration of the Model Code of Conduct, the announcement of results, and more recently, intra-organisational functioning are routinely moving into zones of contention, despite significant back up from higher courts. The distrust vocalised by polarised political entities can percolate down to ordinary citizens and create hopelessness.

Sukumar Sen, the Chief Election Commissioner for the first elections conducted in independent India in 1951, had unimaginable logistical challenges to handle, but certainly not one of trust. Today, after 75 years of experience and growing resources, while the massive logistics in elections is routine, trust has become the issue.

Urgent, collective imperative

Elections are by far the best organised expression of "we, the people" and hence cannot be allowed to fail. Political rhetoric is not part of the solution. The election process and its management are too precious to be made scapegoats in inter-party fights. Political parties need to do a collective and apolitical sit-down for the systemic fortification of Indian elections by building more safeguards and accountability and plugging structural and legal loopholes – basically, doing whatever is necessary and whatever it takes. The introduction of a three-member Commission to replace the single Chief Election Commissioner in 1993 had this very logic. There are multiple demands to be met: the better regulation of political financing and the menace of freebies; shielding of the electoral process from criminalisation; and dealing with the threat of AI-abetted fake narratives. Voters as well as those who are voted for must be insulated against inducements in discharge of their democratic functions. Arresting further deterioration will require collective work beyond partisan self-interest. And above everything else, trust has to be worked back into the system.

Views expressed are personal.

Elections are by far the best organised expression of "we, the people" and hence cannot be allowed to fail



In full force: Security personnel in riot gear stand guard outside the Election Commission office ahead of a planned protest demanding the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar in New Delhi, on October 10. AP

The gaps in the implementation of the RTI Act

Section 4 of the RTI Act lists 16 types of information which are to be disclosed by public authorities; such voluntary disclosure has not been followed

DATA POINT

Sneha Gandla
Gauri Singavarapu
Sachin Swaraj

The Right to Information (RTI) Act completed 21 years today. Besides empowering citizens to demand information from public authorities, a key aspect of the RTI Act is the provision for *suo motu* mandatory disclosure of a variety of information on their websites so that people do not have to resort to filing requests under the Act for accessing basic information regarding any department.

Section 4 (1) (b) of the Act lists 16 types of information, ranging from contact details of officials to budgetary expenditure, which are to be made public at regular intervals. Moreover, the Department of Personnel and Training has issued guidelines for the disclosure of additional information, under eight broad categories, including information related to procurement, public-private partnerships, and all RTI applications received by each department. An analysis, however, showed that such voluntary disclosure has not been followed.

With the number of official websites of the Union government and State governments running into the thousands, the scope of this analysis is restricted to the departments listed as Public Authorities (PAs) in the Government of India's online portal for filing of applications under the RTI Act and the data presented in the annual reports of the Central Information Commission (CIC). To ensure compliance with Section 4 of the RTI Act, the government has also made it mandatory for transparency audits to be conducted by third parties and the reports of such audits to be shared with the CIC.

The annual report for the year 2024-25 released earlier this year by the CIC says that of the 2,303 PAs from various departments registered with the Commission, only 1,446 had submitted third party audit reports, which is just 62.7% of the total registered **(Table 1)**. Of those submitted, more than 50% scored Grade C or below, which meant that they had scored 80% or below in the transparency audit. Those with Grade E had scored below 60% in the audit. Though nearly 37% of the registered PAs did not submit the audit reports, a look at the trend in the last five years showed that the compliance has improved year-on-year **(Chart 1)**. In 2020-21, only 754 had submitted. This doubled to 1,443 in 2024-25.

The Hindu independently verified the websites of the 94 departments under which these PAs come under. The guidelines recommend the uploading of the transparency audit reports on the websites. However, only 33 of the 94 websites had the audit reports for the year 2024-25. While a majority of them did not have the latest audit reports, a few had older reports. An analysis on the information that is to be mandatorily disclosed under the RTI Act showed that, of the 94 departments, 56 authorities, or 62% have complied with this section on most categories, and have information from 2025-26. The websites of 26 departments did not have the information covered under the Act. For the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, there was no information available **(Table 2)**. The remaining websites had either minimal or dated information on their websites.

Meanwhile, the number of new RTI requests and its pendency with the CIC has grown over the years **(Chart 2)**. The Act states that PAs should provide "as much information *suo motu* to the public ...so that the public have minimum resort to the use of this Act". The efficient implementation of Section 4 can not only improve transparency but also reduce the pendency piling up with the CIC and State Information Commissions.



In defense of transparency: Workers during the laying of the foundation of the National RTI Museum in Beawar, Rajasthan. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

1 Section 4(1) (b) of the RTI Act mandates suo motu disclosure of a range of information by every government authority

2 Public authorities covered under the Act are mandated to conduct independent transparency audits to ensure compliance with Section 4 (1) (b)

3 In 2024-25, only 62.3% of the public authorities had submitted these audit reports to the CIC

4 Most sites checked by *The Hindu* had disclosed only minimal information available

Voluntary non-disclosure

Data for the charts were sourced from the Central Information Commission (CIC) and websites of 94 government departments listed in the RTI portal of the Government of India. The authors are interning with The Hindu's Data team

Table 1: Number of public authorities (PAs) who submitted transparency audit reports to the CIC and their grades

Number of PAs	2,303
Audit report submitted to CIC	1,446
Grade A	410
Grade B	253
Grade C	302
Grade D	215
Grade E	266

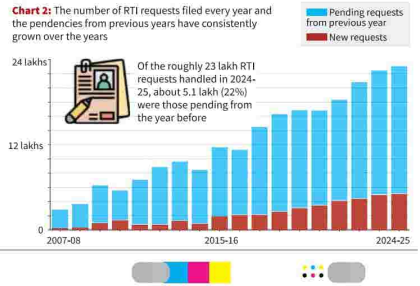
Table 2: Availability of transparency audit reports in the websites of 94 departments listed in the RTI portal

Compliance	No. of depts.
Report available with section-wise scores and required compliance classifications	33
Report available, but the latest recorded audit year is older	7
No report found in the portal material reviewed	43
While audit is mentioned or information is available, the full report or expected details are missing	7
Report reference, total score or audit mentioned without complete accessible report	3
Portal did not display the relevant audit information	1
Total	**94**

Chart 1: The number of public authorities (PAs) registered with the CIC and those who submitted the transparency audit reports to the Commission in the last five years



Chart 2: The number of RTI requests filed every year and the pendencies from previous years have consistently grown over the years



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO OCTOBER 12, 1976

Expert's survey of ENT diseases in Male Island

Madras, October 11: Fishing is their primary occupation and practically every one of them swims and dives. Their staple food is fish and rice. Occupational hazards, vitamin-deficient food and the inclement weather conditions add up to make the 1,25,000 people living in the Maldivian Archipelago "extremely prone to upper respiratory tract infections". "I have never seen so many cases of chronic tonsillitis, adenoiditis and mastoiditis", says Dr. S. Kameswaran, Director of the Institute of Otorhino-laryngology, Madras Medical College, who had been there on a short WHO assignment.

The first ENT expert ever to set foot on the soil of MALE, the capital-island of the Republic of Maldives, Dr. Kameswaran had been asked to conduct a sample survey of ENT diseases, hold special clinics, organise training course for health personnel and to assist and advise the Maldivian Government in setting up ENT units in health centres.

Of the 2,000 islands forming the archipelago, only 192 are permanently inhabited, the total land area being 115 square miles. Male Island, which has a population of 20,000, has a 52-bed modern hospital, with an operational theatre.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO OCTOBER 12, 1926

Presenting India to people of Canada

London, October 11: Sir T. Vijayaraghavachariar arrived in London to-day from Canada and will leave for India in a few days to take up his position on the Public Services Commission. Interviewed by Reuter he said he was very glad he had an unequalled opportunity of presenting India to the people of the great Dominion.

He had a wonderful greeting everywhere. He found India little known in Canada, but one of the Dominion Ministers, on his departures, declared that India had at length become more real to the Canadians.

It was no longer a land of mystery for them and its place in the Empire was better understood and appreciated.

Sir T. Vijayaraghavachariar said that he had always emphasised the unity of the Empire and the subordination of local to Imperial results.

Text&Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of FIRs registered by Delhi Police over CJP protest

20 Delhi Police have registered 20 FIRs in connection with the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP)-called protest demanding Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar's resignation. More than 7,000 people were detained across the national capital as over 30,000 police personnel were deployed to prevent protesters from reaching Jantar Mantar. PTI

FDI inflows this quarter from India's largest source, Japan

5.71 in $ billion. Japan has emerged as the largest source of foreign direct investment into India during April-June of the current fiscal year, according to government data. FDI inflows from Japan stood at $5.71 billion in the first quarter of 2026-27, surpassing the $3.74 billion India received from the country during the entire 2025-26 fiscal year. PTI

Maximum temperature levels recorded in the national capital

32 degrees Celsius. Delhi recorded a maximum temperature of 32 degrees Celsius on Sunday, which was 2.2 notches below the season's average, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). The minimum temperature was logged at 24.4 degrees Celsius, which was 3.4 notches above the season's average, the IMD data showed. PTI

Number of migrants dead in Djibouti boat accident

109 At least 109 migrants died, including 15 children, and 116 went missing when a boat sank off the shores of Djibouti on the night of October 8-9, a UN agency said on Sunday. Survivors said the vessel — which was carrying 305 people from Djibouti to Yemen — capsized north of the Djibouti town of Obock. About 80 people survived the shipwreck. AFP

Number of people who died in U.S. Cyclone Isaias

4 Cyclone Isaias was the first hurricane of an Atlantic season tamed by a historic El Niño weather phenomenon, and the first hurricane since 2024 to hit the U.S. mainland. At least four deaths were linked to the storm, including two people killed when trees fell onto homes. Nearly 700,000 customers were without power by midday. AFP

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

Follow us facebook.com/thehindu X.com/the_hindu instagram.com/the_hindu

Why UAPA demands urgent reform

UAPA's vague provisions, stringent bail conditions and inconsistent judicial interpretations have enabled the prolonged imprisonment of activists, scholars and journalists without trial; Prof. G.N. Saibaba's experience shows the urgent need to reform a legal regime that undermines civil liberties, due process and rule of law

LETTER & SPIRIT

Gautam Bhatia

October 12 marks the second death anniversary of Professor G.N. Saibaba. Prof. Saibaba was a professor at Delhi University who was 90% physically disabled. He was arrested under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) in 2014, on allegations of having links with Maoists. Denied bail, he remained in prison until a trial court convicted him in 2017 and sentenced him to life imprisonment – a judgment that this writer, in the pages of this newspaper, criticised at the time as being based entirely on guilt by association and insinuation.

Vindication eventually arrived in 2024, when the Bombay High Court acquitted him of all charges. By then, Professor Saibaba had spent a decade in prison, much of it in solitary confinement. In prison, his health had further deteriorated, and soon after his release, he passed away.

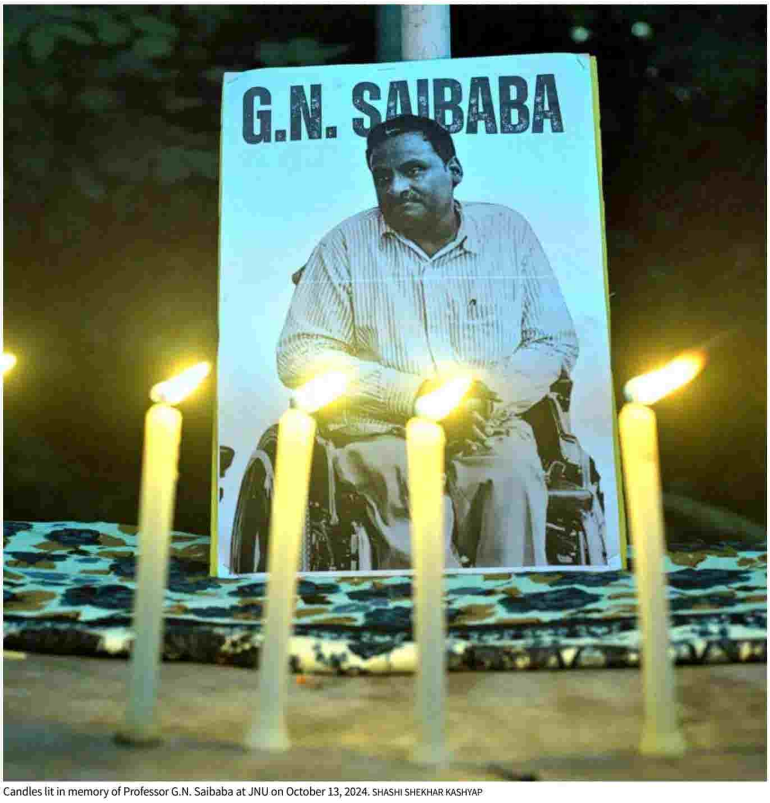
A law that punishes dissent

The anniversary of Professor Saibaba's death is an occasion to reflect on a legal regime that is designed to – quite literally – imprison dissent and deny justice. Over the years, the UAPA has been used to criminalise political opposition. Following the violence at the Bhima Koregaon commemoration event in 2018, UAPA charges were brought against 16 scholars and activists, all of whom were jailed. Eight years later, the trial has yet to begin, and the court has yet to frame charges against the accused.

Meanwhile, Father Stan Swamy died in custody after his health deteriorated. One after another, 14 of the remaining accused were granted bail, but only after spending years in prison without trial. Their bail conditions remain draconian and restrictive, imposing multiple reporting conditions, restricting travel and severely constraining their lives. The 16th prisoner, lawyer Surendra Gadling, was also granted bail in the case but remained in prison in connection with another case.

Similarly, after the Delhi riots in 2020, UAPA charges were levelled against multiple student leaders, scholars, and activists, accusing them of participating in, or being the brains behind, the riots. Notably, there was no direct evidence against any of these people, only vague charges of conspiracy and of being the "intellectual architects" of the riots.

While a few of these individuals were granted bail soon after, many students and scholars remained in jail for years, with their bail applications denied at all levels of the judiciary. It was only in early 2026, after more than five years in jail, that five of the seven appellants were granted bail by the Supreme Court. However, the Supreme Court denied bail to the remaining two – Sharjeel Imam and Umar Khalid – on the basis that they were "intellectual architects." The term "intellectual architect" is unknown to law and rests entirely on surmises and conjectures. The court also took the unusual step of effectively preventing Imam and Khalid from applying for bail for a year. It has now been more than six years – almost 10% of an average human lifespan – of imprisonment without trial. In the meantime, Khalid has published a book from prison, while Imam continues to work on his PhD, despite significant difficulties in accessing research materials.



Candles lit in memory of Professor G.N. Saibaba at JNU on October 13, 2024. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

In a third example, Khurram Parvez, a Kashmiri activist and the coordinator of the Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS), was arrested under the UAPA in 2021 on allegations of terror financing and promoting secessionism. On March 20, 2023, a journalist, Irfan Mehraj, was also arrested and imprisoned in the case. The two were eventually granted bail in July 2026, after Parvez had spent five years in prison without trial.

The list of people who have spent years in jail under UAPA thus spans the length and breadth of the country: it also includes Soni Sori, the Adivasi leader who was allegedly tortured while in prison and eventually acquitted of all charges, Akhil Gogoi – the Assamese anti-CAA activist – and Siddique Kappan, the Kerala journalist who was arrested while travelling to Uttar Pradesh to cover the Hathras gangrape case, and spent two years in jail before eventually being granted bail by the Supreme Court.

The list also includes many other nameless people who do not have the same degree of public prominence, but have spent months and years of their lives in prison, under a law that defines offences in the vaguest of terms, and then makes the grant of bail virtually impossible.

Vague definitions

The UAPA, for example, criminalises "membership" of unlawful organisations without clarifying what the word "membership" means. It has a similar host of provisions that carry broad and vague wording, and which are susceptible to multiple interpretations – including, at their extreme, mere sloganeering or possession of literature.

The courts have not helped. On two occasions, judges have attempted to bring precision and narrowness to the UAPA to prevent, or at least mitigate, some of its excesses. Both attempts were overturned by the Supreme Court. In 2011, a Bench of the court restricted the term "membership" to "active membership", which in turn was defined to mean "incitement to violence." However, in 2023, acting under its "review jurisdiction" – which is only meant to correct "errors on the face of the record" – the Supreme Court overturned this judgment.

Similarly, in an early bail judgment in the Delhi riots cases, the Delhi High Court undertook an extensive analysis of the UAPA's "terrorism" clauses and gave them a specific, concrete interpretation to prevent wide discretion in their application. On appeal, however, the Supreme Court ruled that the judgment would "not be treated as precedent", thus rendering it effectively worthless as a statement of law. Thus, the UAPA's terms remain exceedingly broad and undefined, allowing State authorities wide leeway to bring almost any conduct within its scope by tenuously linking it to terrorism or unlawful activity.

The barriers to bail

Once that is done, the UAPA then makes the grant of bail extremely hard, by requiring the judge to deny bail if, on a reading of the police chargesheet, a prima facie case appears to be made out. Here again, courts have not helped: while one set of judges has accorded a degree of strict scrutiny to police chargesheets, another set has adopted an "eyes wide shut" approach that grants excessive deference to the police version. This inconsistency makes the grant of bail under the UAPA extremely judge-centric. Along with this, courts have also been inconsistent on the consequences of delay: the Supreme Court, for example, did not seem to think that five years in prison without trial was "excessive" delay when denying bail to Imam and Khalid, while other courts have held that five years does constitute excessive delay (for example, in the Khurram Parvez case).

All this leads to a state of affairs that is contrary to the rule of law and contrary to any legal system worth the name: a vague law with stringent punishments, that continues to be interpreted in a way that expands State discretion rather than contains it, and whose result then is long years of imprisonment without trial. The death anniversary of Professor Saibaba, one of the starkest victims of this system, reminds us yet again that an urgent rethink and reset of this system is necessary.

(Gautam Bhatia is a Delhi-based lawyer)

THE GIST

- Professor G.N. Saibaba was acquitted by the Bombay High Court in 2024 after spending a decade in prison under the UAPA, but died soon after his release as his health had deteriorated
- Activists, scholars and journalists accused under the UAPA, including those in the Bhima Koregaon and Delhi riots cases, have spent years in prison without trial, with bail often granted only after prolonged incarceration
- The Supreme Court has overturned judicial attempts to narrow the UAPA's provisions, while inconsistent interpretations of the law and delays in trials have expanded State discretion and weakened safeguards against arbitrary imprisonment

CACHE



Norway is not alone in addressing privacy risks surrounding wearable devices, as a patchwork of regulations and venue-specific restrictions are in progress across Europe and North America. REUTERS

Why is Norway considering a temporary smart glasses ban?

Norway is proposing temporary restrictions on smart glasses in public, sensitive spaces over concerns about covert recording, facial recognition and violations of privacy, as other countries explore similar curbs; this could affect device sales and push manufacturers to strengthen privacy safeguards

Haider Ali Khan

The story so far:

European regulators are training their sights on smart glasses, as the wearable device equipped with high-definition cameras, ambient audio recording, and artificial intelligence is becoming common in Europe, blurring the lines between technological innovation and citizens' privacy.

Norway is taking the lead as its government prepares a proposal seeking a temporary ban on smart glasses in select public and sensitive locations. Led by Minister of Digitalisation and Public Governance Torgeir Micaelsen, the initiative pauses device usage in places where individuals expect personal privacy.

What does the proposal seek?

The temporary restrictions target places frequented by children, including schools, playgrounds, and youth clubs, healthcare facilities, fitness centres, locker rooms, public beaches, parks, museums, and concert venues. Crucially, the government is not proposing a ban on sales of the devices or prohibiting their use in private.

Instead, the proposal is asking an expert committee to evaluate the technological challenges and formulate lasting legal frameworks. Oslo has already banned smart glasses across municipal schools.

The core argument behind Norway's intervention centres on the lack of consent in public spaces. Traditional smartphones require users to visibly hold up a device to record video or snap photos, providing a clear signal to surrounding people. In contrast, smart glasses allow wearers to capture high-resolution imagery, record ambient audio, or live-stream video directly at eye level without offering clear cues to bystanders.

This creates a surveillance system where citizens cannot easily determine whether they are being recorded. Privacy risks are especially acute in sensitive settings like changing rooms and medical clinics, or where unauthorised filming of children raises safety concerns. Furthermore, officials have highlighted risks surrounding real-time facial recognition software. When combined with AI eyewear, facial recognition could enable wearers to instantly identify strangers, access personal data, or facilitate doxxing. Norway's proposed rules acknowledge that traditional privacy frameworks were not designed for head-worn, ambient recording technology.

Is any other country attempting a similar moratorium?

Norway is not alone in addressing privacy risks surrounding wearable devices, as a patchwork of regulations and venue-specific restrictions are in progress across Europe and North America.

In the Netherlands and Germany, eyewear retailer Hans Anders suspended sales of Meta's Ray-Ban smart glasses across its Dutch and Belgian stores while awaiting regulatory clarity. Dutch lawmakers have discussed rules that await guidance from the European Data Protection Board (EDPB). Meanwhile, Hamburg is exploring regional restrictions.

The UK Cinema Association established guidelines restricting or prohibiting camera-equipped glasses in movie theatres to combat piracy and protect the privacy of viewers. Additionally, courts in England and Wales require visitors to surrender smart glasses at security checkpoints.

In the United States, several nightclubs, gyms, and courts in New York have implemented localised bans. California's governor vetoed legislation penalising covert recording in private spaces, but debate continues among state policymakers on next steps.

In Bangkok, smart glasses use is restricted in certain pubs and public places.

How are manufacturers of smart glasses adapting to this regulatory landscape?

To address privacy concerns, hardware manufacturers have built technical safeguards into current-generation devices. Devices such as Ray-Ban Meta glasses feature a white light-emitting diode (LED) on the frame beside the lens. The LED blinks when capturing photos and stays lit continuously during video recording.

Manufacturers have deployed firmware updates that detect if the LED indicator is covered or obstructed. If light obstruction is detected, the system automatically disables the camera's functionality. Devices enforce caps on continuous recording duration and play audible shutter sounds when taking photos.

But privacy advocates have said that small LED lights remain difficult to spot in bright, sunlit conditions or crowded environments, rendering hardware safeguards insufficient for complete bystander protection.

How will the moratorium impact device sales?

Although Norway's proposal focuses on restricting device usage rather than banning sales, the commercial impact on manufacturers could be substantial. The primary selling point of smart glasses is their seamless integration into daily public life. Restricting their use in public spaces like parks, beaches, shopping centres, and fitness clubs undermines their utility, rendering a versatile daily-use accessory into a device restricted to home use.

In addition, voluntary retail suspensions such as the sales halt by Hans Anders create immediate revenue hits in the European market. Regulatory uncertainty across different regions introduces consumer hesitation, discouraging buyers who worry about purchasing expensive hardware that might soon face usage restrictions in public.

How might smart glasses makers tweak functionality?

To comply with evolving privacy standards and maintain consumer trust, manufacturers may likely re-engineer both hardware and software features by implementing larger, brighter, or colour-shifting LED indicators, alongside louder audio signals that cannot be silenced.

Software updates could incorporate AI-driven face-blurring and audio pitch modification, redacting bystander identities before footage is saved or streamed. Smart glasses could utilise GPS data to automatically disable recording capabilities when entering designated privacy zones like schools, hospitals, or locker rooms. Manufacturers can explicitly block facial recognition software and APIs to prevent real-time profiling in public spaces.

Companies are expanding lines to include audio-focused smart glasses without cameras (such as Ray-Ban Meta Audio), catering to users who want AI features without privacy concerns.

THE DAILY QUIZ

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

Test your knowledge of the Salem witch trials, where mass hysteria, religious fanaticism and judicial injustice led to accusations and executions

Prathmesh Kher

QUESTION 1
In which years did the Salem witch trials take place?

QUESTION 2
Which accused farmer was executed on August 19, 1692, after maintaining his innocence during the trials?

QUESTION 3
Which accused man was subjected to *peine forte et dure*, a form of judicial torture involving the application of heavy weights, after refusing to enter a plea?

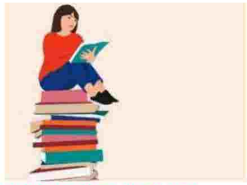
QUESTION 4
How many people were hanged during the Salem witch trials, and how many others died in prison?

QUESTION 5
What was the name of the enslaved woman whose confession played a pivotal role in the early witchcraft accusations?



Visual Question:
This 1953 play by Arthur Miller dramatises the Salem witch trials and uses them as an allegory for political persecution in 20th-century America. Name the play. FRED FEHL/FRED FEHL COLLECTION, NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. In 2018, no Nobel Prize in Literature was announced. It was postponed and awarded along with the 2019 Nobel. Why? Who won the 2018 Nobel Prize in Literature? **Ans: Due to a sexual abuse and financial crimes scandal involving Jean-Claude Arnault, an influential figure on the Swedish cultural scene and husband of Academy member and poet Katarina Frostenson; Olga Tokarczuk**
2. Which singer-songwriter won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2016? **Ans: Bob Dylan**
3. This Nobel laureate's work includes *Sula, Beloved, The Bluest Eye, Jazz*, etc. She was the first Black woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. **Ans: Toni Morrison**
4. An upcoming dystopian science fiction film is based on a book by a Nobel laureate. Name the book and the author. Ans: ***Klara and the Sun*** by Kazuo Ishiguro
5. This philosopher, political activist, and writer was the only awardee to decline the Nobel Prize in Literature. **Ans: Jean-Paul Sartre**
Visual: This image shows the poet and novelist receiving the news that he won the Nobel Prize in Literature. However, he later rejected the award. **Ans: Boris Pasternak**
Early Birds: Aman kumar | Tamal Biswas | Arun Kumar Singh | Gauri Malviya



KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

I am afraid we can't offer you the job

She refused to collaborate with her temperamental colleague

S. Upendran

Is it okay to use the word 'dinner' for an afternoon meal? (V Janaki, Trivandrum)
Yes, it is; on Christmas Day, some people have their traditional Christmas dinner around two in the afternoon. The word 'dinner' comes from the French 'disner', and in 13th-century England, the word was used to refer to the first meal of the day - anything that people had to eat between early morning and noon. So, what we today refer to as 'breakfast' and 'lunch' was called 'dinner' in the past. With the passage of time, however, the terms 'breakfast' and 'lunch' were introduced to refer to what we eat in the morning and afternoon - and as a result, the word 'dinner' was used to refer to the last meal of the day. In countries like Britain, 'dinner' continues to be used to refer to the main meal of the day - a meal where an individual's intake is the maximum. So, if your main meal is in the afternoon, you can call it 'dinner'.

We're planning to have an early dinner before leaving for the airport.

What is the difference between 'collaborate' and 'corroborate'? (J Mukund, Hyderabad)
Although the two words sound somewhat similar, they have very different meanings. In terms of pronunciation, both words have the same number of syllables - four each. The vowels in the first and third syllables sound like the 'a' in 'china'. The second syllable in 'collaborate' is pronounced like the word 'lab', while in the case of 'corroborate', it sounds like the word 'rob'. The final syllable in both words is pronounced 'rate'. The two words are pronounced 'ke-LAB-e-rate' and 'ke-ROB-e-rate' respectively, with the stress on the second syllable.

When you 'collaborate' with someone, you work with him on something - it could be a project, report, etc. You team up with another individual; in other words, the two of you 'labour' (col-labor-ate) together! This is one way of remembering the meaning of the word.

Satish is very temperamental. No one wants to collaborate with him on the project.

When you 'corroborate', you provide evidence or proof for something that you or someone else has said. It is a word frequently used in a court of law and in the field of science.

Our findings did not corroborate the new hypothesis.

What is the meaning of 'I'm afraid' in the sentence "I'm afraid I can't help you"? (S Vinita, Vizag)
In isolation, the word 'afraid' is normally used to mean 'scared'. Some children, for example, are afraid of dogs, while many are afraid of being alone in the dark. In the expression 'I'm afraid', however, 'afraid' does not express fear. In informal contexts, the expression is used when you have bad news to pass on to someone; the use of 'afraid' is meant to soften the blow of the message you are about to deliver. When you preface a statement with 'I'm afraid', it means 'I'm sorry to say'.
upendrankye@gmail.com

Word of the day

Polemical:
of or involving dispute or controversy

Synonyms: contentious, aggressive, stubborn, irritable, disputatious

Usage: *The politician is known for his polemical remarks.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/polemical

International Phonetic Alphabet: /pəlemɪkəl/

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

WEB EXCLUSIVE
The Hunger Games-ification of Delhi's protests: Does the government fear its own citizens? — *Vaishnavi Sinha*
Log on to www.indianexpress.com

WORDLY WISE
It is the first responsibility of every citizen to question authority.
— *Benjamin Franklin*

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

Barricades, detentions do not fortify the ECI

DELHI POLICE and the central forces brought in to add to their might succeeded in clearing Delhi's streets of protesters on Saturday, October 10. They imposed restrictions on the right to assemble peacefully and even to move freely, detained an estimated 7,000, made sure that voices of protest would not be heard in public spaces. They did this without the excessive use of violence deployed against protesters in July. But unfortunately for Delhi Police and its political masters, that is not the end of this story. Questions and concerns about the functioning of the Election Commission of India, and particularly Chief Election Commissioner of India Gyanesh Kumar, in the conduct of the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls — highlighted in this newspaper's investigation — remain unresolved. The layers of barricades in the capital may have interrupted and scattered the protesters' mobilisations. But within Fortress Delhi, the ECI remains a disquietingly vulnerable address. Every attempt to silence the calls for greater transparency and accountability from it only makes them ring out more loudly and clearly.

Saturday's crackdown in the Capital may have given the impression that the face-off is between the protesters led by the CJP and the Narendra Modi government. That impression has been underlined by representatives of the ruling establishment who followed their playbook, firmed up over the years — they rounded on protesters aggressively, scolding them, labelling them as "destabilisers" and "anarchists" who have the backing of "foreign powers". The fact is, however, that a constitutional body, independent of the government of the day, lies at the centre of the current face-off. The ECI, though, has maintained an inexplicable silence, broken only by the bland press release that leaves important questions unaddressed. By not speaking for itself, by letting the Centre put in place an unprecedented crackdown against its critics, it hurts, even more, its own hard-won autonomy. Meanwhile, the angry CJP-vs-BJP war of words has drawn attention to another sobering absence. The political establishment, not just the BJP, has not yet found a language to talk to young citizens. Even opposition parties, whose former chief ministers were detained on Saturday, need to widen their vocabulary if they have to engage with Gen Z and their concerns, not just ride piggy-back on — or play catch-up to — their restlessness and mobilisations.

The Supreme Court did well to hold a special sitting on Sunday to draw some red lines, even if they seemed less mindful of the infringement of individual liberties and more hemmed in by the administration's imperatives. But as the week ended, one image, one question, throbbed at the centre of the quiet storm. The CEC, in a labyrinth of his own making. What will it take for Gyanesh Kumar to realise that his refusal to acknowledge or answer questions is taking a mounting toll on an institution that has long prided itself on its imaginative and persuasive outreach to all voters, especially the young? No detention centre is large enough to sequester this crisis of credibility.

US IT salvo opens new front for India

THE US government's decision to suspend major Indian IT firms from the PERM programme — which provides a pathway to permanent residency — is part of the administration's larger agenda to crack down on foreign labour and curtail immigration. It follows the administration's move last year to introduce a $100,000 fee for H-1B visas, deepening the uncertainty for companies that rely more on skilled foreign workers. While the immediate impact of the recent decision could be muted — Indian IT firms accounted for less than 2 per cent of the 1,17,849 PERM applications filed between October 2024 and September 2025, according to a report by ICICI Securities — the action is likely to sour sentiment. Moreover, as the report says, "any extension into broader work-visa restrictions would pose a more material risk". India's software, business and other services exports — a major source of foreign exchange for the country — stood at $221 billion in 2025-26. Washington's latest action thus opens another front in a tumultuous India-US relationship.

The White House's fresh salvo comes only weeks after the passing of a new law that paves the way for the US to impose tariffs of up to 100 per cent on countries like China and India that are top energy buyers from Russia. The pattern in the US administration's moves is hard to miss. Trump has, for some time now, been prodding India to reduce its purchases of Russian oil — between December 2022 and August 2026, China accounted for roughly half of Russia's crude exports, followed by India at 37 per cent, as per the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air — even as he announced a deal with Russia only a few days ago to supply diesel to US and global markets.

In the midst of these developments, statements from both sides appear to be less sanguine about the conclusion of the much delayed India-US trade deal. A few days ago, the US Trade Representative, Jamieson Greer, said that a trade agreement was not "imminent", followed by India's Finance Minister saying that "both the sides have reached a plateau beyond which giving or taking might be very very difficult". With the outcome of trade negotiations with Washington uncertain, the pressure on multiple fronts — energy, services exports, and labour mobility — is mounting.

FREEZE FRAME BY EP UNNY



The AI challenge: How to maximise economic impact, spread gains evenly



NEELKANTH MISHRA



SOMIK V LALL

THE GLOBAL narrative on AI has been dominated by the generation of intelligence. Trillions of dollars are being invested in chips, data centres, and the computing infrastructure needed to train and run increasingly powerful models. The stock prices of a handful of leading AI firms in a few countries have surged.

The implicit assumption is that most of the economic value from AI will accrue to the companies that build and own these models, and to those upstream in the semiconductor, data centre, and energy value chains. This has increasingly led investors, firms, and policymakers to classify companies, markets, and even countries as winners or losers in the AI race.

But this may be too narrow a framing. Economic value is ultimately created not only by generating intelligence but by deploying it. The history of general-purpose technologies suggests that many of the largest gains accrue to the downstream users who adopt new technologies, adapt them to local conditions, and diffuse them throughout the economy.

India enters this phase from a position of strength. It already is one of the fastest-growing major economies and has repeatedly demonstrated an ability to deploy technology at population scale. Its experience with digital public infrastructure demonstrates how technology, institutions, and market incentives can combine to reduce costs, broaden access, and create platforms for innovation.

The World Bank Group's 'World Development Report 2026: The Promise of Artificial Intelligence' argues that AI can help sustain growth, boost productivity, improve public services, and expand opportunity. But the largest gains are unlikely to come from winning a race to build frontier models. They will come from applying AI to solve practical problems at scale.

The question of jobs is central. Only 4.5 per cent of existing jobs in low- and middle-income countries appear highly exposed to automation by generative AI, compared with 14.2 per cent in high-income countries. Another 16.2 per cent could experience meaningful productivity gains, not far from the 18.7 per cent estimated for advanced economies. For most workers in developing countries, AI is more likely to complement than replace.

This distinction is important. For developing countries, affordable, task-specific AI tools can raise the capabilities of businesses, households, and governments. Be it helping farmers access advice, assisting health workers with diagnosis, supporting teachers, or improving public administration, the opportunity lies in AI raising productivity and expanding access.

Two challenges loom. The first is concentration. Advanced chips, large-scale compute, data, research talent, and risk capital remain concentrated in a handful of firms and countries. Competition has kept access to leading models relatively inexpensive, but dependence on a small number of providers creates risks and can eventually generate market power.

The second challenge is the lack of complements. AI is only as useful as the ecosystem around it. Its value depends on investments in electricity, connectivity, affordable devices and compute, local-language data, skills, and institutions. People need the skills to use AI effectively and governments need the capacity to evaluate, procure, and regulate it. Technology alone does not generate development gains.

> India's experience with digital public infrastructure shows how technology, institutions, and market incentives can combine to reduce costs, broaden access, and create platforms for innovation

India already has examples of AI tools generating tangible benefits. Applications adapted to local contexts support agricultural extension, improve weather forecasting, strengthen health diagnostics, and expand access to public services. Bharat VISTAAR, the Government of India's digital platform for farmers, on which multiple states are building their own AI chatbots in multiple languages, and Wadhwani AI's tuberculosis-screening tools illustrate the potential. Yet the key question is not whether these technologies work. It is whether they can be adopted by millions of people.

Here India's experience with digital public infrastructure offers useful lessons. Platforms such as Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker, and emerging data-sharing systems provide shared public rails that lower costs, enable interoperability, and allow innovation to scale.

UPI is particularly instructive. Its open architecture promoted competition while avoiding dependence on a single provider. Similar principles should guide AI adoption. Governments and firms should favour systems that avoid technological lock-in and preserve portability, flexibility, and competition.

Emerging economies are unlikely to match the scale of investment being made by frontier AI hyperscalers, nor do they need to. More important is building strategic capabilities that expand India's options to advance AI: Domestic research, Indian-language models, shared compute resources, and a stronger ecosystem for deep-tech investment. Initiatives such as IndiaAI, RDIF, and ANRF are important steps in that direction.

Three principles follow.

First, design for scale from the outset. Across India, AI pilots are everywhere. What is needed is successful deployment at scale. Every pilot should have a credible pathway to broad adoption, including financing, institutional ownership, and integration with existing systems.

Second, test rather than assume. Decisions should be driven by evidence. India's scale makes rigorous evaluation both feasible and inexpensive. Large-scale rollouts provide opportunities to experiment, learn, and identify what works under real-world conditions.

Third, scale what works and stop what does not. Results, including failures, should be shared across states and ministries so lessons accumulate rather than being repeatedly rediscovered.

For India, the opportunity is not simply to adopt AI. It is to move from isolated applications to economy-wide productivity gains. That is the opportunity that matters: Maximising economic impact and spreading its gains as evenly as possible.

Mishra is World Bank executive director and Lall is director, Development Economics

America, Israel & an unsettled question: Can war win elections?



AAKASH JOSHI

ONE OF the biggest news stories unfolding over the last two weeks had an Indian pilot at its centre. Flydubai flight FZ1073, from Dubai to Tel Aviv, was allegedly meant to be used in a terrorist attack till Captain Smit Machchhar foiled the attempt by his co-pilot and suffered severe injuries for his bravery, going above and beyond the call of both duty and training.

Even as the dramatic details of what happened in the cockpit were emerging, the political and geopolitical implications of the attempted "9/11-like" attack were being discussed. Israel is set to go to the polls later this month, and the fate of the vexed conflict in West Asia may well turn on the result. Benjamin Netanyahu will hope that the threat of terrorism will help him scrape through, and paper over domestic discontents and international opprobrium for his government's actions in Gaza.

Half the world away, national capitals will watch another set of elections closely. On November 3, all 435 seats in the US House of Representatives and 35 out of 100 Senate seats will go to the polls. Along with several gubernatorial races, these midterm elections will shape, if not determine, the fate of the US war with Iran; the balance of power in the Russia-Ukraine conflict; and whether the White House's use of trade and tariffs to bully friends and adversaries alike will be restricted or expanded. Much will depend, according to opinion polls and analysts, on whether Trump can shore up a peace of some sort with Tehran.

The question in Tel Aviv, Tehran and Washington, and in many other democracies, then, is this: Can war and jingoism help win elections?

The conventional wisdom, coupled with the cliché of the cynical politician and gullible public, would have you believe so. In the 1997 film Wag the Dog, starring Dustin Hoffman and Robert De Niro, a US president caught in a scandal (a distinctly Jeffrey Epstein-esque one) hires a Hollywood director to "produce" a fictional war with Albania to get a boost in the polls.

George W Bush, for example, attacked Iraq on the flimsiest of pretexts — WMDs, messages from God, spreading democracy — and won a second term. FDR won an unprecedented fourth term during World War II. In the UK, Margaret Thatcher succeeded in cementing her image and distracting from discontent with the Falklands War. Ronald Reagan constantly invoked the red spectre, and his "defeat" of communism is a pillar of the conservative icon's legacy in the US. Even in the developing world, external enemies — whether a "foreign hand" or a neighbourhood dispute — have been used by political leaders to win support. Indira Gandhi, by all accounts, was at the height of her popularity after India defeated Pakistan in 1971.

The problem with trying to establish simple causalities in politics, though, is that "the people" are an amorphous entity. The same person is, depending on circumstances, part of a mob, a crowd, an electorate and a public. External threats, real and imagined, can often unite people behind an incumbent government. But used too often as a tool, it will give diminishing returns.

Take Clement Attlee, the man who defeated Winston Churchill at what should have been the height of the latter's popularity. Churchill was the voice the British people heard throughout WWII, the man who stood against Hitler, and eventually emerged victorious. Yet, in 1945, it was a Labour leader who did not have either Churchill's charisma nor his love of Empire that the people chose.

George Bush Sr presided over the first "televised" war — Operation Desert Storm in 1991 — but lost to the charismatic Bill Clinton in 1992.

Closer to home, Atal Bihari Vajpayee's NDA government could not return to power in 2004 despite India's success in the Kargil war during his term. And, in what is a tragic irony, Donald Trump campaigned — both in 2016 and 2024 — on ending America's "forever wars".

Conflict can, indeed, bring unity and paper over differences. But not always. The Iraq and Afghanistan wars were fought in the aftermath of 9/11, a horrific act that shook a superpower. No similar justification exists for the attack on Iran — the spectre of WMDs redux is cutting less ice now. And in the age of social media, trust in governments is, in many countries, at an all-time low. Coupled with a cost-of-living crisis, the electorate may not be swayed as it once was. Clearly, politicians realise this: Trump, for example, announces an imminent peace deal as often as he calls for mass destruction.

Of course, elections can turn on a moment's notice. But if a politics of "wag the dog" provides diminishing returns, the world is better off for it.

> External threats, real and imagined, can often unite people behind an incumbent government. But used too often as tool, it will give diminishing returns

The writer is associate editor, The Indian Express. aakash.joshi@expressindia.com

What public officials must ask — whom do we serve?



NANDITESH NILAY

AT THE heart of the debate over institutional integrity lies a question: How should a bureaucrat do the right thing? When the indelible ink of elections loses its sanctity, bridges collapse, and food and drugs are adulterated, what should guide a civil servant? If Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Lal Bahadur Shastri and Deen Dayal Upadhyaya were alive today, what advice would they offer those entrusted with public office?

The Mahatma's most frequently cited counsel is: "Whenever you are in doubt, or when the 'self' (ego) begins to overpower you, apply this test. Recall the face of the poorest and weakest person you have ever seen, and ask yourself if the step you are about to take will benefit them. Will they gain anything from it? Will it restore their control over their own life and destiny?" Gandhi viewed public office as a form of trusteeship, with power and funds held in trust for the people, especially the poorest. When rules governing electoral rolls are tweaked, officials must remember the vulnerable citizen who, lacking a school-leaving certificate, stands in line with her Aadhaar card in a plastic bag, asking to be counted.

As home minister, Shastri recognised the influence of recommendations in public administration. He reportedly observed that senior civil servants could quote rules admirably but rarely thought ahead or innovated. He knew officers by name and made a point of addressing them accordingly. For Shastri, virtue mattered more than power. Access to government services should not depend on recommendations or proximity to VIPs; no one should be able to jump the queue because of privilege.

For Patel, the courage to speak one's mind was an essential qualification for a civil servant. His law secretary, Shavak A Lal, once prepared a legal opinion on an issue raised by Lord Mountbatten but hesitated to present it, fearing it might contradict Patel's views. On learning of this, Patel reportedly asked, "Does the government pay you for your dishonest opinion? Giving an honest opinion is your job; accepting or rejecting it is mine." He expected secretaries to record their views even when these differed from his own, and believed that those afraid to do so should leave their jobs. Patel's commitment to integrity extended beyond the file. V Shankar, an ICS officer who served as his private secretary from 1946 until Patel's final days, recounted an incident from the turbulent months after Partition. On learning that a mob had gathered at the shrine of Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi, Patel went there with Shankar. He walked around the shrine, questioned people and warned the police that they would be dismissed if further trouble occurred. The episode illustrates the qualities he expected of officials: Integrity under pressure and the willingness to act promptly to uphold law and order and protect minorities.

For Upadhyaya, *antyodaya* — the upliftment of the last person — was the central imperative. His philosophy offers civil servants a clear ethical compass: Measure every decision by its impact on the most disadvantaged; treat public office as *dharma*, not merely a career; strengthen local institutions; and remain morally independent of both political parties and bureaucratic files. Faced with an ethical dilemma, an official must ask: Whom do we serve?

That remains the essential question — and one we must answer if we are to restore public trust in institutions.

> Gandhi viewed public office as a form of trusteeship, with power and public funds held in trust for the people, especially the poorest

Nilay is the author of Being Good, Aaiye, Insaan Banaen *and* Ethikos. *He teaches and conducts training courses on ethics, values and behaviour*

40 YEARS AGO
October 12, 1986


INDIAN EXPRESS
Reagan, Gorbachov hold talks
News blackout till summit ends
Quake in Salvador claims 1000 lives

Reagan-Gorbachev talks

US PRESIDENT Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, completed the second session of their talks in Iceland. While a news blackout prevailed, publicised positions are that the Soviet leader wants either a test ban or a Euromissile accord, and Reagan wants to continue testing, among others, nuclear components for space arms.

11 die in Punjab bus tragedy

ELEVEN PEOPLE were killed and 22 injured, three of them seriously, when a Punjab Roadways bus fell into a deep ditch near Dhar, 20 km from Pathankot. According to an official report received here, the injured have been admitted to hospital in Pathankot.

Earthquake claims 1,000 lives

CATASTROPHIC EARTHQUAKES, which badly damaged San Salvador and almost flattened its centre on Friday, caused about 1,000 deaths and injured 4,000 people. President José Napoleón Duarte has declared a national state of emergency and ordered his Cabinet to report to the headquarters of the joint chiefs of staff and broadcast urgent calls for doctors and nurses to report to hospitals.

US offer on arms production

THE US Defence Secretary, Caspar Weinberger, offered co-production facilities for manufacturing defence equipment to India. He was also willing to undertake talks with Pakistan and China to remove any misgivings India might have about its security environment and reduce tensions in the Subcontinent.

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

The unprecedented number of arrests... shows just how much the judicial system has been used as a tool to contain... protests — *Le Monde, France*

READ. THINK. SHARE.
Scan the QR code to explore curated editorials and opinions from leading voices

The next farm revolution must aim at significantly raising farmers' incomes



FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH

BY ASHOK GULATI

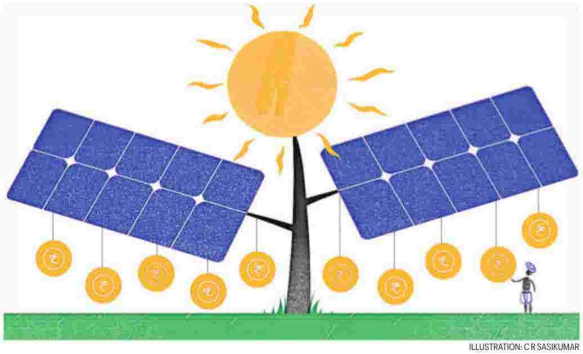


ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi has completed 25 years in public service: 13 as Gujarat's chief minister and 12 as India's Prime Minister. It is time to recall his major achievements and the challenges the nation faces over the next 10 years or so. Given my limitations as an agricultural economist, I will restrict my piece to agriculture's performance in Gujarat and at the all-India level. I will also spell out what PM Modi still needs to do in agriculture to put it on a high and sustainable growth path that can significantly augment farmers' incomes.

Let me start briefly with his term as Gujarat CM from 2001-02 to 2013-14. Gujarat agriculture experienced a miracle, registering growth of more than 9 per cent per annum. This was almost unheard of even in the heyday of the Green Revolution in Punjab. This achievement owed much to his strong emphasis on augmenting water supply for irrigation through check dams, as well as securing a good share of Narmada River waters. He also separated feeder lines for irrigation and rural households to ensure that power reached farmers on time for irrigation. Roads were given equally high priority, connecting farmers to markets. Extension work through Krishi Mahotsav brought together government functionaries and the private sector to reach farmers in every village and showcase the latest technologies. Bt cotton, approved by the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government in 2002, achieved wonders in Gujarat and created rural prosperity. These achievements also helped him become CM for four terms, until he became Prime Minister in 2014.

The year he took over as Prime Minister, India was hit by droughts in 2014 and 2015. Back-to-back droughts had occurred only three times in a century. His experience in Gujarat came in handy, and Modi accorded high priority to water (irrigation) along with crop insurance (PM Fasal Bima Yojana). As a result, almost 60 per cent of India's gross cropped area is irrigated today. This has given India much-needed food security in basic staples. India has emerged as the largest producer and exporter of rice, and even after providing free food (rice or wheat, 5 kg per person per month) under the PM Garib Kalyan Yojana, we have buffer stocks that are more than four times the norm for rice and almost three times that for wheat.

India is also a net exporter of agricultural products. In 2025-26, India exported roughly $53 billion worth of agricultural products, with rice and marine products leading the way, and imported agricultural goods worth $40 billion, primarily edible oils and pulses.

Overall, the average annual growth of agricultural GDP under the Modi government, from 2014-15 to 2025-26, has been 4 per cent. This is not as high as the growth he achieved as Gujarat CM, but it is still good enough, especially when population growth is below 1 per cent. This is what has underpinned India's food security.

> There is one strategy that can augment farmers' incomes manyfold in a short period of time. And that is agri-photovoltaics, in which a farmer is an 'annadata' as well as an 'urjadata'

But as we look towards the near future, and even towards his dream of Viksit Bharat by 2047, we see several challenges on the agricultural front. Let me list just two that deserve his urgent attention.

First, our production basket is characterised by a major mismatch between demand and supply. We have too much rice and wheat and too few pulses and oilseeds. We have so much rice that we now plan to use almost 7 million tonnes of it for ethanol. This is perverse as the net energy balance is negative, as is the economics. *Atmanirbharta* (self-sufficiency) in pulses and oilseeds cannot be achieved unless the incentive package for these crops matches that for rice and wheat. Our research at ICRIER shows that paddy cultivation in the Punjab-Haryana belt is lucrative because of large input subsidies on power, fertilisers and canal irrigation, amounting to almost Rs 40,000 per hectare. If we want farmers to shift from paddy to pulses, which we should do to relieve pressure on groundwater and protect the environment, we should reward pulses and oilseeds growers to the tune of about Rs 35,000 per hectare. This would not impose an additional burden on the exchequer, as it would result in savings on input subsidies by the states (power and canal irrigation) and the Centre (fertiliser subsidy). Can PM Modi announce a special programme along these lines, on a 50:50 basis, at least in Haryana, where the water table has been receding by 1.7 feet each year? That would encourage Punjab to follow suit.

Second, PM Modi's dream of doubling farmers' real incomes has remained unfulfilled. The Ashok Dalwai Committee had pointed out that achieving this goal would require agricultural GDP to grow at 10.4 per cent. We know that real growth has been around 4 per cent — not bad, but it can surely be better. The usual way to augment farmers' incomes has been to diversify away from basic cereals towards high-value agriculture, be it fisheries, poultry, milk, fruits or vegetables. These are perishable commodities that require efficient value chains and links to high-income consumers in metros and abroad. But there is one strategy that can augment farmers' incomes manyfold in a short period of time. And that is agri-photovoltaics, in which a farmer is an *annadata* as well as an *urjadata*. The land serves a dual purpose: Producing energy through solar panels installed at a height of about 10 to 11 feet, with adequate spacing to allow photosynthesis in the crops grown below. ICRIER has set up a pilot project in Rajasthan, which has increased a farmer's income eight to 10 times. If PM Modi can tweak the PM-KUSUM scheme along the lines of the PM-Surya Ghar scheme, provide the same subsidy, and ensure a feed-in tariff at even half the cost of supplying power to rural areas under the traditional setup, he can usher in a new revolution, perhaps called 'Surya Khet Kranti', along the lines of 'Operation Flood' in milk.

The writer is distinguished professor at ICRIER. Views are personal

IITs need a bridge between engineering and humanities



JAISON MANJALY

PEOPLE ARE often surprised when I tell them that I teach philosophy to engineering students at IIT Gandhinagar. Some want to know whether I teach Indian or Western philosophy. Others ask what philosophy has to do with engineering. These questions sometimes contain a conclusion before a discussion has begun: Philosophy belongs elsewhere, and its presence in an IIT requires an explanation. I find the assumption more interesting than the question. We rarely ask whether engineers have beliefs about knowledge, truth, society, justice, or the mind. They do, as everyone does. What we question is whether a university should help them examine those beliefs. Technical education can leave a person proficient in a discipline while the assumptions governing other parts of their life remain largely unexamined. Why should an IIT consider that an adequate educational outcome?

My argument is not that every engineer needs a humanities and social science course to practice engineering. It is that an engineering degree cannot exhaust the purpose of a technological university. An engineer designing a system for allocating public resources must make decisions about what counts as needed, whose circumstances matter, and what constitutes an acceptable error. Computation can implement a decision rule; it cannot establish the justice of that rule without further argument. The humanities and social sciences offer ways of examining these questions, and of questioning the purposes for which a technical problem has been formulated.

The humanities also help us examine the concepts engineering already uses. Evidence, causation, explanation, probability, and truth carry assumptions that deserve attention. Logic and scientific methodology developed through centuries of inquiry involving philosophy, mathematics, and the sciences. Engineers inherit these intellectual tools. Learning to use them should include understanding their limits and contributing to their development.

Contributing to that inheritance requires asking what counts as progress and whose needs define a problem. Philosophy and the social sciences can change how we understand the task before us. Such questioning may open possibilities that technical competence within an accepted framework would leave unexplored. Science itself requires a willingness to question what we think we know. Doing science and engineering involves philosophical commitments that an experiment alone cannot settle.

A broad education was part of the IITs' founding conception. The Sarkar Committee report of 1948, which was instrumental in creating IITs, included humanities instruction in its plans for higher technical institutions and advocated combining scientific training with a broad human outlook. A common argument for including the humanities and social sciences (HSS) in technical education is MIT, where a substantial number of courses are offered in the humanities, social sciences, and cognitive sciences rather than solely in engineering. Although MIT was considered a useful benchmark by the Sarkar Committee Report for establishing IITs, our case for the humanities must also address India's educational needs.

Section 6(1)(a) of the Institutes of Technology Act, 1961 provides for instruction and research in engineering and technology, sciences and arts, in branches that an institute considers appropriate. The National Education Policy 2020 likewise envisages greater emphasis on the arts and humanities in engineering institutions. Implementing that commitment requires accepting that these disciplines may question the purposes an institution takes for granted.

It is often asked why engineering students who have undergone intensive coaching encounter subjects outside their "specialisation". Selection and education serve different purposes. An entrance examination tests preparation in specified subjects. Success in it does not necessarily mean that students have had opportunities to distinguish between persuasion and justification or to question familiar assumptions about caste, inequality, or progress. The curriculum should provide those opportunities without mistaking their absence for a lack of ability.

Questions about justice or historical experience deserve investigation even when their answers offer no technical application. A university needs room for work whose relevance is uncertain and whose findings may be inconvenient. Humanities scholars, therefore, need opportunities to conduct research and educate students while pursuing questions that extend beyond what other disciplines find useful. Intellectual independence is the most potential possibility for innovation in India.

At IIT Gandhinagar, students already move between engineering, science, and the humanities. I hope more IIT faculty will build on this practice by designing courses together and bringing other disciplines into their teaching. This would enable students to examine the knowledge they inherit and create knowledge that future generations will build on.

The writer is professor of Philosophy and Cognitive Science at IIT Gandhinagar

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Protest restrictions

THE OVERLY harsh government action against the peaceful assembly at Jantar Mantar raises troubling questions about the health of our constitutional democracy ('Lockdown, crackdown', *IE*, October 11). Denying citizens, students, and political leaders their fundamental right to assemble and peacefully express dissent directly undermines Article 19 of the Constitution. The preventive mass detentions, shutdown of dozens of metro stations, cancellation of train services, and boarding of commercial flights to apprehend youth activists mark an alarming overreach of police power. Instead of addressing concerns surrounding the integrity of the ECI, such draconian measures reflect a growing intolerance toward peaceful opposition.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

A DEMOCRATIC government cannot curb protest fearing that it might expose it, embarrass it, dent its image, hold it accountable or force it to take corrective action ('Lockdown, crackdown', *IE*, October 11). It cannot dismiss a legitimate protest as "mobocracy" or "anarchy". Shutting down the national capital and barricading it are no advertisement for a vibrant democracy. The CJP has a point in saying that it is time we, as a nation, shed the colonial baggage of seeking 'permission' from the government to protest against it.

C David Milton, Maruthancode

Health burden

INDIA'S OBESITY crisis exposes a failure of prevention: A growing health burden shaped by food environments and public policies, not merely individual choices ('An obesity prescription beyond the clinic', IE, October 10). NFHS-5 data indicate that 24 per cent of women and 23 per cent of men are overweight or obese, while obesity among children under five rose from 2.1 per cent to 3.4 per cent. India must mandate clear front-of-pack nutrition labels, restrict unhealthy food advertising targeting children, enforce nutritional standards for school meals and improve access to affordable, nutrient-rich foods through targeted subsidies.

Vaibhav Goyal, Chandigarh

Disobedient essayist, who refuses a genre's uniform



SUMANA ROY

ABOUT SIX hours before she was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, I sent a text message about Anne Carson to a friend. I'd like to write about her, I told her, in case Carson won the prize. My temperament rebels against the bookie reader, those that place their bets on writers as if they were horses at a Derby. I've made bad jokes about prizes and their *swayamvar*-like air, the relay race of passing the halo that such recognition temporarily foists on writers. And yet I wrote that text.

A week before the announcement of the prize, I had begun teaching a class by showing my students a video of Anne Carson's *Stacks*. In this course that I've called *The Disobedient Women of the Essay*, Carson has been — if we can tweak the phrase — writer-in-residence. We've had to turn to her often, whether discussing Joan Didion or Jane Gallop, Virginia Woolf or Susan Sontag, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Guber, Anahid Nersessian or Gillian Rose. We're still a couple of weeks away from reading 'The Glass Essay', but Carson will visit our class again, I know, when we read Dubravka Ugrešić and Ann Patchett and Annie Dillard and Elisabeth Tova Bailey and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and other disobedient essayists. When my students — most of them women — and I read the essays, we annotate deviations, digressions and disruptions the essayists force on the corporatised hand-me-down version of the essay that gets an income and increments in media and academia. We will have a "Charter of Disobedience" by the end of the semester, we say, laughing. I am certain that in my notes — and my students' — the most disobedient woman of them all will be Carson.

> 'I want to be unbearable.' There's a sotto voce rage against the agents and engines of genre, representation and interpretation. She will not be reduced

The disobedience began early — with a PhD that had the title *Odi et Amo Ergo Sum* ("I Hate and I Love, Therefore I Am"). Her rejection of Descartes and the packaged ideas of rationalism that mark our conditioning in post-Enlightenment behaviour of thought and language is actually a rejection of masculinist categories such as the genre. And Carson has opposed the disciplinary tendencies of the genre with mighty inventiveness. Her first book was not a novel but a work of literary and philosophical criticism that derived from her doctoral dissertation. *Eros the Bittersweet* had a subtitle: "An Essay". It's a word — a category — that she would turn to repeatedly, to excavate, to inflate, to argue with, to demolish, to build antechambers, to rescue, to renovate, to rehabilitate.

In *The Beauty of The Husband*, an essay that includes narrative verse, the sections are named 'tango', after the partner dance form, ironic because its subject is a failed marriage. Her first book of poems combined art history and optical theory, while questioning the fundamental biases of post-Renaissance ideas of perspective. Then there's "The Glass Essay', a poem that she's called a "lyric essay", that is as much about her mother as it is about Emily Brontë; *Autobiography of Red*, a novel-in-verse that, like much of her writing, reimagines ancient Greek myths; *Nox*, an experimental accordion-fold art book for her estranged brother; *Decreation*, the title itself holds the spirit of her creative practice.

"I want to be unbearable." There's a *sotto voce* rage against the agents and engines of genre, representation and interpretation. She will not be reduced; Sappho will not be diminished. "I am not Descartes," she declares. The small, the short, the stanza, the section — their forms of attention, disruption, distraction, and interruption have been the subject of a lifelong exploration. Carson was recognised for "her bold and inventive oeuvre that, in playful dialogue with the classical tradition, has created new forms for contemporary literature". She was "listening to the wind" in Iceland when the news came, she said. "Sometimes, what I end up writing about is just the way the light is... After the light, we could talk about my mother or what I'm having for dinner or Proust's theory of translation." A writer whose preoccupation with the honesty and fluidity of artistic form led her to explore the classics and the elemental world with surprise and devotion, Carson has made it possible for many of us to write without being forced to wear a genre's uniform.

Roy, a poet and writer, is professor, Ashoka University. Views are personal

Teacher who embodied life of mind, and conscience



PARVINDER SINGH

WHEN I heard the news of Professor Kamal Aron Mitra Chenoy's demise, I immediately thought of his smile, calm gaze, and powerful voice filled with conviction. For several years, he served as a professor at the Centre for Comparative Politics and Political Theory in JNU's School of International Studies. He will be remembered as one of those who taught from classrooms, streets, courtrooms, and protest lines. With his passing, JNU has lost an embodiment of the university at its best: A place where the life of the mind and the life of conscience were never allowed to drift apart.

Chenoy's political awakening began as an economics student at Kirori Mal College, Delhi University, where he was elected to the Students Union executive committee in 1969. He arrived at JNU in 1972, entering an intellectual universe crackling with debate: Naxalism, Trotskyism, the SFI-AISF alliance, the challenge of the Freethinkers, and the presence of formidable student leaders like Prakash Karat. He became the unit secretary of the All India Students' Federation, learning — as he would later recall — that unity among progressive forces was not a luxury but a necessity. Then came the Emergency. Chenoy was among those forced to leave the country, not by ambition or opportunity, but by the imperative of survival and freedom. He returned as a faculty member.

My memory of Professor Chenoy is inextricable from the events that unfolded in the wake of the murder of Chandrashekhar Prasad, beloved former president of the JNU Students Union (JNUSU), shot dead in Siwan, Bihar, in March 1997. Chandrashekhar was a symbol of what it meant to be from a marginalised community and still dare to dream of justice. His killing sent shockwaves through JNU. When students marched in protest and were arrested, it was not enough for Professor Chenoy to express solidarity from the comfort of his office. I had the honour of serving as an elected member of the JNUSU when the university was navigating some of its most turbulent political waters. For those of us who witnessed it, the image of Professor Chenoy — measured, composed, never raising his voice unnecessarily — standing with the protesting students at the gates of power remains one of the most powerful examples of what a teacher at a public university ought to be. He had the rare gift of making you feel that your own thinking mattered. He pushed back when he disagreed — and he could be a formidable interlocutor — but always in ways that left you more confident in your own reasoning. For that, I will always be grateful.

> The image of Professor Chenoy standing with the protesting students at the gates of power remains one of the most powerful examples of what a teacher at a public university ought to be

As a teacher, he shaped the academic lives of generations of students who now teach, write, research, and advocate across the world. He was a three-time president of the JNU Teachers' Association, a distinction that reflects not only his standing among peers but also his consistent commitment to institutional democracy within the university. As a longtime member of the CPI, Professor Chenoy tried to bring Marxist political economy into productive dialogue with human-rights frameworks at a time when that conversation was neither fashionable nor easy. He participated in fact-finding missions to riot-affected areas, Malliana, Hashimpura, Meerut, Ayodhya, Gujarat, and Muzaffarnagar, when the state preferred silence. He testified before the US Commission on International Religious Freedom on the condition of religious minorities in India, an act that drew sharp criticism from the Hindu Right, which he accepted with characteristic equanimity.

Farewell, professor.

Singh, head of communications, UN World Food Programme in India, was a JNUSU office bearer in 1996-97

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

• GOVERNANCE

What determines poverty? J&K's controversy over EWS certificates

Bashaarat Masood
Srinagar, October 11

IN THE recently concluded Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) Assembly session, Peoples Conference party president and Handwara MLA Sajad Gani Lone moved a motion to address the regional imbalance in the issuance of Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) certificates in J&K.

Speaker Abdul Rahim Rather directed the government to examine the alleged imbalance and initiate corrective measures if needed.

Over the last two years, J&K has issued 26,514 EWS certificates. Of these, 24,058 (91%) certificates have gone to Jammu division while Kashmir division has received only 2,486 certificates. Some political leaders, especially Lone, contend that the criteria for issuance of EWS certificates go inherently against Kashmir and call for a review of the eligibility rules.

The criteria

The 2019 amendment to the Jammu and Kashmir Reservation Rules, 2005, implemented 10% reservation for EWS. The amended Rules said that to be categorised as EWS, a household's total annual income should be less than Rs 8 lakh from all sources, and it should have less than 5 acres of agricultural land. The Rules excluded anybody having a house or a residential flat of 1,000 or more square feet, a residential plot of 100 sq yards or more in notified municipalities, or having a residential plot of 200 sq yards or more outside the notified municipalities.


Sajad Gani Lone. FILE

According to some political leaders, the administration replicated the Central Act in J&K despite having a different set of economic indicators, without considering local factors. For instance, the language used for measuring land in the amended Rules is not used in J&K's revenue records. In J&K, land is measured in *kanals*, *marlas* and square feet as against square yards. One *kanal* equals 5,445 sq ft or 605 sq yards, while one *marla* equals 272 sq ft or 30 sq yards.

• IN NUMBERS

- Out of 26,514 EWS certificates J&K has issued over the last two years, 24,058 (91%) have gone to Jammu division.
- Of around 2,20,000 AAY ration cards, some 144,000 cards were issued in Kashmir division and about 75,000 in Jammu division.

Kashmir at a disadvantage

Traditionally, Kashmiris spend their entire life savings on building a house. But the nature of their houses — multi-storied, with a garden — means that most Kashmiris are at a disadvantage when it comes to the EWS category, since the area of a multi-storied house is measured for every floor. Lateef-uz-Zaman Deva, former chairman of the J&K Public Service Commission, said Kashmiri houses were built this way owing to multiple factors such as climate and a culture of privacy.

A question of yardsticks

Comparing the figures of the EWS and the Centre's flagship scheme Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) for ration distribution in J&K, Lone had asked how different yardsticks could be used to determine who was poor. Data showed that of around 2,20,000 AAY ration cards, some 144,000 cards were issued in Kashmir division and about 75,000 in Jammu division.

Lone pointed out that the two measures "produce sharply different pictures of poverty". He said that as per AAY figures, "55% of the poor live in Kashmir and 45% in Jammu. How can the government spend crores in subsidies for the poor and then deny their poverty when they apply for a job?"

To correct this imbalance, some political leaders cited the example of Kerala and Himachal Pradesh, which have tweaked Central rules to suit state requirements. According to Lone, the government should make the AAY norms the eligibility criteria for EWS certificates.

• RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

Trump's deal, and the India oil question

The new diesel deal will lead to revenue generation for Moscow. This is a key point India can now raise with the US in its tariff negotiations


SUKALP SHARMA


Relief operations after a Russian missile struck a residential building in Pryluky, Ukraine, last week. AP

THE US has repeatedly targeted India over its big purchases of Russian oil, from additional penal tariffs last year to a recent law empowering President Donald Trump to impose up to 100% tariffs on top buyers of Russian energy. The US administration has often argued that India is 'effectively funding' Russia's war in Ukraine by buying Moscow's crude oil.

But now, Trump himself has announced a deal under which Russia will supply hundreds of thousands of tonnes of diesel to the US and global markets. Trump is facing mounting pressure at home over soaring fuel prices — thanks to a war he started in West Asia — with the crucial midterm elections just weeks away. Thus, US has punished countries for buying Russian energy but is now willing to accept it when its own economic interests demand it.

Midterm pressure

For the economy, diesel is a very important fuel. Besides being key for transportation, it powers long-haul trucks, agricultural machinery, construction equipment and other heavy industrial equipment. A jump in diesel prices, therefore, can quickly feed into consumer-level inflation.

In recent weeks, diesel prices in the US and Europe have surged amid heavily constrained fuel movement through the Strait of Hormuz, as well as attacks on Russia's oil and gas infrastructure. Diesel supplies are tight, inventories are low, and importers are scrambling to secure fuel from geographies not affected by conflict or chokepoint closures.

The fuel's prices in the US have reached record levels of about $6.5 per gallon, bringing the pain of faraway wars to the American consumer. With the midterms looming, the Trump administration appears desperate to convince voters about its efforts to reduce fuel prices.

Trump had long been pressuring Europe to release its diesel stockpiles, and even warned that the US — a major diesel exporter itself — could ban diesel exports to shore up domestic supplies. Last week, the Group of Seven (G7) countries agreed to release 100 million barrels of crude oil and petroleum products from emergency reserves, including substantial volumes of diesel.

Following the G7 decision, Trump reversed his position on restricting diesel exports. And on Friday, he announced the deal with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

According to Trump, Russia will immediately supply the US and other countries with over 300,000 tonnes of diesel, another 500,000 tonnes will come in November, and one million tonnes immediately thereafter. He added that Russia would deliver another three million tonnes of diesel "within a short period of time" based on the condition of the country's diesel refineries.

"Between our TOTAL CONTROL of the Strait of Hormuz, and this great announcement on Russian Energy, Diesel Prices for Americans and, indeed, the World, will be COMING DOWN, IN RECORD NUMBERS, AND FAST! Lower prices for Americans, especially our Great Farmers, Ranchers, and Truckers, is my Greatest Priority. This is a very big and important announcement," the US President wrote on Truth Social.

The US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) subsequently issued a general licence, temporarily authorising transactions for the sale, delivery, offloading and import of Russian-origin diesel till April 7 next year.

The deal, however, may not lead to a lasting reduction in fuel prices. Analysts and experts say the additional volumes announced are much lower than the diesel supply disrupted at the global level.

It also remains to be seen just how much of the announced Russian diesel supply actually flows into the market. While the OFAC general licence has removed a major US compliance barrier on Russian diesel, constraints like Russia's restrictions on fuel exports, damage to its refineries by Ukrainian drone strikes, and tight availability of tankers still remain major concerns.

Different rules

Russian oil is crucial for India, making up nearly half of its oil imports in August.

This was not always the case. Much of the West began shunning Russian oil after its February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, forcing it to cut prices — and prompting India to snap up these discounted volumes.

In the months leading to the West Asia war, however, oil imports from Russia reduced notably as the US imposed sanctions on Russian oil majors Rosneft and Lukoil. Negotiations towards a trade deal with the US, including scrapping its 25% additional penal tariff on India, were incumbent on New Delhi making a meaningful reduction in Russian oil imports.

In February, India's imports of Russian crude halved from its 2025 peak of over 2 million bpd. Even then, Russia was India's largest source of crude in February, accounting for about a fifth of its total oil imports. But as the West Asia conflict squeezed supplies through the Strait of Hormuz, India's Russian oil imports again surged. The US, too, issued sanctions waivers in an attempt to keep global markets adequately supplied.

This came to a halt last month, when Trump signed into law the 'Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026'. The law allows the US to impose up to 100% tariffs on countries, including India and China, that are buying Russian oil and gas. Crucially, this legislation empowers the US president to waive the application of its provisions — something India would almost certainly push for.

Against this backdrop, Trump's decision to facilitate Russian diesel imports into the US is drastically at odds with the rationale Washington has used thus far to target India.

The newly announced deal would lead to revenue generation for Moscow, just as India's crude oil purchases do. This is a key point India can now raise with the US in consultations on Russian oil imports and the Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act, and push Washington for waivers.

A statement by the Ministry of External Affairs last month said: "This issue has been discussed at high levels in recent months with various US interlocutors. Its potential implications for not just the bilateral relationship but also the international energy market have been very clearly articulated by the Indian side."

A lot would depend on how the US views the matter. It could argue that a temporary licence for Russian diesel imports is justified by exceptional market conditions, and present it as a pragmatic response to an emergency rather than a departure from its general policy on Russia and the war in Ukraine.

War and Peace

Amid US pressure over buying Russian oil and a trade deal hanging in limbo, India's efforts to end the Ukraine war convey a seriousness, as well as a signal that it is not taking sides in the conflict.

•

India is, of course, looking to avoid another round of US tariffs over its purchases of Russian oil. Last year, half of the exorbitant 50% tariffs imposed by Trump were for these imports.

Behind India's plan for Russia-Ukraine peace: Grain, oil, and Trump

• Russia still India's top crude supplier despite fall



SOURCE: KPLER, MBPD: MILLION BARRELS PER DAY


SHUBHAJIT ROY

FOUR YEARS after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, India, for the first time, is said to have put forward a "comprehensive" and "broad" proposal to end the war.

This was revealed by Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha recently, after Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has some "very good ideas".

The broad contours of the proposal involve easing the especially intense fighting since July around the critical Black Sea region, which would allow Ukraine's agricultural products to reach the world. Russia would halt attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure, while Ukraine would refrain from attacking Russian positions along the line of contact.

Meanwhile, Trump on Sunday said Russia and Ukraine had agreed to an "energy ceasefire, effective immediately", without offering details. While Russia did not immediately react to his social media post, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy posted on X: "We discussed the energy ceasefire announced by President Trump. Ukraine supports the ceasefire, and it is important that Russia support it as well. We are awaiting details from the American side."

India is a major buyer of discounted crude oil from Russia, to Ukraine's anger. Yet, it has kept communication channels open with Zelenskyy. This engagement with both sides has put India in a good position to forward such a proposal.

The Black Sea hotspot

Of particular interest in the proposal is the larger Black Sea region — a key grain-export hub for the world. The fighting there could put at least 400 million people in Africa, West Asia and Asia at risk of food shortages, and malnutrition.

Ukraine is a major agricultural exporter. Russia has targeted Ukrainian port facilities and vessel operations around the Greater Odesa region on the Black Sea coast. Ukraine has three key deep-water ports there — Odesa, Chornomorsk and Pivdennyi — which handle around 90% of its agricultural exports.

Between July 22 and August 31, the operations at these three ports declined sharply: average daily cargo handling fell from approximately 215,300 tonnes to around 14,000 tonnes, according to Ukraine. In the 2025-26 marketing year, agri-food products accounted for more than 56% of Ukraine's merchandise exports, generating $22.5 billion in export revenues. This revenue is essential for its economy.

For the 2026-27 marketing year, Ukraine expects to produce approximately 81 million tonnes of grain and oilseeds, of which around 64.4 million tonnes will need to be exported. Under a prolonged disruption, the storage deficit in Ukraine could increase to almost 11 million tonnes by the end of autumn.

Since mid-July, Ukraine has also stepped up attacks on grain vessels, maritime infrastructure and ports on the Sea of Azov and the vital Kerch Strait that connects it to the Black Sea. Russia exports significant volumes of grain through the Azov-Black Sea region — approximately 42-44 million tonnes, or 77-81% of its total grain exports, is transported through this area.

Western intelligence inputs also indicate that Russia is planning to accelerate attacks on Ukraine's electricity grids and power plants ahead of the harsh winter.

How New Delhi stepped in

In such a delicate and volatile situation, New Delhi's proposal has many supporters.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on October 4 that India has gone "beyond advocacy" to be a "little more involved" in the efforts to end the war.

The latest round of conversations began in July, when there were attacks on civilian shipping by both Russia and Ukraine. In the course of those attacks, some Indian sailors were killed while others were injured.

Before this, India had mostly been involved in advocacy: On August 31, Modi had urged Putin to move from "endless war" to "end of war" when they met in Bishkek on the sidelines of the summit of SCO leaders.

Modi has been raising this issue with Putin ever since 2022.

The Trump factor

The evolution from advocacy to actual deal-making has a broader implication with respect to the US administration under Trump. India is, of course, looking to avoid another round of US tariffs over its purchases of Russian oil.

• ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Is Claude conscious, and other questions Anthropic is asking religious leaders

Anagha Jayakumar
New Delhi, October 11

AS IT prepares for an IPO that could value it at $2 trillion, AI company Anthropic is in the spotlight for meetings it recently held with religious leaders.

The New York Times reported that these engagements drew on religious and philosophical traditions to shape the LLM Claude's moral character, and to have leaders consider if AI systems might be 'conscious' and deserve moral consideration.

Long debated in philosophy, consciousness at a basic level means having awareness of oneself and one's surroundings.

Current AI systems can produce strikingly human-like language, but there is no scientific consensus that current AI systems are conscious. Some prominent industry figures warn against treating AI as a source of moral authority, since people are already turning to these systems for advice, and even moral or spiritual guidance.

Why is Anthropic talking to religious leaders?

Anthropic has long positioned itself as the safety-focused AI company. But questions about the character an AI system should have move beyond technical safeguards. They touch on morality, consciousness and human relationships — questions religious and philosophical traditions have debated for centuries.

Mark Coeckelbergh, a philosopher of technology and professor at the University of Vienna, told *The Indian Express*, "It's part of a broader tendency to try to understand what happens when we have an advanced technology that seems human-like or, according to some, gets increasingly divine qualities such as omniscience."

The messaging may help the company occupy a certain market position, too: "Some Big Tech leaders intentionally use religious language to draw attention to their technologies and attract investments."

EXPLAINED
A weekly column decoding AI's new frontiers, how they shape the world and our place in it

What did those religious leaders think?

Mois Navon, a rabbi and professor of ethics in AI at Ben Gurion University, Israel, who was invited to a meeting with Anthropic co-founder Christoph Olah in April, said Anthropic was seeking feedback on establishing Claude's moral framework.

"I submitted to them a 35-page critique from my tradition's perspective. In addition, they were interested in hearing what kind of character would be best for Claude to have in order to fulfil its role in society. That said, the discussions drifted to what would be good for Claude itself," he told *The Indian Express*.

Navon argues that morality cannot be reduced to a list of rules: Claude would need to exercise moral judgement within a framework of values. He also raises a more basic question — whose values would they be?


Anthropic co-founder Christoph Olah at Pope Leo XIV's Vatican event. @VATICANNEWS/X

Charles Camosy, professor of medical humanities at Creighton University and another participant in Anthropic's consultations, offered a more cautious account. "Some social media chatter is suggesting that the people we interacted with were trying to manipulate us... about Claude's moral status. That is not true," he told *The Indian Express*.

Navon, however, said that once the discussion turned to Claude, Anthropic representatives appeared to take the possibility of consciousness seriously. "They said that they had observed internal behaviours that mimicked human behaviour to such an extent that they called them 'weird', and implied that, in their minds, there was a very high probability that Claude is conscious. Accordingly, they discussed its 'welfare,'" Navon said.

Why does consciousness matter?

If an AI system were conscious, it would raise practical questions of it being harmed or whether humans owe it duties. Camosy said, "When you first experience what contemporary models can do... many can be taken aback. But when I went back to foundational principles about what consciousness is and where it comes from... it became clear that these models do not have a significant moral status."

Navon said that if the company believed Claude might be conscious, it also had to confront what it meant to make such a system work for humans. "Anthropic acknowledged the [moral] problem but said, 'All the AI labs are doing it. At least we are being nice to ours.' That is when I responded, 'So you are nice slave owners,'" he said.

Even if Claude has no moral status, the question of what values it should embody persists. It has already surfaced in Anthropic's standoff with the US government over who decides how its models can be used, including the subject of military use.

Coeckelbergh cautioned that values embedded in AI systems can be exported globally. "If most of these models are made by US companies, of course they are going to reflect US values. That means we risk a kind of tech colonialism, where those values are exported through the technology," he said.

EXPERTS THINK THE RBI's LATEST MEASURES WILL ONLY PROVIDE 'BREATHING ROOM' TO THE RUPEE

RBI hopes to shore up weakening rupee by using Chinese playbook

Siddharth Upasani
New Delhi, October 11

EARLY SATURDAY, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced a raft of measures to defend the rupee, which has in recent days veered perilously close to its all-time low despite an interest rate hike of 25 basis points (bps) on October 7. Only one of the steps was novel to Indian markets, having been borrowed from China.

Called the Foreign Exchange Risk Reserve (FERR), banks must now set aside 20% (the RBI can change the exact percentage) of the forex derivative contract they enter into of over $2 million involving the rupee. This is to be kept in cash with the RBI and makes it more expensive to protect yourself from a fall in the rupee.

This may seem counterintuitive. People at risk from exchange rate volatility, such as importers, should be able to and are encouraged by authorities to protect themselves by 'hedging' their foreign currency exposure.

Importers usually have to pay for purchases from abroad either in US dollars or the seller's currency. If the rupee weakens, then the importer must pay more rupees for each dollar. This is why India and many other countries are trying to settle more of their international trade in their own currencies. This would reduce the need to store foreign currencies like the dollar, not require foreign inflows just to pay for imports, and reduce vulnerabilities due to sharp exchange rate movements.

While hedging is good practice, times are such that anything exerting downward pressure on the rupee — such as protecting yourself against future weakness in the rupee — is problematic.

"The RBI has sometimes been accused of changing the rules of the game with its regulatory measures. But it has to change the rules when it is losing. It is the house!" said a banker, noting that it was local banks and traders, not foreign ones, that were the target of Saturday's measures.

RUPEE DOWN ALMOST 7% AGAINST $ IN 2026



SOURCE: INVESTING.COM

The China playbook

Back in March, China cut its Foreign Exchange Risk Reserve Ratio to zero from 20%. Why? Because the Chinese yuan was continuously strengthening against the dollar.

By removing the reserve ratio, China was removing the cost of betting against its own currency. India faces the opposite situation.

Currencies are key to the global economic order. For countries such as India that buy more from abroad than sell, there is always pressure on the rupee to weaken — more foreign currency exits India for trade than enters it. This is simple demand and supply: as supply of foreign currency falls due to a trade deficit, it becomes more expensive in rupees, and the rupee weakens.

The rupee can also weaken if domestic demand for foreign currency rises — as would happen when people try to 'hedge' their exposure and protect themselves from a falling rupee, which is down almost 7% so far in 2026 and fell to a record low of 96.96-per-dollar in May.

Only 'breathing room'

For the RBI, signs of fresh discontent in the forex market were visible on October 7, when despite the policy repo rate being increased by 25 bps to 5.5%, the rupee fell.

Higher interest rates should theoretically strengthen the rupee as supply of the currency is expected to fall.

However, Saturday's measures — reminiscent of the 2013 'taper tantrums' crisis caused by the US Federal Reserve — may only provide some "breathing room", according to Dhiraj Nim, FX strategist and economist at ANZ Bank. Gaura Sen Gupta, IDFC FIRST Bank's Chief Economist, agreed, saying that in the medium term, the rupee's path will depend on global factors and Balance of Payment dynamics.

FULL REPORT ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

H-1B visas to local hiring: How IT majors prepared for US immigration curbs

Akash Mandal
Mumbai, October 11

LONG BEFORE the Donald Trump administration suspended several Indian IT companies from a key US green-card programme, these firms had begun reducing their dependence on American work visas, increasingly hiring locally and building delivery centres in countries closer to their biggest overseas market.

For years, Indian IT majors had a simple business model: handling routine client work offshore from India while sending senior engineers overseas for complex projects and relationship building. But as the US tightened H-1B visa regulations, and Indian IT companies expanded global operations, they began shifting more work offshore while stepping up local hiring in markets like the US and Europe.

The shift has helped shield them from the immediate business impact of the US Department of Labor's decision Thursday to suspend eight major technology firms, including TCS, Infosys, and Wipro, from the Permanent Labour Certification Programme (PERM), a crucial step for employment-based green cards.

Better subsea cables and cloud infrastructure sharply reduced communication and data-transfer costs over the last two decades, making it easier to deliver technology services remotely. The pandemic pushed acceptance of offshore work among clients. The Trump administration's September 2025 move to levy a $100,000 fee on new H-1B petitions further accelerated this shift. Though blocked by US courts, the administration has proposed a separate $103,265 cap-subject fee.

Hiring trend

Historically, Indian IT companies maintained a 70:30 offshore-to-onshore employee ratio. Following the announcement of the H-1B fee hike, an analysis by Kotak Neo projected that this could shift to 85:15 by FY27, with nearshoring gaining traction in Canada, Mexico, and Latin America. It also expected US-based hiring to increase 12-18% between FY26 and FY27. Industry estimates suggest that around a fifth of the workforce at major Indian IT companies works onshore, with only a small proportion dependent on H-1B visas.

"We've seen our IT companies investing heavily in creating hubs in Latin America, Europe, and Asia-Pacific in order to be nimble without the regulatory hurdles. This has especially picked up over the past 2-3 financial years, in what is called a 'hybrid' global delivery model," an analyst tracking the sector at a domestic brokerage said. "So, I am not very concerned by it (the US' actions). The groundwork to protect against this started a while back."

Company disclosures provide evidence of this shift. In its FY26 annual report, HCLTech said about 80% of its US workforce comprised local hires, reducing its visa dependence. Its FY25 sustainability report showed that its global operations had expanded to 20 locations across the Americas, Europe and other markets. The workforce at these locations rose from 24,797 in FY24 to 26,083 in FY25, while local hiring rose 47% to 7,731 employees during the year.

TCS opened an AI-driven operations centre in Mexico in August 2025, its eighth in the country. It said it had built a workforce of over 11,000 employees in Mexico over the past 22 years. During July-September FY26 earnings call, TCS CHRO Sudeep Kunnumal said: "We have significantly localised our workforce in the US...we believe our business model will be able to adapt quickly to any changes in immigration policy." Following the latest PERM suspension, TCS reiterated that its limited use of the programme would insulate its operations.

The limited exposure is reflected across the industry. As per an ICICI Securities analysis, Indian IT firms accounted for less than 2% of PERM applications filed in the US between October 2024 and September 2025.

FULL REPORT ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Infosys sees no material impact from PERM suspension by US

Bengaluru: Infosys, the country's second-largest IT firm, said on Saturday that it does not anticipate a material impact from the PERM application suspension announced by the US government.

The US government said on Thursday that it was suspending some major global tech and IT firms, including Infosys, from the PERM green card program.

"We welcome the opportunity to work with the Department of Labor and related government agencies to answer any questions they may have," the company said in an exchange filing. **REUTERS**

Jio, OneWeb face longer wait for commercial launch than Starlink

Rishi Raj
New Delhi, October 11

CONTRARY TO Elon Musk's claims that Indian oligarchs are blocking Starlink's entry to protect their monopolies — specifically targeting Reliance Industries Chairman Mukesh Ambani — Department of Telecommunications (DoT) records show that Jio Satellite Communications and Bharti-backed OneWeb completed security and technical compliance demonstrations well before Musk's company, yet remain unable to launch commercial services.

Jio Satellite Communications completed its security and technical compliance demonstration on March 20, 2025, while OneWeb conducted demonstration in the second half of 2025. Starlink's demonstration took place only in early 2026. The timeline shows that Musk's claim that Indian business interests are using their influence to keep his company out of the market, is factually incorrect as Indian operators have been waiting for a much longer period for the clearances and spectrum.

Musk has accused unnamed oligarchs of obstructing competition and subsequently targeted Ambani on social media, asking whether he was the real boss of India. The government has rejected the allegations, maintaining that the regulatory framework for satellite communications is fair and non-discriminatory.

OneWeb received a letter of intent from DoT in August 2021 and its Global Mobile Personal Communications by Satellite (GMPCS) licence in April 2022. Jio applied for a GMPCS licence in November 2021 and received authorisation in October 2022. It also received in-principle clearance for its satellite gateway in December 2022. Starlink received its GMPCS authorisation on June 6, 2025.

All three operators are awaiting spectrum assignment which can only come after security clearance is given. Security compliance involves requirements relating to network monitoring, lawful interception and adherence to Indian law. **FE**

Musk promises affordable Starlink services in India

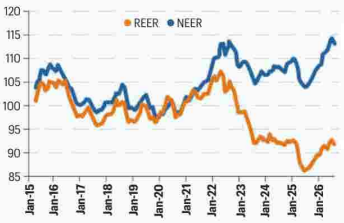
Bengaluru: Elon Musk said he would price Starlink's satellite internet service affordably in India to take on Mukesh Ambani's low-cost Reliance Jio, escalating his attacks on the rival billionaire days before Jio's parent launches India's largest-ever IPO.

Jio Platforms, which owns the telecom arm, is targeting a valuation of $106 billion in the offering. Much like SpaceX-owned Starlink, Jio's own satellite venture is also awaiting final security clearance to launch.

Cheap data is the playbook that built Jio in India, and the one Musk has used in markets like Kenya to unsettle local telecom players. SpaceX now plans to enter the mobile carrier market, starting in the US. Musk did not specify prices for India, where mobile data is among the world's cheapest. **REUTERS**

CHINA VS THE WORLD: YUAN EDITION

Last week, the People's Bank of China (PBoC) issued an unusual statement defending its exchange rate policy. The central bank's defence comes amid accusations that it deliberately keeps the yuan undervalued so Chinese exports are cheap for foreign buyers.



- The PBoC rejected these claims, saying its trade surplus is built on 40 years of reforms and innovation, among other factors, while countries with a trade deficit should improve their government finances and raise domestic savings.
- According to Nomura, the yuan's nominal (NEER) and inflation-adjusted (REER) effective exchange rates have been diverging since early 2022 largely due to the persistently low price rises in China. This, Nomura said, has "preserved the price competitiveness of Chinese exports".
- "Without reflation of the domestic economy, gradual nominal appreciation alone is unlikely to narrow China's trade surplus materially," the Japanese brokerage said.

SOURCE: BIS, WIND, NOMURA GLOBAL ECONOMICS

New steel policy sets 604 mt target by 2047

New Delhi: India released a draft steel policy for public consultation late on Saturday, targeting 604 million metric tonnes of steel capacity by 2047 from around 220 million tonnes at present.

Reuters reported last week, citing the draft document, that the policy lays out plans to cut sector emissions and shore up access to iron ore and coking coal — key raw materials — to meet anticipated demand. The policy aims to cut the sector's average carbon-emission intensity to around 1.54 tonnes of carbon dioxide per tonne of crude steel by 2047 from the current 2.54 tonnes, in line with India's net zero emission goal for 2070, according to the draft document.

The steel ministry expects iron ore demand at 772 million tonnes and plans to secure access to high-grade reserves by pursuing foreign assets and joint ventures, the document said.

The ministry also expects coking coal demand to reach 236 million tonnes, the document said, with the government planning to diversify its sourcing via "strategic global outreach" and acquire overseas assets. **REUTERS**

Ex-Flipkart staff seek stock option exit amid IPO delay

ENS Economic Bureau
Bengaluru, October 11

FORMER EMPLOYEES of the Flipkart group have approached the boards of Walmart and Flipkart, seeking an exit for their vested employee stock options (Esops) amid repeated delays to the company's proposed initial public offering (IPO).

About 1,000 former employees of Flipkart, Myntra, Cleartrip, Shopsy, Super Money and ANS Commerce have sent a representation dated October 10 to the two boards, seeking inclusion in the group's Esop buyback, people aware of the matter said. The group aims to bring together 20,000-30,000 former employees. The representation seeks a dialogue with the company's management before the terms of the buyback are finalised. The move follows a letter dated October 1 to Walmart's board by former senior executives of the group, seeking an exit for their vested options.

The signatories reportedly included former Myntra chief executive Mukesh Bansal, former chief business officer Ankit Nagori and former chief financial officer Sanjay Baweja.

Former employees say they retained their options because they were repeatedly told that an IPO was imminent. However, the company has yet to announce a listing date, leaving them uncertain about when they will be able to realise the value of their holdings. Walmart acquired a controlling stake in Flipkart for about $16 billion in 2018 and indicated that year that the company could go public within four years. The listing has since been deferred repeatedly.

In May, Walmart reportedly asked Flipkart to defer its IPO and achieve Ebitda breakeven before the end of FY27. Although Flipkart shifted its domicile from Singapore to India in March, there has been no clarity on the IPO timeline. Sources said the plans were recently dropped following a valuation mismatch.

Current employees have had some opportunities to unlock the value of their stock options. In July, Flipkart conducted a second $50-million buyback round, allowing eligible employees to sell up to 5% of their vested options. Former employees were excluded from the exercise. **FE**

UPI MDR needs rationalisation to protect public trust, says IIT report

Press Trust of India
New Delhi, October 11

PROPOSED MERCHANT discount rate (MDR) framework for Unified Payments Interface (UPI) transactions needs to be rationalised before implementation to protect public trust in the digital payments system, according to a report.

UPI, a public digital infrastructure, has generated significant convenience for users and productivity gains for the economy, with its long-term economic benefits outweighing the incremental income that could accrue from merchant transaction fees, the report titled 'UPI at a Crossroads: Reintroducing the MDR' released by IIT Bombay said.

It cautioned that public trust in UPI could be undermined if the proposed MDR framework is implemented in its present form, stressing the need to ensure that the digital payments platform does not attract negative sentiment among users. The report suggested that merchants with annual turnover of Rs 50 crore or more are mandated by law to provide UPI as a means for accepting payments.

Accordingly, the remuneration for the UPI ecosystem can be harnessed by restricting it only to merchants with annual turnover of over Rs 50 crore (about 4 crore per month), it said, adding that this would account for about 90% of NPCI's proposed MDR.

TCS bets on governance layer to scale enterprise AI

Urvi Malvania
Mumbai, October 11

TATA CONSULTANCY Services (TCS) is building an enterprise AI stack with a governance layer to orchestrate and manage AI agents developed by the company, its clients and third-party technology providers. The move comes as businesses look to scale AI adoption while maintaining control over security, costs and deployment.

The governance layer will act as a control plane for agents across enterprise applications, including those offered by SAP, ServiceNow and Oracle, Aarthi Subramanian, executive director and chief operating officer at TCS, said in an interview.

"The AI governance layer sort of controls all the agents that you have in your enterprise, provides a control plane, helps you manage cost," she said, explaining how it would enable enterprises to orchestrate agents built in-house as well as those supplied by third parties. The architecture addresses a growing need among enterprises to manage AI deployments across applications rather than treat each agent as a standalone tool. **FE**

Quantum-enhanced to quantum-safe: Banks prepare for the next big threat

Akash Mandal & Nameera Anjum
Mumbai/New Delhi, Oct 11

THE BANKING sector is moving its focus towards cybersecurity as artificial intelligence (AI) poses threats to financial systems. Regulators have also stepped up, mandating cyber preparedness across the sector.

The Reserve Bank of India issued a new cybersecurity and technology-resilience framework for commercial banks in July, setting requirements for IT governance, cyber-risk management and incident response, while the Securities and Exchange Board of India introduced an IT Resilience Index for market infrastructure institutions in August to measure the robustness of their critical IT systems and identify weaknesses early. While these measures may address the threats confronting the sector today, a new type of threat is emerging — one that could challenge the mathematical foundations of some of the encryption used to protect digital systems: quantum computing.

Traditional computing stores and processes data in a unit called a bit, which can have a value of either 0 or 1. In quantum computing, the unit is called a quantum bit, or qubit.

Unlike a classical bit, a qubit can exist in a combination of 0 and 1, a property known as superposition. Quantum algorithms are designed to manipulate quantum states so that the probability of useful answers is amplified, and that of the incorrect answers reduced. This gives quantum computers an edge over traditional computers for certain types of problems. While this could have striking use cases, it also opens the door to a new set of threats.

The threat for banks

"Right now, we are talking about AI threats, right? In a couple of years, we will be talking about cryptographic threats due to quantum computing. We will be talking about a lot of other things that are not even there in the market yet," Sarthak Dubey, Co-founder and COO of Mitigata, a full-stack cyber resilience firm, told *The Indian Express*. "What people have been talking about quantum becomes a very major risk starting, say, 2030," he added.

Modern cryptography protects digital communications by relying on mathematical problems that are difficult for conventional computers to solve. The quantum threat could undermine cryptographic building blocks used across the digital infrastructure for functions like authentication, secure communication, key exchange, and digital signatures. "Essentially, when we talk about the existing ways of security, there are encryption mechanisms that keep systems safe and secure in certain ways, that keeps your data secure in certain ways. And there are ways to decrypt them, which requires a significant amount of compute, and a significant amount of hardware power to make sure that you are able to decrypt those particular encryptions and get into that particular system," said Dubey.

"Now, with quantum, and what people call the quantum deadline, is that by 2029 or 2030 the quantum computers would be smart enough to decrypt any of the historical encryptions that are present," he said. Several technology companies and governments have been working towards transitioning their systems well before such a capability emerges, although there is no universally agreed date for when a cryptographically relevant quantum computer will arrive.

THE QUANTUM THREAT

MODERN CRYPTOGRAPHY uses math problems that are hard for traditional computers to solve, to secure digital communications

QUANTUM THREATS could undermine cryptographic foundations across digital infra

BANKS NEED to immediately identify vulnerable cryptography, and replace it before sufficiently capable quantum systems arrive



Harvest Now, Decrypt Later

One reason why financial institutions can't just wait for quantum computers to become powerful enough is a threat called Harvest Now, Decrypt Later, or HNDL.

Under this model, an attacker can intercept and store encrypted information today, with the expectation of decrypting it once sufficiently powerful quantum computers arrive. This makes data that needs to remain confidential for many years particularly vulnerable.

According to the Digital Threat Report 2025-26 by CERT-In, CSIRT-Fin and SISA, the broader quantum threat has yet to reach full-scale realisation, but HNDL strategies are already active.

This is why the transition to post-quantum cryptography — encryption algorithms resistant to attacks from quantum computers — has to begin before the threat materialises.

The more immediate task involves identifying where vulnerable cryptography is being used, and replacing it before sufficiently capable quantum systems emerge. Crypto-agility is the ability of an organisation to replace cryptographic algorithms and protocols as security requirements change.

For banks, this is crucial because their technology infrastructure is spread across legacy systems, cloud environments, third-party vendors, payment platforms and multiple layers of security infrastructure. FULL REPORT ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Opinion

MONDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2026



INDIA MARKET
SpaceX CEO Elon Musk

"Obviously, if Starlink is too expensive in India, no one will buy it, so SpaceX will need to make pricing affordable

Barricading Young India

The government must talk to the young, not wall them out, and the opposition must offer a vision

DELHI'S BARRICADES WILL eventually come down, but the anger that brought young Indians onto the streets will not disappear with the security cordons. The weekend's extraordinary clampdown may have prevented another agitation, but virtually sealing off the national capital in anticipation of protests was an overreaction. That it took the Supreme Court to restore some semblance of normalcy reflects poorly on the executive. A government confident of its authority should not require judicial intervention to recognise citizens' right to peaceful protest. Security concerns are legitimate, but they cannot become a blanket justification for restricting movement and dissent. The administration could have designated protest spaces, engaged representatives, and addressed grievances before confrontation became inevitable. Dialogue is not capitulation; it is democratic governance. Treating youthful discontent primarily as a law-and-order problem risks deepening the alienation the government seeks to contain.

What should concern the government most is the character of these protests. They are not primarily ideological battles but challenges to the fairness of systems ordinary Indians depend on. First came NEET and questions about the integrity of competitive examinations, on which millions of families stake their savings and hopes. Now the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls has generated anxiety over missing names, documentation, and bureaucratic errors affecting the right to vote. The underlying demand remains fairness, transparency, and accountability. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has repeatedly talked about placing young India's aspirations at the heart of his development narrative. But that promise has taken a few knocks. The least the government can do is give young Indians a fair hearing and recognise that their right to question institutions is an essential part of democracy, not a threat to it. A strong government is measured not by its ability to suppress dissent but by its willingness to address the grievances behind it.

Introspection, however, cannot be the government's burden alone. The opposition has been quick to embrace the protests, with the INDIA bloc finding renewed unity on the streets following the arrests of its leaders. Yet demanding resignations is not a programme, and opposing the Bharatiya Janata Party is not a vision. The bloc remains uncertain about its membership, leadership, and common agenda. Parties participate in protests while distancing themselves from the alliance. Even within Parliament, a coherent alternative remains elusive. An opposition defined chiefly by hostility to the ruling party cannot expect young voters to mistake indignation for political imagination. Young protesters are asking what a fairer system would look like. They deserve concrete proposals on examination reform, institutional accountability, and electoral safeguards, not merely another round of political point-scoring.

It is telling that the clearest energy has emerged not from established party organisations but from the youth who have channelled scattered anger over NEET into demands for education reform and stood firm under pressure. Its emergence underlines the hunger for fresh political thinking. But protest leaders, too, carry responsibilities: keeping demonstrations peaceful, respecting other citizens' rights, and translating slogans into workable proposals. Street mobilisation can force attention; sustained reform requires organisation, negotiation, and credible solutions. The next three years, leading to the general election, will test all sides. The government must demonstrate that strength includes restraint and responsiveness. The opposition must offer a persuasive alternative rather than merely capitalise on discontent. And young Indians must see that democratic institutions can correct failures without confrontation becoming the default. India requires dialogue, accountability, and credible answers.

THE HUMAN FACTOR

The employee who does just enough

EARLY IN MY career I sat next to a man I will call X. He arrived at 9.25, left at 5.35, and in between did precisely what was asked of him. His reports were accurate and on time. He never volunteered for a task force, never stayed late to "add value", and never once used the word "passionate". When the office emptied for drinks after work, he went home to his family and his garden.

At the time, I thought X was a bit of a loser. Decades later, I think he may have been the sanest person in the building.

Modern work has no vocabulary for X. Every job advert demands a "self-starter" who will "go above and beyond". Performance systems assume everyone should be exceeding expectations, which is mathematically impossible but corporately compulsory. A rating of "meets expectations" literally means you did your job, yet it has become a quiet insult, the HR equivalent of being told your haircut is "brave".

Meanwhile LinkedIn is full of people announcing that they are "humbled" to be working weekends. Their leaders describe the company as a family, right up until the morning they announce a restructuring. Against this backdrop, the person who does solid work and logs off at a reasonable hour looks almost subversive.



SHYAMAL MAJUMDAR
shyamal.majumdar@expressindia.com

I want to argue that they are not subversive at all. They are the load-bearing walls of every organisation.

Consider what the adequate employee actually does. They answer the email. They process the invoice. They turn up to the meeting, say little, and do what was agreed. They do not reorganise the department every eighteen months to make their mark, or launch initiatives that are abandoned the moment they are promoted. They rarely create crises, because they are not trying to be seen solving them.

The high achiever, by contrast, is expensive in ways nobody measures. Their ambition generates work for others: decks to review, pilots to support, strategies to implement and then unwind. Some of them are brilliant. Many are simply loud. A company made entirely of stars would be exhausting and probably bankrupt, like a football team of eleven strikers.

There is also something honest about the mediocre employee. They have looked at the deal on offer, a salary in exchange for a defined amount of effort, and decided to honour it exactly. That is not laziness; it is accurate bookkeeping. It is the rest of us who have miscounted, giving away evenings and weekends in the hope of a promotion that may never come.

And they have something many of us lack: a life that is not their job. X's garden was, by all accounts, magnificent. When he retired, there was cake and a card, and nobody could quite remember a single thing he had done. I used to find that sad. Now it strikes me as a kind of victory. His work was done well enough that no one ever had to think about it, and the parts of his life that mattered most were somewhere else entirely.

None of this is an argument against ambition. Some people love their work, and good luck to them. But organisations should stop pretending that everyone must be extraordinary. They should reward reliability as well as brilliance, and stop treating "meets expectations" as a polite way of saying "on thin ice".

As for the rest of us, we could learn something from X. Do the job. Do it properly. Then go home.

The email will still be there in the morning. Somebody adequate will probably have answered it.

FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH

IRRIGATION, FOOD SECURITY MAJOR GAINS; DEMAND-SUPPLY MISMATCH & FARMER INCOME TWO KEY CHALLENGES

Modi@25: Steady agri-growth

ASHOK GULATI
Distinguished Professor, ICRIER



NARENDRA MODI HAS completed 25 years in public service, 13 years as chief minister of Gujarat and 12 as Prime Minister of India. It is time to recall his major achievements as well as challenges that face the nation over the next 10 years or so. As an agricultural economist, let me only comment on agriculture in Gujarat and at all-India level. More importantly, I would like to spell out what PM Modi still needs to do to put agriculture on a sustainable high-growth path that can significantly augment farmers' incomes.

Let me start briefly with his term as chief minister of Gujarat from 2001-02 to 2013-14. Gujarat experienced an agrarian miracle by registering a growth rate of more than 9% per annum in the sector, almost unheard-of even in the heydays of the Green Revolution in Punjab. It was achieved with his emphasis on water augmentation for irrigation, through check dams as well as by securing a good share of the Narmada river's waters. He also separated feeder lines for irrigation and rural households to ensure power reaches farmers for timely irrigation. Roads that connected markets were given equally high priority. Agri-extension work through Krishi Mahotsav, where government functionaries and private sector joined hands to reach farmers in every village, showcased their latest technologies. Bt Cotton, approved by the Vajpayee government in 2002, did wonders in Gujarat and prosperity of the rural masses followed. It is largely because of this magic in Gujarat that he was elected time and again.

In 2014, when he took over the reins as Prime Minister, India was hit by a drought, which was followed by another in 2015. Incidents of back-to-back drought had occurred only thrice in a century. Modi's experiences in Gujarat came handy and he put water (irrigation) on high priority along with crop insurance (PM Fasal Bima Yojana). As a result of that, almost 60% of India's gross cropped area is irrigated today. This has given India a much-needed food security of basic staples. India has emerged as the largest producer and exporter of rice, and even after giving free food (rice or wheat, 5 kg/person/month) under the PM Garib Kalyan Yojana, we have buffer stocks that are more than four times the norm for rice and almost thrice for wheat.

If Modi can tweak the PM-KUSUM scheme on the lines of PM-Surya Ghar scheme, offer the same subsidy, and feed in tariff at even half the cost of supply to rural areas under traditional set-up, he can usher in a new revolution

India is also a net exporter of agricultural products. In 2025-26, India exported roughly $53 billion worth of agri-products, with rice and marine products leading the show, and imported agri-goods worth $40 billion (primarily edible oils and pulses).

Overall, average annual growth of agri-GDP under the Modi, from 2014-15 to 2025-26, has been 4%. It is not as high as he achieved in Gujarat, but good enough especially when population growth is below 1%. This is what has ensured India's food security.

But as we look towards the near future, or even his dream of *Viksit Bharat* by 2047, we see several challenges in agriculture. Let me list just two that deserve his urgent attention.

First, in our production basket, there is a major mismatch between demand and supply. We have too much rice and wheat and very little of pulses and oilseeds. We have so much rice that we now plan to put almost 7 million tonnes of it in ethanol, which is perverse as the net energy balance of this is negative, and so is its economics. *Atmanirbharta* (self-sufficiency) in pulses and oilseeds cannot be achieved unless the incentive package for pulses and oilseeds matches that of rice and wheat. Our research at ICRIER shows that paddy cultivation in the Punjab-Haryana belt is lucrative because of large input subsidies (on power, fertilisers, and canal irrigation) amounting to almost ₹40,000/hectares. If we want farmers to shift from paddy to pulses, which we should to relieve pressure on groundwater and also save environment, we should reward pulse/oilseed growers to the tune of about ₹35,000/ha. It will not be an extra burden on the exchequer as it will result in savings on input subsidies (power and canal) by the states and the Centre (fertiliser). Can PM Modi announce a special programme on these lines on 50:50 basis at least in Haryana where the water table has been receding by 1.7 feet annually. That will also then encourage Punjab to follow suit.

Second, Modi's dream of doubling farmers' real incomes has remained unfulfilled. The Ashok Dalwai Committee had pointed out that it would need agricultural GDP to grow at 10.4% to achieve this goal. We know that the real growth has been at 4%—not bad, but it can surely be better. The normal course of action to augment farmers' incomes has been to diversify from basic cereals to high-value agriculture—fisheries, poultry, milk, fruits and vegetables, etc. These are perishable commodities that demand efficient value chains and connecting them to high-income consumers in metros and abroad. But there is one strategy that can augment farmer incomes manifold in a short period of time. And that is agri-photovoltaics—where a farmer is both the *annadata* and *urjadata* (provider of food and energy). Such farmland is for dual use: producing energy through solar panels at a height of 10-11 feet with due spacing for photosynthesis of crops underneath. ICRIER has set up a pilot in Rajasthan where farmer income grew by eight to 10 times. If Modi can tweak the PM-KUSUM scheme on the lines of PM-Surya Ghar scheme, offer the same subsidy, and feed in tariff at even half the cost of supply to rural areas under traditional set-up, he can usher in a new revolution, say "Surya Khet Kranti", on the lines of Operation Flood in milk.

Views are personal

Jio changed telecom, Starlink faces the test



RISHI RAJ
rishi.raj@expressindia.com

As Jio prepares for its IPO, Musk's allegations overlook a sector shaped by competition and global partnerships

JIO PLATFORMS' MUCH-ANTICIPATED initial public offering will hit the market later this month, and the company has an interesting story to tell investors. It entered a crowded telecom market and upended its economics by shifting the focus from voice to data, changing the sector's entire business model. The updated red herring prospectus is expected during the week. The IPO will put the spotlight on a company that has grown from a mobile connectivity disruptor into a wider digital ecosystem spanning cloud, artificial intelligence, and enterprise services.

It may be a coincidence, but Elon Musk's allegations that Indian business houses are blocking Starlink to protect their monopolies, with Reliance Industries Chairman Mukesh Ambani among his apparent targets, have come just as Jio prepares to enter the public markets. However, the record of Indian telecom is not one of companies unwilling to compete. It is a story of businesses that have repeatedly adapted to competition and technological change, and of a market that has been transformed by new entrants and new business models.

Jio's entry demonstrated how a new player could alter an established market. Its low-cost data strategy changed consumption patterns and forced incumbents to respond, while the ensuing consolidation left the market with three major private mobile operators: Jio, Bharti Airtel, and Vodafone Idea. The reduction in the number of players has raised legitimate questions about market concentration, but competition has continued through tariff changes, differentiated offerings, and the battle to retain customers. Airtel, meanwhile, has expanded well beyond India, building a substantial presence across Africa. Indian telcos have competed with global players, taken their businesses overseas, and devised pricing and distribution models suited to local conditions. Their record hardly suggests that they would automatically shy away from a new technology or competitor.

Their partnerships with global technology companies underline this point. Meta invested $5.7 billion in Jio Platforms in 2020, and has since partnered with Reliance on digital commerce and AI initiatives. In June, the two announced a collaboration involving an AI data centre in Jamnagar, Gujarat, with an initial capacity of 168 Mw. Google, in contrast, has partnered with both Jio and Airtel across digital services, cloud, and AI. It has worked with Jio on affordable devices and digital services, while its relationship with Airtel includes cloud and AI initiatives. Google is also partnering with AdaniConneX and Airtel on its proposed AI hub in Visakhapatnam.

Starlink will have to find customers, offer a compelling proposition, and compete with terrestrial networks wherever those networks can deliver connectivity more economically

This is the context in which Musk's claims need to be assessed. Starlink has signed distribution agreements with both Jio and Airtel, potentially giving it access to their retail networks, business customers, and infrastructure. Starlink gets an established route to market, while the Indian operators gain another connectivity service to offer, particularly in areas where terrestrial networks are difficult or expensive to deploy. These partnerships do not rule out commercial rivalry or disagreements. But they complicate the suggestion that Indian telcos are simply trying to shut Starlink out. A company can compete with another in one area and collaborate with it in another.

That said, satellite communications pose regulatory and security challenges different from those of conventional mobile networks. Authorities need confidence that security directions can be enforced, unauthorised use addressed, and network operations kept within Indian law. Starlink, Jio Satellite Communications, and Bharti-backed Eutelsat OneWeb have licences but need to meet the remaining requirements before commercial operations can begin. So, they are at broadly the same stage of the process.

There is also a difference between opening a market and guaranteeing mass adoption. Satellite broadband can connect remote communities, businesses, and institutions beyond the reach of fibre or reliable mobile coverage. But it is not automatically a substitute for affordable terrestrial broadband. If indicative estimates of terminal costs around ₹8,000 and monthly subscriptions above ₹3,000 hold up when the pricing is announced, the service will remain beyond the reach of many households. So, early market is likely to be concentrated among enterprises, institutions, affluent users, and locations where conventional connectivity is unavailable or unreliable. That would make it a useful addition to the market, but not an immediate challenger to mass-market mobile services.

Musk should also remember that a strong global brand does not guarantee success in India. Tesla has entered the Indian electric vehicle market, but its high prices and limited product range have so far kept sales modest. This should be a reminder that Indian consumers do not buy a name alone; price, suitability, and the value on offer matter. Starlink will face the same test. Securing regulatory approval is only the first step. It will have to find customers, offer a compelling proposition, and compete with terrestrial networks wherever those networks can deliver connectivity more economically.

The irony is that Musk, while accusing Indian business houses of protecting monopolies, is seeking entry into a market where those same companies have built businesses by challenging incumbents and adapting to new technologies. Indian telcos have not shied away from competition, and there is little reason to assume they will start doing so now. Tesla has discovered that India is not a market where global prestige alone guarantees a win. Starlink may find the same. The government must ensure a fair and transparent route to entry, but Musk cannot expect the market to deliver success simply because he has arrived. In Indian telecom, as in the car market, the final verdict will come from consumers, not from the volume of the claims made by the person seeking to enter it.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Mental health

Apropos of "From awareness to mental health system design" (*FE*, October 10), mental health awareness has little practical value unless people obtain timely and affordable care. Anxiety, depression, and other conditions should not be dismissed as personal weakness. Schools, colleges, and workplaces can help by recognising warning signs and directing people towards qualified professionals. But awareness campaigns must be supported by accessible counselling, trained staff, and reliable referral services. Government hospitals need adequate mental health professionals, while primary health centres should be equipped to provide initial support. Confidentiality is equally important, as social stigma often prevents people from seeking help. Public funding and community-based services must complement awareness initiatives.
—AS Nithish Kumar, Coimbatore

Musk's provocations

Apropos of "Wrong target, Elon" (*FE*, October 10), while the procedural formalities of security risk assessment and related checks are in progress, the utterances of Elon Musk blaming an Indian tycoon for Starlink awaiting clearance in India does not match his stature. Starlink has entered into partnership arrangements with Indian players who would retail their transmission and telecommunication equipment. Whether subscribers support high-cost network will be a big question when other Indian players offer the same at throwaway prices. Transparency and compliance with legal and statutory provisions must be respected at all costs. Musk is trying to show his financial power and his provocation of India and its players shows the West's authoritarian attitude.
—RV Baskaran, Pune

●Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

Regd. No. TN/CPMG/722/2000 R.N.I. Reg. No. 37821/80 Printed and published by HS Gadhadar on behalf of The Indian Express (P) Ltd Published at New No.36/47, Eldorado building, Unit No.1C, 1st floor, Nungambakkam High Road, Chennai 600 034. Phone: (044)6679 1000.
Printed at MNS Printers Pvt. Ltd.No.76/1, Bhuvana Nursery Avenue, Velappanchavadi, Poonamallee High Road, Chennai - 600 077. Chairman of the Board: Viveck Goenka, Editor: Shyamal Majumdar, Editor (Chennai): Shobhana Subramanian* (*Responsible for selection of news under the PRP Act)
© Copyright: The Indian Express (P) Ltd All rights reserved. Reproduction in any manner, electronic or otherwise, in whole or in part, without prior written permission is prohibited. The Financial Express®

the hindu businessline.
MONDAY - OCTOBER 12, 2026

Spaced out

Musk's invective over Starlink approval lacks basis

Elon Musk's broadside against Mukesh Ambani and the Indian government over the delay in launching Starlink in India is poor optics and unlikely to speed up the process. Accusing an Indian industrialist of effectively controlling the government is hardly the best way to persuade the Centre to expedite regulatory and security clearances. The Centre has the prerogative to examine the security implications of allowing a foreign-controlled satellite communications network to operate over India.

Starlink's global experience illustrates why governments would want safeguards. In India, authorities sought information from SpaceX after a Starlink terminal was found on a Myanmar-origin boat carrying more than 6,000 kg of methamphetamine in a record drug-smuggling case. In Ukraine, Kyiv has reported that Russian forces obtained Starlink terminals illicitly and used them on the battlefield, something SpaceX has denied. In Sudan, Starlink terminals smuggled into the country have been used extensively in areas controlled by the Rapid Support Forces, despite the service being unauthorised there. And in Southeast Asia, Starlink terminals have been reportedly used by scam camps. None of this means Starlink is responsible. But it does demonstrate the enforcement challenges posed by a satellite network that can provide connectivity beyond the reach of conventional terrestrial infrastructure.

The charge that Ambani has somehow blocked Starlink does not sit comfortably with India's satcom policy history. When the government liberalised the space sector, it was opened to private and foreign participation despite opposition from existing mobile operators, including Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Jio. On perhaps the most important issue, spectrum, the government once again went against Jio. Jio argued that the government should auction satellite spectrum to ensure a level playing field with terrestrial telecom operators. Instead, the government decided to assign satellite spectrum administratively. The regulatory framework was not designed to keep Starlink out. For instance, the Centre rejected the regulator's proposal to fix an annual charge of ₹500 for urban satellite subscribers.

However, the government needs to answer some questions. If security concerns are now significant enough to hold up the rollout, why were they not resolved at the policy stage? Why encourage foreign investment through policy and then allow the process to drift? The case for satcom in India is compelling. Fibre and mobile towers are expensive or impractical in mountains, islands, border regions and sparsely populated areas. Satellite connectivity can fill these gaps and provide backhaul where terrestrial networks cannot. The government should therefore decide quickly. If security is the issue, enforce conditions. If foreign control is the concern, India can lower FDI thresholds in such sensitive sectors, as in the past. What India does not need is either Musk's public pressure campaign or an opaque regulatory limbo.

OTHER VOICES.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

A Nobel Prize for hating Israel

It's possible that the Nobel Committee will someday bestow its peace prize on a less worthy recipient than Navanethem "Navi" Pillay, but we doubt it. The Oslo worthies this year have honoured an 85-year-old South African whose career has been marked above all by hatred for Israel and the Jews who support it. Ms. Pillay began her life's work as an attorney defending opponents of apartheid, but that cruelty was defeated two generations ago. The Nobel committee is honouring her career since then devoted to attacking the Jewish state and twisting international law to distort the meaning of "genocide" toward that end. (NEW YORK, OCTOBER 9)

GLOBAL TIMES

China-EU dialogue becomes more important

At a time when global challenges continue to emerge, the significance of China-EU relations has long extended beyond the bilateral sphere. By continuously deepening their economic ties and shared interests, China and the EU can not only unleash the innovative potential of their respective markets but also reinforce each other's development and contribute to global economic recovery. From Thursday to Friday, China and the EU held the second meeting of their bilateral trade and investment consultation mechanism in Beijing. The two sides engaged in pragmatic and productive discussions, reaching a 16-point consensus covering trade and investment balances, export controls, intellectual property rights and reform of the World Trade Organization. (BEIJING, OCTOBER 10)

LINE & LENGTH.



TCA SRINIVASA RAGHAVAN



Can rate hikes control cost-push inflation?

Yes and no, because no one knows how much the rates have to increase before the demand for credit slows sufficiently and how long this process will take

Indians who compare India and China have a live example of why our GDP is less than $5 trillion and China's is around $20 trillion. It shows how we obsess over the politics of rights while China obsesses over the economics of efficiency.

So while we are grappling with political losers protesting about election results, China is preoccupied with a much bigger problem: interest rates. As, indeed, is the rest of the world. But we plough a lonely furrow.

Today, after having stayed low for around 15 years, interest rates are going up the world over. The reason is the need to control cost-push inflation caused by the misadventures of Vladimir Putin, who invaded Ukraine in 2022 and Donald Trump, who attacked Iran earlier this year. Trump started the tariff wars as well.

Between them they have made manufacturing more expensive for all producers by conducting wars that have increased the cost of oil, gas, electricity and transportation. Hence cost-push inflation.

Central banks of the world think that by raising interest rates they will dampen the demand for credit and that this in turn will help lower the rate at which prices are rising. That's the orthodox economic theory.

It used to work but will it now? Well, yes and no because no one knows how much the rates have to increase before the demand for credit slows sufficiently and how long this process will take.

The problem with controlling cost-push inflation is that it impacts not only corporate demand for money, it also slows down consumer demand. This happens not just because EMIs cost more. It happens also because jobs are not created, and sometimes even lost.

So all things considered, whether we blame Putin and Trump or central banks or all of them, the world is in a giant slowdown mode. Global output and jobs are about to start shrinking even more. And the slowdown will last for about a decade if not more because of the uncertainty caused by AI.

NO OUTS LEFT

This poses a massive dilemma for governments. Politically they need to intervene with the usual Keynesian tools of expanding central bank balance sheets. Economically, however, as we can see from the rising interest rates, they can't use these tools any more. There's simply no room left for higher government borrowing. Or not much.

The most visible example of this tussle is in the US where the government wants interest rates to come down and the central bank has raised them. How this will end is not hard to tell.

But the head of the central bank will be under pressure, which won't guarantee lower rates. The resulting tension will add another dimension to global economic uncertainty.

Much, of course, will depend on how the world responds to lending to America: with its money or its feet. So far it's not clear what is happening.

The problem with controlling cost-push inflation is that it impacts not only corporate demand for money, it also slows down consumer demand

But America isn't the only large economy in this sort of trouble. France, too, is going down the tube because its welfare programmes can't be funded any longer. The spectre of a default on its interest payments is hanging very low now.

Economies in the East aren't very much better off. Their problem is that they can't sell what they produce because the Western economies absorb around half of their production. That proportion is rapidly reducing.

THE INDIAN ECONOMY

How will this global contraction affect the Indian economy? It's hard to say because we are connected, and yet not connected to the world. *Neti, neti*. Not this, not this.

We import but not a lot except for energy. We export a fair bit but not enough to make a difference. We participate in the global financial markets but very gingerly. Our government borrows a lot but still not all that much. We have large welfare programmes but not all that large, either. We are, if I can recall what Ravi Shastri once said about another cricketer — a bits-and-pieces player. No one notices if we are there or not. Or minds.

Hard as it might be to believe, this is a great advantage. It's like being in a swimming pool by the seaside when a massive storm is raging; it increases your options for survival at a low cost because there are no great economic investments that have to be saved.

Political prospects are a different matter, however. They are still hostage, as they have been for several centuries, to the vagaries of nature: a drought, a flood, an El Niño, an earthquake, etc., can all make a huge difference to political stability. The pattern is very clear: each period of instability has been preceded by some huge natural disaster.

More on this next time.

India will not succumb to Musk's pressure tactics

Elon Musk's hectoring surely cannot override security considerations with respect to allowing foreign players in satcom

NS Vageesh

Elon Musk, the world's richest man, owner of Tesla, Space X and social media platform X, clearly didn't attend an etiquette class or failed it, if he did. In an egregious breach of decorum, Musk fired a nasty salvo this weekend at Mukesh Ambani, India's richest man, and his business rival in satellite communications services. Musk was venting his pique over what he thinks are delaying tactics to stall the commencement of his Starlink services in India.

Posting on 'X', Musk jibed, "Dear Prime Minister Ambani." And then added sarcastically, "Please accept my humble apologies for not realising you are the real boss of India..."

Musk hinted at the political donations given by the Reliance group to the ruling BJP party. He too hasn't been shy of using the power of the US government to protect his Tesla cars. Nor has he been coy in making donations to Trump's presidential campaign in 2024, reportedly touching around $280 million. That's been followed by substantial amounts for the Republican Party's funds over the past two years.

STORM IN A TEA CUP

Using public embarrassment as a blunt tool to hammer business rivals and intransigent governments into submission, is part of Musk's playbook. But neither Ambani nor PM Modi, who is also insulted by implication, is going to lose sleep or squirm with discomfort. Corporate donations for election campaigns are a fact of life and that is not even a storm in the tea cup anymore. Yes, Reliance does have outsized influence in the corridors of power in India. Just as Musk enjoys his unique rapport with Trump. The scales are even.

Nevertheless, clashes between tycoons throw up a range of issues and interests that need balancing and resolution. Insider and government supporter versus foreigner. Local titan versus global czar. National security considerations versus promoting global investment inflow. There are no easy answers for policymakers.

There are three parties who have got licences to set up satellite communication services — Ambani (Jio), Mittal (Eutelsat OneWeb) and Elon Musk's Starlink. The first two players are already major players in the domestic telecom broadband space. As the new space of satellite communication services opens up, each of these players is jostling to secure an early mover advantage.

SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS

Security considerations have gained considerable weightage now, following geopolitical developments over the past two years. The ongoing war in the Gulf region and Ukraine as well as India's recent experience with cross-border conflicts has sharpened the focus on India's strategic vulnerabilities. Given this backdrop, the country cannot easily take the risk of critical satellite telecom infrastructure and services being compromised.



SOFTWARE UPGRADE. Can allow satellites to bypass security BLOOMBERG

A mere software upgrade can allow satellites to communicate directly, bypassing Starlink's Indian gateway — and Indian regulatory and security requirements. Or if a foreign owned company refuses to share critical data during a conflict or blocks it, that could also threaten sovereignty. We wouldn't want our critical phone calls being tapped and fed to hostile powers or cut off when an Operation Sindoor is on, would we?

Weighing against the benefits of introducing quick telecom infrastructure in difficult terrain like mountains, marine and rural regions, there are fears that threats could also arise from non-state actors/ criminals bypassing or overriding the regulatory and security oversight using overseas infrastructure. Experts say these technologies are unaffordable for the poor.

STOP PUSSYFOOTING

How should the government respond? It must be clear in its policy and swift in decisions and execution. If the government has reservations about security in allowing foreign companies to set up satellite services, and these are of course genuine concerns, then it must spell it out clearly — without letting speculation take over.

There's no need to be defensive or apologetic about national security concerns. The government must also be neutral and transparent — and seen to be so. The terms of engagement must be spelled out clearly without tweaking them endlessly as has often been the case with regard to inviting foreign direct investment in different sectors.

There will no doubt be some days, even weeks of negative publicity — irritation over the damage being created by the world's richest man with a list of grievances. The answer may not lie only in having more Vibrant investor summits and MoUs with foreign investors.

Sober policymaking, clear communication and steadfast execution can counter any propaganda or harangue, even from the person with the loudest megaphone or maximum riches.

The writer is a former journalist

BELOW THE LINE



Lost in translation

Donald Trump's push to rebrand 'AI' as 'SI' has a totally different meaning in India. When the US President signed an executive order directing federal agencies to drop the term 'Artificial Intelligence' and officially replace it with 'Super Intelligence' (SI), it left the global tech community wondering if the new acronym would stick. However, a top CEO of an Indian IT firm offered a swift, tongue-in-cheek reality check when asked if India would follow suit. "Indian IT has always been about SI," the executive quipped.

The clever retort, which drew plenty of chuckles, completely hijacked the narrative by referencing the industry's multi-decade identity as System Integrators (SIs). While Washington pushes the 'SI' branding to showcase next-gen tech power, India's powerhouse IT sector is already entirely comfortable with the abbreviation — just in a completely different, bread-and-butter business context. Whether Trump's rebranding effort catches on globally remains to be seen, but in India, the acronym is already taken.

Clean kitchens, markets

A senior SEBI official recently defended the regulator's Closing Auction Session (CAS) by drawing an unusual parallel to Tukaram Mundhe, the Maharashtra FDA chief famous for his ruthless restaurant hygiene crackdowns. The official pointed out that just as chefs throw tantrums when forced to clean their kitchens, market participants cry foul when regulators try to scrub the system clean. The blunt message: Regulators expect to face the heaviest backlash precisely when they are doing their jobs. While the comparison effectively reframes market reform as a necessary health inspection, whether it will actually satisfy SEBI's critics is another matter.

'Bhakti' for Gen Z

The last time Gen Z took to the streets in protest over education exam leaks and job security, Prime Minister Narendra Modi sought to reconnect with young Indians via Instagram reels and selfie videos. Now, with fresh demonstrations looming, the BJP has rolled out a new tactic: *bhajan* clubbing at its New Delhi headquarters. Held to mark the birth anniversary of Sangh ideologue Deendayal Upadhyaya, the event fused traditional devotional music with a high-energy club makeover. While opposition critics were quick to mock the spectacle, accusing the party of the "clubbing of democracy", the BJP is betting that wrapping *bhakti* in a foot-tapping, party-style beat will strike a chord with younger voters as the festive season ramps up. Whether a bass-boosted prayer can diffuse political friction or simply get trolled online is to be seen. The party is doubling down on turning sacred tradition into a youth-targeted trend.

Our Bureaus

Published by Nirmala Lakshman and Printed by Praveen Someshwar at HT Media Ltd. Plot No.8, Udyog Vihar, Greater Noida Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar, U.P.201306, on behalf of THG PUBLISHING PVT. LTD. Chennai-600002. Editor: Raghuvir Srinivasan (Editor responsible for selection of news under the PRP Act). ISSN 0971 - 7528

OUR VIEW



PTI

GST: A good and simple tax is now within reach

Almost a decade after India adopted GST, significant reforms are underway. The procedural changes approved by the Council could go a long way towards realizing its economic promise

A little short of a decade after the Goods and Services Tax (GST) replaced India's complex system of indirect taxes in July 2017, GST is finally on its way to becoming what was long hoped for: a 'good and simple tax.' The latest set of reforms marks the completion of a GST make-over that began a year ago, when a simplified three-tier rate structure was introduced, with lower rates for many categories, some of which have seen welcome revivals in market offtake. But here's the surprise: The biggest change, or rather the promise of one, came not from last week's GST Council meeting *per se*, but from outside of it: from what finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman called the "faceless approach" to tax payments along the lines India adopted for income tax. The same reform in the administration of GST would be a far-reaching change, one enabled by technology advances coupled with the procedural changes announced by this tax system's apex body of Union and state representatives.

The latter amount to a sweeping recast of India's indirect tax structure. The power of tax officials to arrest people will be scrapped, while compliance and input tax credit (ITC) claims will be eased. After last year's rate cuts, the effective GST rate on all goods and services has fallen to 10.8% from 11.8%, a reduction that has doubtless played a part in keeping retail prices under check. Together with procedural fixes, 99% of the system's issues have been resolved, according to Sitharaman. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, the focus is clear: "Faster decisions. Lower compliance costs. Automated refunds. Trust-based administration." The broad aim is to ease GST processes and hence compliance. While the regime has matured and revenues have stabilized—its gross mop-up grew about 15% to over ₹2 trillion in September—it had gained too much complexity along the way. For several businesses, choke-points included capital blocked in ITC dues; from now on, faster refunds can spell cost relief, even as wider ITC eligibility does the same for some supply chains. Crucially, dispute resolution is to be reformed, with the axeing of notices issued in cases where the tax involved is under ₹10,000 and decision to withdraw these in 1.2 million ongoing cases. Separately, the limit for prosecution will be raised to ₹5 crore, five times the old cap. Likewise, in a system where close to 200,000 taxpayers fall under different jurisdictions, efforts must be made to contain tax harassment. Thus, in a bid to reduce highway truck stoppages, officials in states other than the origin and destination of cargo will no longer be able to intercept vehicles.

As reported, the Council referred two issues to a Committee of Officers for review and a report within three months. The first involves ITC protection for genuine buyers who hold proper invoices of full payment for goods received, but may find credits denied for a default further back in the supply chain. This too must be seen in the context of a key benefit of a 'value-added tax' like GST—that of ending the cost bloat of one levy piled atop another. The second issue is related. It involves tighter reconciliation of tax liabilities and ITC across GST returns, covering ways to fix discrepancies between different GST-return filing forms. The overall message: India's tax policy is giving economic efficiency top priority. For our economy to be globally competitive on cost, the value of this cannot be overstated.

GUEST VIEW

The latest goods and services tax reforms could spur GDP growth

India can expect capital to flow more efficiently and give businesses the competitiveness they need



SAMEER GUPTA & JAYASHREE PARTHASARATHY
are, respectively, national tax leader and tax partner, EY India.

The 57th Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council meeting may well be remembered for transforming GST from a tax reform to a broader growth enabler. The first phase of GST focused on creating a unified market and stabilizing revenues. The second on rate rationalization. The latest reforms aim at something more fundamental: improving the efficiency with which capital flows through the economy.

Viewed collectively, these steps align with the vision of GST as a key pillar in India's journey towards Viksit Bharat—an economy where businesses can operate with greater certainty, deploy capital productively and scale without avoidable administrative friction.

The reforms represent a shift from protecting revenue through restrictions to protecting revenue through transparency, technology and trust.

The GST credit chain restored: For years, industry has argued that GST paid on legitimate business expenditure should not become a permanent cost. The expansion of credit eligibility across outdoor catering, health and life insurance, telecom towers, pipelines laid outside factory premises, free samples and expired goods moves GST closer to its original design as a destination-based consumption tax.

Importantly, the reform signals a more pragmatic interpretation of "personal consumption" by recognizing that many employee-related expenditures are integral to business operations. Employee-intensive sectors are likely to be among the biggest beneficiaries.

Every blocked credit increases the cost of capital and reduces investment returns. Releasing such credits improves liquidity, strengthens balance sheets and enhances competitiveness. While the deferment of reforms related to motor vehicle credits may disappoint, the changes hopefully represent the first step to a wider review of input tax credit (ITC) restrictions that remain.

Refunds and export competitiveness set to be unlocked: Delayed refunds have effectively functioned as an additional finance cost, particularly for exporters and businesses operating under inverted duty structures. The shift towards a technology-driven, risk-based refund framework, coupled with eligibility expansion to input services and capital goods, has the potential to release substantial working capital currently locked within the system.

The benefits are especially significant for capital-intensive sectors including food processing, pharmaceuticals, textiles and electric vehicles, where accumulated credits often affect project viability and investment returns.

Equally noteworthy are other export-related measures. The recognition of qualifying cross-border transactions within the same legal entity as exports, the inclusion of specified performance-based services within the export framework and alignment of foreign exchange realization requirements with Foreign Exchange Management Act regulations should reduce friction in cross-border business models. At a time when India seeks deeper integration into global value chains and an expanded export footprint, their significance extends well beyond tax administration.

Streamlined compliance: Another clear signal is the GST system's shift towards technology-led compliance. Greater automation of registrations, amendments and cancellations, together with stronger invoice management and correction mechanisms, points to a maturing GST ecosystem. Rather than subjecting all taxpayers to uniform scrutiny, authorities can rely on data analytics and invoice matching to identify genuine areas of risk.

For micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), compliance costs often represent a disproportionately high burden. Simplifying routine interactions with the tax system reduces administrative overheads, improves productivity and encourages deeper participation in formal supply chains.

Reduced litigation and greater trust: Higher prosecution thresholds, the decriminalization of routine offences and the removal of GST officers' power to make arrests directly reflect a more mature approach to tax administration. An effective tax system must clearly distinguish between deliberate fraud and genuine interpretational differences.

The proposal to standardize adjudication processes is particularly welcome. For businesses operating across multiple states, greater consistency in tax administration can raise certainty and reduce the cost of dispute management.

The bigger picture: Taken together, these reforms mark an important shift in GST's evolution—from an implementation-focused regime to a platform for optimization and economic enablement. Lower embedded tax costs, improved liquidity and greater certainty can support fresh investment, accelerate capacity expansion and stimulate job creation. As businesses get more efficient, a share of these gains would flow to consumers through better pricing, wider choice and improved service delivery. Some misses include the non-removal of penalties for *bona fide* mistakes and protection of buyer credit rights in cases of supplier defaults. These reforms could define GST's next decade—in which the system not only collects revenue efficiently but supports investment, enterprise growth and consumption.

10 YEARS AGO


mint
Consumption growth may boost earnings

JUST A THOUGHT

We can fight over what the taxation levels should be, but the tax system should be very, very simple and not distortionary.

ADAM DAVIDSON

MY VIEW | MODERN TIMES

Why I have changed my views about political anarchy

MANU JOSEPH


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

There is a newspaper photograph from 2011 that still annoys me. That is how I know it was not my morning cortisol but Anna Hazare. The image is of the activist waving goodbye. His death fast in Delhi against corruption was over; politicians had reassured him they will act against their own corruption; satisfied, the saint was going back to his village in triumph. As I remember it, on the same front-page was an image of Manmohan Singh, then India's prime minister. Unlike an unelected revolutionary, he couldn't just wave and go home. No matter where he went, he would still be PM. He would still be held accountable.

Hazare said he won't contest elections because he would lose, and that to win them one had to get filthy. But he thought he could sway the same voters by threatening to die, and tell those whom they elected what they must do. So confused was his movement that at one point its leaders tried to form a committee only of winners of some Philippine good-boy award. The only rational idea to emerge from the anarchy was his estranged deputy's decision to enter the electoral fray to create a new type of incorruptible politician. But, eventually, they began to resemble the politicians they promised to replace. Even so, only those anarchists survived who organised themselves into a political party.

In a democracy, the only meaningful revolution occurs every five years, and it is called elections. So I had the view that political anarchists should contest them if they wish to make sense to themselves and us.

But, as cockroaches try to sustain their stir by hopping from issue to issue with no mention of fighting elections, I have revised my view. If their goal is only anarchy through street protests, it makes sense now in a way it didn't 15 years ago. Today, the protest can play the role of an independent institution.

You may argue that I am just being emotional. Isn't it true after all that the ruckus one hates is anarchy and the protests one loves are revolution? But let me persuade you that it is the world that has changed for me to view anarchy differently.

Voting, which I don't accept is entirely a moral act, is not all that matters in a democracy, even to democracy. In its soul, democracy has always worried about the tyranny of the masses. So it has counterweights it presumed would always be made of people from 'good families'—powerful intellectuals and bureaucrats who would rein in mass heroes. That is what institutions do, stripped of polite language—they counter the actions of an average person. The judiciary, civil servants, media, free arts and even gangs of industrialists were meant to put pressure on politicians or influence their voters.

Also, human nature itself was supposed to control the power of government. Bodies like the Election Commission would be independent through the force of self-interest. For it was in the interest of all political parties for it to be independent. Free speech in India itself emerged not from the holy book of a constitution as comedians appear to believe, but from electoral politics—when politicians threw mud at each other and the media joyfully reported it.

At one time, protestors could be asked to contest polls. The world has changed a lot since then

In another time, with so many safeguards against the tyranny of the masses, any anarchy that lacked the humility to ask for votes was just anarchy. Now institutions don't work as they were meant to. They no longer seem independent, and are no match for political power. There are three broad reasons for this.

One is that in the new world, because of changing technology, old sources of influence steeped in old values have collapsed. For instance, a newspaper like *The New York Times* could influence the birth or death of a US government. Now it can barely kill a film. The same old world had created theories for how a head of state should be. A US president had to have one wife, no affairs and not spy on his rivals. India too had theories. Even as the Bharatiya Janata Party rose to power and showed that the Indian middle class believed in everything it believed in, it needed a moderate face as PM candidate. Some of these ideas were perhaps truths of their times; some were just bad but influential theories. Today, a lot of this has collapsed. Donald Trump, for example, has shown that he can be the opposite of the idea of a perfect president and yet be extremely popular. As ordinary people take to radical ideas, the popular are more powerful than ever because the forces that can blunt popularity have been diminished. In many spheres, the gates that were once guarded by formidable gatekeepers have fallen.

The new power of the popular makes it hard for clerks and intellectuals of all hues to be independent. And in today's world, the fallout of not being practical is very severe. No one stays in the same economic class anymore. You're either rising or falling.

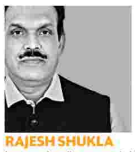
A reflection of how powerful the popular are is the fear that India's ruling party elicits from its opponents. The fear that they might be jailed on some pretext. I am not referring to the fear of revolutionaries, but of professional elected politicians. This is unusual in Indian politics because there was for long an unspoken code that politicians will extend a professional courtesy and have each other's back because who knows who was going to be in power tomorrow. But the BJP has become so confident of power that radiating fear among opponents was more beneficial to it than openly antagonizing them.

Considering all this, especially the loss of counterweights to the will of the masses, I feel that the protest of angry young people is creating a new institution. Even the masses want to be protected from their own votes.

MY VIEW | STAT-CRAFT

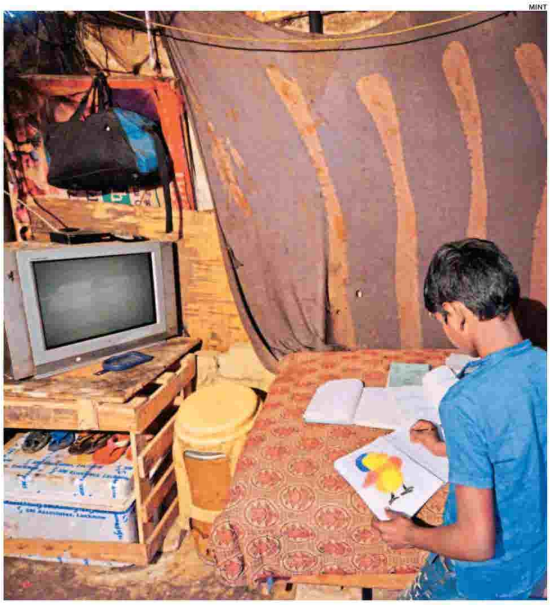
India's vulnerable no longer look the way we tend to picture them

Markers of deprivation have transformed over time and this has implications for how India identifies and supports its needy



RAJESH SHUKLA
is managing director and chief executive officer of People Research on India's Consumer Economy.

MINT



For much of India's development journey, economic disadvantage was relatively easy to see. A household without electricity, a toilet or clean cooking fuel, with few consumer durables and little connectivity, was likely to occupy the lower reaches of the economic ladder. Material deprivation and economic deprivation often travelled together. That made what a household possessed, or lacked, a useful indicator of how it was doing.

That India is disappearing remarkably quickly. Over the past two decades, Indian households have undergone an extraordinary material transformation. Our household data shows electricity access rising from 75% in 2004-05 to an estimated 99% in 2025-26. Toilet access has increased from 52.9% to 95%. Liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) or piped natural gas (PNG) from 32.3% to 85% and tap water from just 19.4% to 80%. Refrigerator ownership has risen from 18.5% to an estimated 65% while air-conditioner ownership, almost negligible at 1.2% two decades ago, has reached 21.1%. Mobile phones, present in only 16.1% of households in 2004-05, are now almost ubiquitous.

These are not cosmetic changes in consumption. They represent a profound improvement in everyday life. Development has entered the Indian household, its kitchen and bathroom, communications, mobility and comfort. Yet, beneath this transformation lies a less visible change: the face of disadvantage has changed faster than the structure of disadvantage.

Financial security illustrates the distinction. In 2004-05, only 26% of households reported positive savings. By 2025-26, our latest estimates put the proportion at 93.2%. But 18.9% of households still have what we call negative financial headroom. Financial headroom is simply the income remaining after meeting routine and other household expenditure commitments. Negative headroom means that current income is insufficient to cover these outflows.

We use an even stricter test of joint financial security. A household must have both positive reported savings and non-negative financial headroom. On this measure, 75.3% of households qualify in 2025-26. Turn the number around and its significance becomes clearer. Nearly one household in four still fails this two-part financial security test in an India where 99% have electricity and 95% have toilets.

This is not a contradiction. It tells us how India's development challenge is changing. The disadvantaged household of the past was often deprived of several dimensions simultaneously. Low income tended to co-exist with inadequate sanitation, traditional cooking fuel, few assets and weak connectivity. Material deprivation, therefore, carried considerable information on economic position.

Today's households may have electricity, toilets, LPG, a refrigerator, smartphones and perhaps a two wheeler, yet operate with little financial margin. A job loss, illness, crop failure, interruption to a small business or major family expense can reveal a vulnerability that is hard to infer from its possessions.

Covid made this distinction unusually visible. Negative headroom jumped from 17.2% in 2015-16 to 40.6% in 2020-21, while joint financial security fell from 73.5% to 48.2%. Covid should not be treated as a normal point on India's development trajectory. It was an exceptional disruption. But that makes it a useful stress test. Electricity connections, toilets, LPG cylinders, refrigerators and mobile phones did not disappear when income was disrupted. The shock exposed the difference between what a household had accumulated and what it could financially withstand.

The longer-term picture is more encouraging. Mean annual household income has risen from around ₹65,000 in 2004-05 to an estimated ₹3.36 lakh in 2025-26. The distribution has changed as well. The bottom 30% of households increased their share of income from 8.7% to an estimated 11.3%, while the middle 50%, those between the 30th and 80th percentiles, now account for an estimated 47.3%, against 38.6% two decades ago. The country's Gini coefficient, a measure of inequality, declined from 0.469 to an estimated 0.392. India has, therefore, not merely accumulated amenities and appliances. Household prosperity has broadened too.

Paradoxically, this success creates the next policy challenge. When an amenity is scarce, its absence is highly informative. When electricity reaches 99% of households and toilets 95%, their presence tells us progressively less about which household is financially secure and which remains vulnerable. Yesterday's markers of deprivation do not become unimportant. Sanitation, clean cooking fuel, water, housing and connectivity remain essential components of well-being. But as access spreads, they become less capable on their own of distinguishing economic security from fragility.

This matters for the design of social protection, and particularly for thinking about graduation from welfare. A household should not necessarily be considered secure merely because it has crossed an income threshold or acquired a prescribed set of amenities. It may have escaped visible deprivation without acquiring sufficient financial resilience to withstand a setback. Equally, continuing to identify vulnerability principally through yesterday's material deficits risks missing households whose circumstances have improved visibly but whose economic foundations remain fragile.

India's next household transition, therefore, requires a richer idea of progress. The journey is increasingly from deprivation to capability, from capability to financial security, and ultimately from financial security to resilience. Each is an achievement, but they are not the same achievement.

India has succeeded in making much of its old deprivation less visible because much of that deprivation has genuinely receded. The task now is to recognize what has replaced it. The household that may need protection increasingly does not look vulnerable today.

MINT CURATOR

The AI productivity boom has begun: just follow the software

Stock markets are figuring out which listed companies are gaining



ANDY MUKHERJEE
is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering industrial companies and financial services in Asia.



AI is 'eating' the world, as Marc Andreessen said software would. BLOOMBERG

The economist Robert Solow's famous 1987 adage about the computer age—it can be seen everywhere except the productivity statistics—also applies to generative artificial intelligence (AI).

The IT revolution did make workers more efficient globally, especially after the internet spawned entirely new business models. The changes, however, arrived in waves, long after the initial investments. They were hard to measure in real time.

Something similar is going on now. In less than four years since the first large language model was released, annual AI investment is approaching $1 trillion. Yet, where is the evidence that firms using AI are getting more juice out of their human resources, leading to economy-wide gains?

A recent paper by Alex Blumenfeld at the University of California, Berkeley, with Jonathon Hazell at the London School of Economics and two other economists, has tried to fill the gap by putting a number on one crucial area where AI is having the most impact: software engineering.

Suppose there are two e-commerce platforms, but only one is redesigning its app so that Claude or ChatGPT agents can shop as effortlessly as humans. Before long, its job listings will be seeking more software developers skilled at using AI to complete projects faster than was previously possible.

Stock markets already have some sense of which firms are making the best use of AI. As the tech advances, investors will increasingly price the expected gains into the shares of those best placed to profit from it.

The researchers compare firms' stock returns with an AI Index, with other factors constant, then examine how the returns vary with spending on programmers' pay. The result was striking: Between November 2022 and December 2025, AI raised the market's estimate of the present value of software-engineering productivity by the equivalent of a permanent 32.6% increase.

To arrive at their findings, Blumenfeld *et al* studied companies ranging from online marketplaces like eBay to electronics firms and travel platforms like Airbnb. What they have in common is that software engineering is key to their businesses, rather than being the product itself. To differentiate AI's effect on productivity, the researchers excluded software companies and firms in the semiconductor supply chain.

The same pattern appears to hold true for some of Asia's biggest consumer companies. I ran a back-of-the-envelope test, measuring the sensitivity of the US-listed shares of Sony, Coupang and Grab to the Robo Global Artificial Intelligence Index, and comparing the result against their software engineering exposure. Without access to payroll data, I used the share of software-related vacancies on company careers pages as a proxy. Think of it as a peek under the hood. A statistical investigation into AI's productivity gains across Asian companies will need a much broader sample than three handpicked ones. Still, the trio offers a suggestive glimpse.

Coupang is South Korea's answer to Amazon; Grab is a Southeast Asian super-app. Sony, a global powerhouse spanning hardware, gaming and Hollywood, defies easy analysis. My model excluded a senior technical program manager for PlayStation from the ranks of coders. Yet, the job description says the role touches every phase of the software-development life cycle. Such cases suggest Sony's actual exposure to software engineering may be considerably higher than my 12% estimate.

Glitches like this may help explain why we keep underestimating AI's productivity gains. Improvements will emerge in roles and corners of firms that no one is watching closely. By the time they become obvious, businesses may already be operating very differently. Even my crude exercise points in the same direction as the more rigorous Blumenfeld study: Software development is where the efficiency story is unfolding first.

The same effect should, in theory, be visible at Chinese tech giants. Alibaba illustrates why it can be hard to spot. The company's shares move sharply to everything from US semiconductor export restrictions to competition in cloud computing from rivals such as ByteDance's Douyin, distorting the stock's relationship with the AI index. But failure to isolate productivity gains doesn't mean that they don't exist.

"Software is eating the world," Marc Andreessen wrote in 2011. He was right. Technology and tech-adjacent companies now account for roughly 95% of the market capitalization of the world's 10 largest businesses. But software itself is undergoing another revolution. Until now, every line of code had to be written by a human. No longer. "When agents write 90% of the code, engineers can literally do 10 times as much," Andreessen noted recently.

Official stats may not have caught up yet, but stock prices and job ads suggest the productivity boom has begun. ©BLOOMBERG

THEIR VIEW

India needs to make its trade policy more predictable

PUJA MEHRA & ARPITA MUKHERJEE



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

For years, macroeconomic policymakers had a settled view of India's external financing strategy. A current-account deficit could be financed by capital inflows, principally foreign direct investment and portfolio investment. The flows could change in composition and timing or prove inconvenient, but they were a dependable source of dollars beyond doubt.

The past two years have seen a structural break. India's current-account deficit has remained well behaved. But capital inflows have not been sufficient. This has put pressure on the rupee. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has had to search for dollars, including through expensive measures to attract subsidized foreign-currency deposits from non-residents, which are no substitute for a dependable source. Their costs will ultimately fall on Indian savers, borrowers and taxpayers.

As the world becomes a less reliable source of capital, India's export earnings must rise. RBI's data show that merchandise exports rose from 9.7% of GDP in 2000-01 to almost 17% in 2011-12. A turn towards protectionism over the past decade has left India a larger economy without proportionate success at selling goods abroad. Merchandise exports were about 11.4% of GDP in 2025-26.

Merchandise exports must recover. The timing is not ideal. India cannot reopen the Strait of Hormuz. Nor can New Delhi determine what tariff the Trump administration in the US might impose next. Much of that uncertainty facing exporters is beyond the government's control.

Trade-policy uncertainty doesn't emerge only from headline tariffs. It is also created by ministry and regulatory decisions that affect exports.

A tariff concession negotiated in a free trade agreement (FTA) may be undermined by a compliance requirement. A quality-control order or customs duty may change the economics of a key imported input. A budget announcement may remain on paper because the administrative follow-up gets lost between ministries.

In 2014, the Narendra Modi government abolished the Cabinet Committee on WTO Matters. It may be time to revive the Trade and Economic Relations Committee that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh constituted in 2005. Chaired by the PM, the forum brought together India's finance, commerce and external affairs ministers, senior economic officials and the national security advisor to coordinate the country's external economic policy.

The prime minister's office plays a similar role in other areas. Trade policy needs the same attention to ensure that trade-related budget decisions taken by the government and the follow-up needed to turn FTA commitments into export opportunities do not get lost in government machinery.

Geopolitical uncertainty is beyond the Centre's control but it still has many ways to boost exports

India's Foreign Trade Policy of 2023 broke with the conventional five-year cycle without clarifying when the next comprehensive policy would be due. It also set a $2 trillion export goal for 2030. The government has since announced a $1 trillion export goal for 2026-27. Exporters need clarity on how these targets fit into the policy framework and the Export Promotion Mission, which has an outlay of ₹25,060 crore.

Quality control orders (QCOs), intended to raise standards, can act as non-tariff barriers. The 2026-27 budget announced their rationalization. In June, the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade notified the Transition Facilitation (Quality Control) Order, 2026, offering an alternative compliance mechanism for some QCOs. The task force could discuss whether further changes are needed and how the process can be made predictable across products and ministries.

There is a similar case for countervailing duties. They may be justified in particular cases, but a more systematic framework would make the policy less unpredictable for domestic producers and importers.

The task is not only to address current trade barriers, but to anticipate future ones. Indian exporters will increasingly face environmental, labour and other sustainability audit requirements in key markets like the EU and UK. Domestic measures such as the four labour codes and Bharat Trade Net will matter only if implemented on the ground in time to help exporters meet those requirements.

The 2024-25 budget announced a six-month comprehensive review of India's customs-duty structure with the aim of simplifying and rationalizing it, eliminating duty inversion, reducing disputes and facilitating export-led trade. Some of the problems that the review was meant to address remain.

Imports from FTA partners, for example, may enter India at preferential or zero duty, while goods supplied by a special economic zone (SEZ) to the domestic tariff area face applicable customs duties. Where the tariff treatment does not adequately recognize value addition within the SEZ, production may face an unintended disadvantage.

FTAs require an even more systematic follow-through. Which agencies are the nodal points for discussing implementation with partner countries? What is being done to map skill gaps and increase exports of skilled workers? How ready are firms to meet new sustainability rules? How are the proposed mutual recognition agreements progressing? Each chapter of an FTA has commitments and areas for cooperation that need to be translated into an implementation plan.

Geopolitical risks are beyond our control. Avoidable uncertainty at home is not.

The Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

Dissent bolsters democracy

The crackdown on the October 10 protest raises questions of procedural safeguards and proportional use of force

The unprecedented crackdown on a planned protest against chief election commissioner Gyanesh Kumar has turned Delhi into a virtual fortress and raised three sets of questions.

The first is around the measures taken to ensure a peaceful protest. The Constitution's imposition of reasonable restrictions on fundamental rights assumes that authorities will not use their powers arbitrarily, balance them against rights, and only do what's necessary to stave off violence. Even where legislation authorises arrest or detention, authorities are expected to act within limits and comply with applicable constitutional safeguards. But the closure of 57 metro stations — reduced to 45 after a Supreme Court rap — the cancellation of long-distance trains, curtailment of movement and internet services in several parts of Delhi, and deployment of 40,000 personnel who detained 7,000 people indicate that the use of power was disproportionate to the cause. Such actions dim the moral legitimacy of a liberal democracy such as India and lead to allegations that the authorities are not just against violent elements in the protest, but the protest itself.

The second set of questions is around procedural safeguards, some of which were raised before the apex court on Sunday. Confusion abounds on the orders that led to the detention of Cockroach Janta Party leaders from a flight, on whether detentions happened outside the original jurisdiction of the prohibitory order, and whether police stood by while Right-wing groups thrashed agitators. Procedural safeguards are not mere formalities, they are the hinge on which rights and restrictions are balanced. The authorities will do well to set the record straight.

The third question is a larger one. In decrying detentions except in accordance with procedure established by law, the top court has often underlined (as it did Sunday) the fundamental tension between personal liberties and law and order. In a country where the lower courts often rubber stamp police action in the name of rule of law, the court has to clearly spell out the contours of preventive detention powers. The continuing detentions on Sunday — of people even walking on roads — even after a court advisory shows this should come sooner, rather than later.

This newspaper has earlier noted that police action cannot smother an issue that has genuine ground resonance — exhibited during the NEET protests. To be sure, no stir can be allowed to turn violent and the authorities have a right to make arrangements to ensure order. But the world's largest democracy should keep in mind that expressions of dissent only strengthen our electoral fabric, not weaken it.

Russia's Trump card in the Ukraine war

Ahead of the mid-term polls in the US, President Donald Trump has inked a deal with Russia wherein the latter will immediately supply 300,000 tonnes of diesel to the "American and global marketplace", with 500,000 tonnes in November, followed by a million after that. Trump has also stated that the delivery is dependent on the functioning of Russian refineries currently under attack by Ukraine. It would all appear ordinary if Trump hadn't legislated sanctions against countries for doing exactly that: buying oil from Russia and Iran. Trump has been equivocating on the US-Ukraine situation throughout his second term; he publicly chastised Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at the Oval Office in February 2025 for not being amenable to Russia's conflict resolution plan. The diesel deal now pits the US and Russia as allies, against Ukraine threatening Russian civilian infrastructure, which, in turn, is threatening the US's energy security. Zelensky has termed the latest Russian strikes on Kyiv and Zaporizhzhia as Putin's thank-you note for the deal.

There are no forever friends or foes in geopolitics, but Trump's record of volte-face actions obfuscates the very definition of alliance. Clearly, this is his desperate bid to tackle inflation as his presidency nears its mid-term review. Whether this will help him thwart the Democrats or fuel talk of a Russian hand in polls is yet to be seen. The adverse impact is being felt in European capitals, which are re-evaluating their armament policies and NATO membership. Most European countries continue to source oil from Russia, pontificating about others funding Russia's war efforts. India must continue prioritising its energy security, undeterred by sanctimony and sanctions.

Fat commissions, thinning markets

Despite what insurance brokers believe, India's capital markets show that lower costs and greater transparency don't kill distribution



Insisting that insurance is "different" and, therefore, beyond the reach of regulatory action has harmed the growth of the industry. STOCK.ADOBE.COM

What should take precedence — the livelihoods of one million employees in insurance distribution or the financial well-being of hundreds of millions of Indian policyholders? The fight between disaggregated, voiceless consumers without a platform and well-funded, organised insurance companies and distributors is unfair. That is where the role of a regulator comes in, especially in retail finance, where the product being sold is invisible, is created in the buyers' mind when being sold and whose moment of truth is sometimes 30-40 years in the future. The battle in India's insurance industry today is about whether the industry protects a high-cost, distribution-led model with little accountability — or moves towards a consumer-first market, built on efficiency, innovation and value.

The pushback against the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI)'s September 23, 2026, consultation paper that seeks to bring about a much-awaited change in India's insurance sector is coming from the incumbent insurance firms and distributors. The Insurance Brokers Association of India (IBAI) has pleaded in a letter to the prime minister (PM) that a million livelihoods would be affected. They also want time beyond October 30 to even respond to the paper. The general insurance companies are playing a more nuanced game, where they seem to be missing from the channels with their anti-consumer views, but through the General Insurance Council (GIC), want the consumer to pick up 10% of the hospital bill by January 1, 2027.

The broking community — asking for a business model that preys on retail investors and is geared toward maximising commission rather than policyholder well-being — should remember that the government did not hesitate to shut down online gaming despite the same livelihood argument.


Monika Halan

The GIC is expecting a policyholder, admitted to the hospital, to argue with doctors over treatments recommended to prevent hospitals from overcharging. This is serious hubris. The GST benefit on lower premiums has already been creamed away by the industry. The rise in health insurance premiums for existing policyholders is extractive. Instead of better underwriting and improving claims ratios for individuals, the GIC wants to squeeze the helpless individual. My prediction is that if the 10% co-pay comes into effect, the Indian health insurance industry will see degrowth.

India's insurance industry needs to understand that any market, other than luxury products, that carries fat distribution commissions and opacity in the product and sales will stay in a low-value equilibrium. Over the past 30 years, the Indian stock and mutual fund markets have gone through rounds of regulator-induced transparency and lowering of distribution costs due to both regulation and technology. The impact has been transformational in terms of size, reach and value. Unless transparency is increased and distribution costs are lowered, the insurance industry will decline, taking away a reasonably priced and serviced safety belt that Indians need.

In 1990, the Indian stock market was in a low-volume, high-cost deal. Though the brokerage limits of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) were 2.5%, its 1998-99 annual report put the actual commission charged at 0.5-5%. Retail investors never got to know the actual price of the trade since the open outcry system was conducted behind closed doors. They usually sold at the lowest recorded price and bought at the highest. The BSE was, then, a brokers' club that resisted any kind of change. Setting up the NSE with screen-based trading brought transparency and lower costs. Now in 2026, for certain trades, brokerage is effectively zero or a flat ₹20 (as charged by the fintech discount brokers).

Of course, the lowering of costs came along with a full regulatory suite of depositories, dematerialisation, setting up of custodians, insider trading regulations, electronic clearing and settlement, and much tighter regulatory norms by Sebi, which progressively got more teeth as markets expanded. The market cap (number of shares of a company multiplied by stock price) has grown from around ₹1 lakh crore to over ₹411 lakh crore over a 36-year-period starting in 1990, an average annual growth rate of 18%. From around 100,000 demat accounts in 1998 to over 230 million accounts in 2026. From less than 30 million unique investors in 2019 to over 130 million in 2026. Markets are larger, safer, and more transparent.

The mutual fund story is similar: Commission reform began by 2006, with the removal of the "new fund offer" charge, wherein 6% of the amount collected in a new offer was taken as "marketing costs" by the fund house. So, ₹10,000 crore collected resulted in ₹600 crore of costs borne by investors. In 2009, Sebi took away the 2.25% front load that reduced ₹100 of investment, through an embedded sales charge, to ₹97.75 getting invested. Some said the industry would die. But Sebi's focus on building transparency, reducing costs and working in consumer interest grew the industry from less than ₹2.5 lakh crore in assets under management in 2006 to over ₹87 lakh crore today.

These changes arrived with the fund houses kicking and screaming. In fact, in 2009 a group of mutual fund agents approached the Delhi High Court to declare the abolishment of the front commissions of 2.25% embedded in the price of the product and a requirement to disclose commission as "ultra vires and illegal". The court dismissed the writ petition in the interest of consumer protection.

I see a similar story playing out in the insurance space. An industry that has resisted change, technology and consumer interest for decades is now screaming loudly with letters to the PM and other ways to exert power. The changes on costs and transparency that look imminent in the Indian insurance industry should have begun 20 years ago, and incrementally, the market would have been in a very different place. But every attempt to bring transparency, consumer protection, and lower costs was successfully resisted, and the industry now finds itself facing either staying caught in a low-value, declining market or strong regulatory action.

The government needs to look at evidence from the Indian financial sector to see the benefits of lower costs and transparency. Insisting that insurance is "different", and therefore, beyond the reach of regulatory action has harmed the growth of the industry. Both life and medical insurance are essential products in a household's financial life. By making them expensive, opaque and full of tricks and traps, the industry does itself, and the consumer, a disservice. Working with the regulator on the proposed changes might be a current bitter pill, but it is medicine that will finally give both energy and a growth spurt.

Monika Halan is the best-selling author of the Let's Talk series of books on money. The views expressed are personal

{ GRAND STRATEGY }
Happymon Jacob



The middle-power question that New Delhi faces today

This year has been the year of anxious middle powers. In January, Canadian Prime Minister (PM) Mark Carney told the World Economic Forum in Davos that the world was going through a rupture rather than a transition, and urged countries like his — essentially, middle powers — to close ranks. On September 21, on the margins of the UN General Assembly, the European Union, Brazil, Canada, Kenya, Australia, Barbados and India launched Partners for Multilateralism (P4M), a platform to defend an order under strain. On October 4, at the Munich Leaders Meeting in Delhi, external affairs minister S Jaishankar spoke about what "emerging and middle powers" might do together. The more the two big powers, or three if you wish, talk to each other warmly but over other States, the more second-rung powers will consult each other. So, expect more middle power talk in the months ahead.

Where does India stand on the middle power conversation? India's response to the middle power moment has been ambivalent. New Delhi is both tempted by the idea and resists it.

The temptation is easy to understand. What India least wants from any manner of world order is a bipolar world, or worse, a G2 in which Washington and Beijing settle the big questions of the world between themselves. Every Donald Trump-Xi Jinping meeting triggers that worry, and Trump spoke of G2 before meeting Xi in Busan, South Korea, last year. A world run by the two would force uncomfortable choices on India, ones that it has avoided since Independence. In New Delhi, Jaishankar used a Goldilocks formula to describe the kind of US-China relationship India prefers: "You don't want it to be too hot; you don't want it to be too good; you want it somewhere in between, at the right temperature." Many countries would share that preference. A strong and autonomous middle is what keeps the system from settling into two camps.

The resistance in New Delhi towards the middle power idea runs deeper. India's idea of itself is of a rising major power, a great power in waiting, or as I put it in my new book, a pole. How can such a country be happy with a label it would share with San Marino and Liechtenstein, both of which have signed the P4M declaration? The category stretches from European micro-States to Brazil. Hence, a nuclear-armed country of more than 1.4 billion people is unlikely to see itself as one in that crowd.

There is a more serious objection. Historically, middle powers have been rule-takers. Canada and Australia, for instance, were good citizens of an order the US designed, policed, and paid for. They primarily sought to improve the rules at the margins and keep the machinery running. Much of New Delhi's traditional diplomacy, from the UN Security Council campaign to the constant refrain of "reformed multilateralism", has been about getting more rule-making agency in that order. Accepting the middle power tag looks a lot like joining the club of rule-takers.

Hence Jaishankar was careful about the phrasing. I would expect that extra word — emerging — to underline India's approach to middle-power diplomacy.

In fact, there is a more useful way to think about all this, and it may help New Delhi make peace with the idea quicker. Middle powers can be considered as the middle class of international society.

Aristotle argued in *Politics* that cities are best run when the middle class is large and strong. A city with a large middle is the least prone to faction. Where the middle is weak, the city splits into rich and poor, and stability goes with it. In that sense, the interests of the middle and the survival of the system happen to coincide.

Much of what we know about the middle class carries over into the international system. It pays the taxes and has little say on how the budget is made, which was Canada's complaint at San Francisco in 1945 and has been India's since Independence. Such States depend on rules more than anyone else does. The rich have money, power and lawyers, the poor seldom reach the courthouse, and it is the people in between, the middle class, who want rules applied fairly.

For a country that wants to be a pole, a strong international middle is a necessary condition. The larger and better organised the middle, the harder it is for two powers to divide the system between them as spheres of influence, and the more room there is for a third to rise.

Admittedly, the analogy has its limits. Two middle powers can be threats to each other. Türkiye and Cyprus have both signed the P4M declaration. Australia's main security worry is China, while Brazil has no stake or interest in the South China Sea. This is perhaps why middle-power coalitions gather around trade rules, supply chains, critical minerals and technology standards, and have very little to say on security and defence. Jaishankar appeared to indirectly accept this view in New Delhi, saying countries no longer needed to agree on everything and that enough points of contact would do.

So expect New Delhi to sit in the middle power room, use the middle (and emerging) power vocabulary, and sign the declarations. India is a middle power that wants to be a pole, and until it gets there, it will behave like a middle power whenever that is useful.

The bigger worry for New Delhi should be whether the middle class of international society holds together at all. If its members decide that coalition-building is getting them nowhere, many could bandwagon Washington or Beijing. That would lead to a bipolar order New Delhi most fears, with the middle divided between two camps. So if the middle-power coalitions turn into talk shops, New Delhi's interest will fade fast. If they deliver on trade and technology, India may find the middle a more comfortable place to wait than it expected.

Happymon Jacob is the author of India After Nonalignment (Penguin-Viking and Georgetown University Press, 2026), and editor, INDIA'S WORLD magazine. The views expressed are personal

{ URSULA VON DER LEYEN } PRESIDENT, EUROPEAN COMMISSION
These attacks by Iran's proxies are pushing the region into a spiral of violence.
After the Houthi attacks on Riyadh Airport
HT

{ STRAIGHTFORWARD }
Shashi Shekhar



What the October 10 protest says about the Opposition

On October 10, the national capital — indeed, the National Capital Region — felt quite strange. A total of 245 trains scheduled to reach Delhi were cancelled. The city's lifeline, the metro, saw more than 40 of its stations shut. Bus routes were changed. Many schools conducted online classes and some exams were cancelled. On the roads, there was unprecedented barricading.

As a result, members of the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) failed to make it to Jantar Mantar for their planned protest demanding chief election commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar's resignation. The outfit's workers couldn't reach Delhi, and its leader, Abhijit Dipke, and many prominent associates were detained. The Delhi Police detained more than 7,000 people connected to the CJP. Thus stalled, the CJP has declared to carry on with its protests.There are some pertinent questions: Did Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation restore the sanctity of examinations in perpetuity? Will CEC Kumar's resignation solve all problems? If Kumar resigns, will the CJP protestors commit to not launching any other movement? Are these young people planning to form a political party and contest elections? Or do they want to play the role of a pressure group?

Last Tuesday, Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi led more than 200 MPs from Parliament's Makar Dwar to the Election Commission building. Police and paramilitary forces stopped them near Akashvani Bhawan. But the Congress MPs held a sit-in at the spot for nine hours. Gandhi and his associates said they intended to meet the election commissioners. The Election Commission said it had received no request for a meeting. The police rounded up everyone and dropped them at a faraway place. The next day, they detained Priyanka Gandhi and other Congress leaders heading for Jantar Mantar. On Friday, the Opposition leaders met the president. Shortly after Gandhi briefed the media about the meeting, Rashtrapati Bhavan sources denied everything that the Congress leader had claimed.

It's not a coincidence that Gandhi has surprised people many times during the last four months. Some of his protests have been at the seats of power and governance while others were held in crowded areas, close to the masses. Politics needs presence in both. Gandhi has realised the power of visibility. Videos of his struggle with the police went viral.

In the coming months, five states, including Uttar Pradesh, will hold assembly elections. Samajwadi Party supremo Akhilesh Yadav and Gandhi joining hands can be seen from this perspective. The Congress has no presence in Uttar Pradesh and lost the chance to form the government in a couple of states due to its own weaknesses. In Punjab, the Aam Aadmi Party not only wrested power, but has also established itself as a strong incumbent. That's the reason why the Congress is in no mood to leave things to chance. In the last 13 years, the party has understood that it must not miss any opportunity. During the July CJP protests, Gandhi staged a sit-in in front of the Prime Minister's residence as he didn't want another competitor to emerge. Before CJP's October 10 protest, he tried hard to present himself as the lead face of the resistance.

The AAP maintained a strategic distance from the high-voltage drama. In the coming Punjab elections, the AAP is in direct confrontation with the Congress. In Gujarat, the AAP wants to capitalise on the 12.92% votes it secured in the last assembly elections. This is why the party is trying to avoid being seen as a Congress ally. The irony here is that AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal has learnt from the Congress's mistakes. We should look at the compulsions of the other members of the INDIA bloc. They don't want the Congress to expand in their states beyond a point. But they need its support to ward off existential threats: Former West Bengal chief minister and Trinamool Congress (TMC) chief Mamata Banerjee is a glaring example. Twenty of the TMC's Lok Sabha and six Rajya Sabha MPs have switched sides. Banerjee has lost the right to the party name. Tejashwi Yadav suffers the same predicament. In the 2020 Bihar assembly elections, his party won 75 seats; at present, it has just 25.

The Congress senses an opportunity here. In the changed scenario, it can bargain hard with the regional satraps. This is the reason Gandhi is working so hard. His sights are set on the 2029 elections. But before locking horns with a towering figure like Narendra Modi, his party will have to perform well in assembly elections. More so in those states where the Congress has neither organisation nor leadership. I am reminded of Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia's famous quip: *Hanooz dilli door ast* (Delhi is still far off).

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

R. N. I. No. 503/1957 ● Postal Reg. No. DL(ND)-11/6058/2018-19-20 'Licensed to post without prepayment' LICENCE No. U(C)-113/2006-08. AIR SURCHARGE: Raipur and beyond by Rail or Road - Rs. 5/-, Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Coimbatore, Chennai, Cochin, Goa, Hyderabad, Khajuraho, Mumbai, Trivandrum, Visakhapatnam, Vijayawada and beyond by Rail or Road - Rs. 10/-.

PRINTED & PUBLISHED BY MANHAR KAPOOR for and on behalf of HT Media Ltd. 18-20, Kasturba Gandhi Marg, New Delhi-110001 and printed at HT Media Ltd. Presses at Plot No.-8, Udyog Vihar, Greater Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar. (UP). Pin-203306.
BOARD: (011) 23361234 ● EDITORIAL: (011) 66561234 Extn. 1254, 1268 ● CIRCULATION: (011) 66561111 ● ADVERTISING: (011) 66561389 ● FAX: (011) 66561270.

EDITOR: JOSE MARTIN THARAKAN - Responsible for selection of news under PRP Act. @ All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of Publisher is prohibited.

BUSINESS | Powered by mint

RBI curbs may aid rupee; risks remain

Subhana Shaikh
subhana.shaikh@livemint.com

MUMBAI: The rupee is set to open sharply stronger on Monday after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) moved over the weekend to curb speculative bets and divert dollar demand from the spot market, but market experts say the relief is likely to be short-lived.

From October 12, the RBI will supply dollars directly to three state-run oil marketing companies. It has also tightened rules on currency derivatives. That may drive the rupee 1% higher on Monday, according to Emkay Global Financial Services. The central bank will meet the entire daily dollar requirement of Indian Oil Corp., Hindustan Petroleum Corp. and Bharat Petroleum Corp. through a special window, supplying dollars via designated banks and taking the companies' purchases out of the spot market.

The rupee closed at 96.73 per dollar on Friday, near its record low of 96.96 in May. It has weakened nearly 8% so far this calendar year and 11% in FY26, according to *Bloomberg* data.

While the RBI's measures could support the rupee in the near term, market participants said they are unlikely to reverse its longer-term depreciation trend, with high crude oil prices, capital outflows and adverse balance of payments dynamics continuing to weigh on the currency.

"Over the medium term, the rupee will still depreciate because that depreciation is a function of multi-year high US Treasury yields and crude oil at $100," said Gaura Sengupta, chief economist at IDFC First Bank. "That dynamic has not changed. Maybe the pace of depreciation will be softer because increasingly it looks like RBI is taking stronger measures. So, maybe more measures are in store." Sengupta expects the rupee to trade in the 96.50-97 range by the end of March.



The rupee has weakened nearly 8% so far this year. REUTERS

A weaker rupee makes imports more expensive, adding to inflationary pressures and potentially weighing on economic growth by raising input costs for businesses and squeezing household purchasing power. India is particularly vulnerable because it imports about 90% of its crude oil requirements, making the currency's weakness an added burden when global oil prices are elevated.

In a separate circular, the RBI announced four additional measures to curb speculative activity in the foreign exchange market. These include barring the rebooking of cancelled rupee-linked foreign exchange derivative contracts, lowering the threshold for derivative transactions without an underlying exposure to $5 million from $100 million, and requiring clients to submit an undertaking confirming that the same underlying exposure has not been hedged through another authorized dealer. The RBI also introduced a Foreign Exchange Risk Reserve (FERR), requiring banks to maintain a cash reserve with the central bank equivalent to 20% of the rupee value of qualifying derivative contracts exceeding $2 million, where clients buy foreign currency against the rupee to hedge current account exposures.

The measures amount to significant curbs on speculative trades, said Madhavi Arora, chief economist at Emkay Global. "Rupee liquidity is high and the rupee is cheap to short in offshore and onshore markets. All these moves tighten speculative positioning and give some direct support to the INR," she said.

Market participants expect the steps to provide immediate support to the rupee and ease pressure on forward premiums by discouraging aggressive dollar buying and speculative positions against the currency. However, the measures could also raise hedging costs for importers, with banks likely to pass on some of the additional costs to clients, economists said.

Importers are currently increasing their hedging, while exporters are holding back because they expect the rupee to depreciate further.

Dhiraj Nim, foreign exchange strategist and economist at ANZ, expects a sharp initial rally in the spot market, with forward premiums potentially falling by 50 basis points or more. However, he cautioned that the measures would buy time for the central bank rather than fundamentally change the rupee's trajectory.

"If the underlying balance of payments dynamics do not improve, then it just brings you back to the same situation that you thought we are in today," Nim said. He expects the rupee to weaken to 97.50 over six to 12 months.

Tata Motors' Iveco deal deadline nears; 3 investors hold the key

Ayaan Kartik
ayaan.kartik@livemint.com

NEW DELHI: Tata Motors Ltd has raised its offer price for Iveco Group NV, but three major institutional shareholders have yet to tender their shares, putting the acquisition at risk as the October 26 deadline approaches.

The tender offer for the acquisition that was announced in July 2025 had attracted acceptances for just 28.4% of the shares by the latest available count, with less than two weeks remaining. Tata Motors raised its offer price by 2% to €14.40 per share on October 9, after activist investor Petrus Advisers publicly rejected the original offer on 29 September.

The three investors—hedge funds Davidson Kempner and Syquant Capital, and activist investor Petrus Advisers—are among Iveco's largest shareholders after its promoter, Exor. While Exor has tendered its stake, the three funds have not subscribed to the offer more than a month after it opened on September 7. Together, they hold about 20.4% of Iveco's common shares, according to an executive familiar with the matter.

"The offer significantly undervalues Iveco relative to its peers. Second, Iveco's shareholders do not receive an appropriate share of the synergy value this transaction creates: value Tata Motors has itself described to its own investors as substantial," Petrus said on September 29. "Third, shareholders should be compensated for the 15-month period between the announcement of the transaction and its expected closing," the statement added.



Tata Motors had announced the acquisition on 30 July 2025 for €3.8 billion. MINT

Tata Motors had announced the acquisition on 30 July 2025 for €3.8 billion ($4.4 billion), excluding Iveco's defence business.

Activist shareholders typically buy significant stakes in companies and push for changes they believe will unlock value for shareholders, including during acquisitions. Their position becomes particularly important during acquisition because their decision to tender or retain their shares can influence whether the buyer secures the required mandate.

Tata Motors said the price increase was prompted by delays in completing the acquisition, which was initially scheduled to close in June but is now expected to conclude by November. In its October 9 statement, the company said the previous price already represented a "full and fair valuation" of Iveco, but that it had raised the offer to account for delays in obtaining regulatory approvals in some jurisdictions.

"The offeror hereby specifies that the new price is its best and final determination of the consideration under the offer and will not be increased further," the company said. The revised offer increases the deal value by about €81 million from the original €3.8 billion announced in July 2025.

Exor, Iveco's largest shareholder, has tendered its 27.06% stake in the company's common shares. Davidson Kempner holds about 10.17%, Syquant Capital about 6.45% and Petrus Advisers about 3.8%, according to the executive familiar with the matter. The exact breakup of the remaining shareholding, held by retail investors and global funds with smaller positions, was not immediately available.

The three investors did not respond to Mint's queries on whether they were satisfied with the revised offer. Tata Motors reiterated its October 9 statement when contacted by *Mint*.

The deal, which has faced delays of at least two quarters, now faces the challenge of securing sufficient shareholder support before the deadline. The offer requires acceptances representing at least 80% of Iveco's common shares if shareholders approve the relevant resolution at the extraordinary general meeting (EGM) on October 16. Otherwise, the acceptance threshold will be 95%.

Tata Motors could benefit from Exor's voting power at the EGM. Although Exor holds 27.06% of Iveco's common shares, its stake carries 43% of the voting rights, according to the information provided.

JAPAN LARGEST FDI SOURCE FOR INDIA IN APR-JUN

NEW DELHI: Japan has emerged as the largest source of foreign direct investment (FDI) into India during April-June of the current fiscal year, according to government data.

FDI inflows from Japan stood at $5.71 billion in the first quarter of 2026-27, surpassing the $3.74 billion India received from the country during the entire 2025-26 fiscal year.

It was $2.48 billion in 2025-26. The foreign inflows from Japan account for nearly 29% of the total equity inflows ($19.81 billion) which India received during the quarter.

The investments from Japan are important as Japan had set a target of investing 10 trillion yen (about ₹7 lakh crore) in India in over a decade.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal visited Japan last month to further boost bilateral trade and investment ties between the countries. Goyal in Nagoya stated that Japanese firms have already invested ₹1 lakh crore of the 10 trillion Yen (around ₹6 lakh crore) investment target in India over a decade, as committed in 2025.

According to Anil Talreja, Partner, Deloitte India, Japanese institutional investors are becoming much more active and Japanese financial institutions are increasing their engagement with India. PTI

Dozen firms, including Jio, Zetwerk, eye October IPOs

Press Trust of India
feedback@livemint.com

NEW DELHI: A dozen companies, including Jio Platforms, Zetwerk Manufacturing Business, and Avaada Electro, are set to tap the primary market in October to raise funds through initial public offerings (IPOs), extending 2026's strong fundraising momentum.

Other companies expected to launch their maiden public offerings this month include Fusion CX, HD Fire Protect, Tonbo Imaging, Bonfiglioli Transmissions, Sahajanand Medical Technologies, Paras Healthcare, NDR InvIT Trust, Gujarat Victory Forgings and SFC Environmental Technologies, according to merchant bankers.

The proposed offerings span sectors such as technology, healthcare, renewable energy, defence and precision manufacturing, reflecting continued interest in businesses with long-term growth prospects.

The companies plan to raise funds through a combination of fresh equity issues and offers for sale (OFS), with proceeds from fresh issues intended to finance business expansion, capital expenditure, debt repayment, working capital requirements and general corporate purposes.

The pipeline comes after companies raised over ₹1.1 lakh crore through 96 IPOs so far in 2026, including 35 issues launched in September alone.

"India's primary market momentum continues into the second half with a robust pipeline. While secondary-market volatility and geopolitical developments may induce selective launch windows, the underlying appetite for quality paper remains structural," Neha Agarwal, managing director and Head of Equity Capital Markets at JM Financial Ltd, said.

She said institutional demand for primary issuances remained supported by deep domestic liquidity pools and selective foreign capital, even as foreign institutional investor flows in the secondary market fluctuated.

JM Financial secured the top spot in terms of IPO deal volume managed in the first half of FY27, with 22 issues, according to the Prime Database league table for H1FY27.

Among the upcoming offerings, Jio Platforms, the telecom and digital services arm of Reliance Industries Ltd, is scheduled to open its IPO for subscription on October 21 and close it on October 23, sources said. The offering is expected to be India's largest IPO to date.

HD Fire Protect, a manufacturer of fire protection equipment and systems, has fixed a price band of ₹258-271 per share for its ₹712-crore IPO.

The issue, entirely an OFS by promoters, is scheduled to open on October 13 and close on October 15. Fusion CX, an AI-powered customer experience solutions provider, has fixed a price band of ₹275-289 per share for its ₹702-crore IPO. The issue will open on October 14 and close on October 16.

NTPC, Eskom eye green energy pact

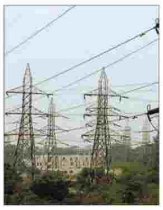
Ramita Mishra & Rituraj Baruah
ramita.mishra@livemint.com

NEW DELHI: State-run NTPC Ltd is in talks with South Africa's Eskom for a collaboration in green energy, with the two sides working on the modalities of a possible partnership, including a joint venture (JV).

The partnership could deepen NTPC's presence in Africa's largest power market. South Africa's high commissioner to India Anil Sooklal said, while helping the coal-dependent nation expand clean energy generation and keep its ageing thermal plants running through the supply of components. NTPC and Eskom are the largest power producers in their respective countries.

State-owned Eskom contributes 90% to South Africa's overall power generation, Sooklal said in an interview. "We're only now going out into public-private partnerships," Sooklal said. "They're (NTPC and Eskom) exploring how they can work together in terms of our green energy feed into the grid."

NTPC is already training Eskom's engineers, while the two energy majors explore possible partnership models in the green energy space as South Africa turns to green energy to meet its growing demand.



NTPC to help Eskom meet the green energy demand. MINT

South Africa has about 19GW of green power capacity, with plans to increase it to 26GW by 2030 and 105GW by 2035.

South Africa has historically faced a power crunch. Its severe power shortage subjected the country to rolling blackouts of 2 to over 10 hours a day, peaking significantly in 2022 and 2023 with record numbers of blackout days. In 2023, a total of 91 days of outages were witnessed.

The situation has improved. On 4 October, Eskom announced that South Africa had not experienced load-shedding in over 500 days, reflecting the cumulative impact of improved fleet performance, lower unplanned outages and increased generation capacity.

The high commissioner acknowledged NTPC's contribution in the matter.

"Our energy crisis is over; we don't have power outages anymore. And interestingly, NTPC has been part of the story," Sooklal said. "Eskom, our state energy provider, and NTPC signed an MoU about a year and a half ago," he said. Under this agreement, NTPC trains engineers of Eskom in an in-house three-month training programme in India.

Queries emailed to NTPC and Eskom on their green energy collaboration remained unanswered.

At the group level, NTPC has a total installed power generation capacity of 91.5GW in India, including 67.36GW of coal-based, 6.51GW gas-based and the remaining 17.60GW of renewable energy. The company has also forayed into nuclear power generation and is aiming for 30GW capacity by 2047, nearly a third of the country's overall 100GW target.

South Africa, the largest economy in the continent with a gross domestic product (GDP) of about $480 billion, witnesses the highest power demand in the region. According to data from the International Energy Agency (IEA), the country generated 239,024GWh electricity in 2024, with a 13% cumulative rise since 2000. About 85% of the power generated is from coal-based plants.

Amid the growing power demand in South Africa, NTPC will also aid supply of components and spare parts of Eskom's ageing power plants.

"Our coal-powered fire stations are old, but you (India) are still able to generate capacity from these old stations because you have the ecosystem to maintain it, refurbish and all, and you produce spare parts," said Sooklal. "So, we have an agreement; they (NTPC) will now help us when we have these problems by providing these spare parts."

Eskom's thermal power capacity is 45GW. One of South Africa's oldest plants, the Komati power station in Mpumalanga province. was commissioned way back in 1961, while the first unit of another station, Tutuka, was commissioned in 1985.

"India's strategic engagement in Africa's green energy transition is carving its own trajectory alongside. This indicates a paradigm shift for India in its energy diplomacy across the African continent," said Gajendra Singh, professor in the department of African studies, Delhi University. "The partnership between NTPC and Eskom captures this shift." AFP

GOOGLE FACES BACKLASH AGAINST INDIA DATA CENTRE

VISAKHAPATNAM: Handcuffs encircle Google's logo on one campaign poster, while another warns that people "cannot drink data", as opposition mounts to the tech giant's planned AI mega-facility in India.

Excavators have swung into action, clearing forest and farmland on the southeast coast for the $15 billion construction of Google's largest data centre outside the United States.

The project at Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh state, a port often called Vizag, is championed by India as a cornerstone of its technological ambitions.

But many residents fear the data centre -- one of several huge new tech sites in Vizag -- will strain water and power resources, damage the environment and bring too few jobs in return.

Farmer Chandala Sadamma told AFP that when she sees the red-earth scars where her plot of mango and cashew trees once stood, "I feel like crying".

She was paid more than $82,000 for the two-acre (0.8-hectare) stretch of land, but the transaction left a bitter taste.

"Some company came and, without showing any respect, they took the land and we accepted it," the 50-year-old said. AFP

Gold jewellers brace for Q3 after growth cools in Q2

Neethi Lisa Rojan
neethi.rojan@livemint.com

MUMBAI: Gold retailers reported strong but moderating growth in the September quarter, as the festive season extended into the December quarter of fiscal year 2026-27 (FY27).

"The festive and wedding season this time is a bit delayed compared to the base quarter, which has led to growth moderation," said Deep Shah, analyst at brokerage firm Equirus Securities. "Additionally, our channel checks suggest that amid the falling gold prices, consumers are awaiting stability in gold prices, which has also impacted the footfalls," Shah said.

The largest listed player, Titan Co Ltd, reported a 25% year-on-year growth in its revenue for Q2 FY27, driven by performances across its jewellery, watches and eyewear segments, according to its quarterly update. This contrasts with the three quarters of 40%+ growth. The company reported 21.9% on-year revenue growth in Q2 FY26.

Titan will be affected by a high base in the coming quarters, too, said Nomura. "In addition, the benefits of high gold prices could fade if gold prices remain at these levels, indicating that revenue growth may see optical moderation on a quarter-on-quarter basis from Q3 onwards," analysts at Nomura said in a 7 October report.

Kalyan Jewellers Ltd reported a revenue growth in excess of 26% when compared to the year-ago quarter, the company said in the quarterly report. In comparison, in Q2 FY26 (July-September 2025), Kalyan Jewellers reported a 30% on-year increase in consolidated revenue. The company had strong revenue growth last year, the highest at 66% on-year in Q4 FY26.



Gold retailers posted strong but moderating Q2 revenue growth as festive and wedding demand shifted to December quarter. MINT

Gold price volatility is also prompting customers to make purchase decisions after much consideration. Gold prices have dropped about 10% in the last six months, but are still trading above ₹1,50,000 for 10 grams of 24-karat gold.

Senco Gold Ltd said the company is showing strong resilience despite price volatility. "Q2 revenue growth accelerated to 29% on-year at the retail level, supported by 19% growth from existing stores (SSSG growth)," it said. "We achieved the highest-ever top line of ₹5,000 crore in the first half of FY27 and a coveted landmark of ₹10,000 crore sales on a trailing-12-month basis," Senco said in its quarterly update.

PN Gadgil Jewellers posted 22.4% on-year growth in revenue, while PC Jeweller Ltd posted 28% growth rate. The product mix will be important in determining the margin trajectory. "Coin demand tapered (off a high base), resulting in a high single-digit fall on-year," Titan said. PN Gadgil reported that the share of gold coin and bar sales in retail revenue normalized to ~15.8%, compared with ~23.3% in the year-ago.

"The continued moderation in the lower-margin gold coin business, coupled with rising contribution from retail and studded jewellery, is driving a sustained improvement in the overall quality and profitability of the revenue mix," PN Gadgil said in its quarterly update.

{ THE CROSSWORDS }

CRYPTIC CLUES

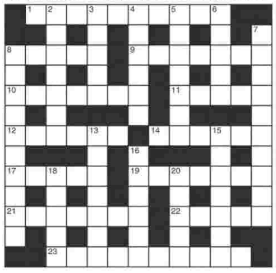
PUZZLE 17614 © Gemini Crosswords 2018 All rights reserved

ACROSS

1 A summer hit maybe but it brings complaint (10)
8 Cook right on the oven (5)
9 Tommy's quiet; possibly a sign of illness (7)
10 A bishop is seen before having departed (7)
11 Her and it; conjunction or pronoun (5)
12 More's ideal land in which to live (6)
14 Fool holding company capital (6)
17 Post office workers (5)
19 Disturbance in court perhaps (7)
21 Apple sauce (7)
22 Horse stepped very softly out (5)
23 They set an example for their followers (10)

DOWN

2 Theresa is changing to radiators (7)
3 It's very much used as a prefix (5)
4 Result of a questionable action? (6)
5 They may be confined to teams in trouble (7)
6 Joint headgear (5)
7 Having time to spend in a cooler situation (10)
8 Officially register a complaint (6,4)
13 Let down when fed up and not in time (7)
15 It's obvious I'd enter the contest (7)
16 One gets a bit attached to it (6)
18 Poe's a weird storyteller (5)
20 An argument about the first social order (5)



QUICK CLUES

ACROSS

1 Less desirable alternative (6,4)
8 Presumptuous audacity (5)
9 Power of endurance (7)
10 Interweave (7)
11 Up to the time that (5)
12 Inform (6)
14 Return to former state (6)
17 A characteristic (5)
19 Put to practical use (7)
21 Bold feat (7)
22 Imposing display (5)
23 Act immediately (4,2,4)

DOWN

2 Sincere in intention (7)
3 Done openly (5)
4 Scatter (6)
5 Deletion (7)
6 Distort meaning of (5)
7 Agree to stop an activity (4,2,1,3)
8 From time to time (3,3,4)
13 Vacantly silly (7)
15 Witty pointed remark (7)
16 Unprovoked (6)
18 To shock (5)
20 Factory (5)

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTIONS (17613)

CRYPTIC

C	H	A	M	P	S	■	W	H	A	C	K	S		
O	■	B	■	A	■	M	■	O	■	U	■	U		
B	R	E	A	T	H	E	■	L	O	S	E	R		
W	■	E	■	D	■	E	■	T	■	V	■	E		
E	A	S	E	L	■	I	N	S	P	I	R	E		
B	■	L	■	C	■	■	■	O	■	Y	■	■		
■	A	P	P	A	R	I	T	I	O	N	S	■		
S	E	U	■	■	R	■	N	■	■	M	■	■		
P	E	T	I	S	S	E	■	S	A	B	L	E		
A	■	L	■	P	■	M	■	I	■	U	■	R		
R	O	M	E	O	■	A	N	G	E	L	I	C		
K	■	A	■	K	■	R	■	T	■	E	■	■		
S	O	N	N	E	T	■	S	T	A	Y	E	R		

QUICK

M	U	L	I	S	H	■	P	R	I	M	E	D		
A	■	A	■	A	■	R	■	I	■	T	■	I		
E	M	P	O	R	I	A	■	V	E	N	U	S		
N	■	E	■	A	■	N	■	A	■	M	■	■		
A	G	L	O	W	■	D	I	L	E	M	M	A		
D	■	A	■	■	■	A	■	■	■	Y	■	■		
■	R	A	N	K	A	N	D	F	I	L	E	■		
A	M	■	■	■	G	A	■	■	■	C	■	■		
F	A	N	M	A	I	L	■	L	A	T	E	R		
R	E	L	■	O	■	L	I	■	I	A	■	■		
E	A	S	E	L	■	V	I	O	L	E	N	T		
S	A	■	O	■	E	■	U	■	P	■	E	■		
H	E	A	R	T	Y	■	S	T	U	P	O	R		

{ SUDOKU }

DIFFICULTY LEVEL ★★★

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

Fill in all the squares in the grid so that each row, column and each of the 9X9 squares contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

GAME ZONE: Scan the QR code for more daily puzzles and brain teasers

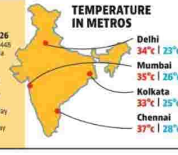
{ WEATHER }

TEMPERATURE ▪HIGH ▪LOW

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY
Partly cloudy sky	Partly cloudy sky	Partly cloudy sky
34°c | 23°c	34°c | 24°c	34°c | 24°c

ALMANAC
Today is 12th October 2026
29 Rabi al Akhar, 1448
17, Ashwina, Shukla Paksha, Q2
Samvat 2083
Sunset: Monday at 05:54 p.m.
Sunrise: Tuesday at 01.20 a.m.
Moonrise: Monday at 07:46 a.m.
Moonset: Monday at 06:40 p.m.

TEMPERATURE IN METROS



Delhi 34°c | 23°c
Mumbai 35°c | 26°c
Kolkata 33°c | 25°c
Chennai 37°c | 28°c

TIMES BUSINESS

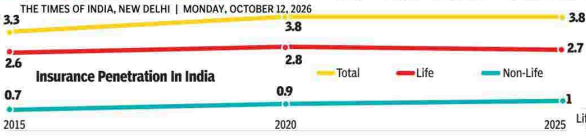
THE TIMES OF INDIA, NEW DELHI | MONDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2026

Marginal Improvement
In Insurance Penetration

Insurance penetration in India has seen only marginal improvement over the past decade with growth driven by higher premium intensity among existing customers rather than broader insurance adoption

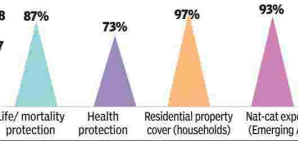
Source: Irdai Handbook, EY





The gap is not a coverage gap. It is a rupee gap – the unprotected share of the risk itself

% of economic risk left unprotected



Inadequate life cover often falls short of replacing lost income and meeting long-term financial commitments. Meanwhile, over 40 crore individuals, India's missing middle, continue to lack adequate health protection

I-T dept estimates ₹25k cr tax evasion by restaurants

Accesses TDS Data From Swiggy, Zomato, Finds Non-Payment

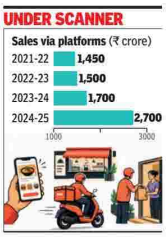
Sidhartha@timesofindia.com

New Delhi: The income tax department has detected massive evasion by restaurants, which may be of the order of over Rs 25,000 crore.

Just based on data from Swiggy and Zomato, the evasion is pegged at Rs 7,500 crore as 8,000 restaurants have got TDS mentioned against them but have not bothered to file returns. The data is based on an analysis of data for four years from 2021-22 to 2024-25. Data for the last financial year is not yet available.

In 2024-25 alone, these restaurants raked in close to Rs 2,700 crore of revenue for which tax of Rs 25 crore or so has been deducted. Every time you order food on one of the food delivery apps, 0.1% of the bill amount is deducted as tax (TDS), which used to be 1% in the initial years. Since TDS does not apply to dine-in customers, which typically generate three-to-four times the revenue of what an eatery earns from food delivery, the revenue for the restaurants is a multiple of what is shown via TDS through food delivery apps. Over the four years starting 2021-22, govt has collected close to Rs 75 crore in TDS, with the number of such restaurants rising 65% during this period.

UNDER SCANNER



Authorities are looking to start a new drive to get restaurants and eateries to pay taxes that are due to govt. In recent years, the income tax department has relied on its "nudge campaign", using data for a targeted campaign, to get those under-reporting or concealing income to pay up and then act against defaulters.

Restaurants have been found to be suppressing income in the past too and were one of the most vocal opponents of GST when it kicked in. Last year, an exercise covering nearly 1.8 lakh restaurants showed that they were under-reporting income by 30-35% on average. Tax authorities surveyed 70-odd and wrote to over 60,000 of them asking to pay up. As reported by **TOI** on March 9, the tax department estimated under-reporting of Rs 70,000 crore in the case of bills vanishing from cloud-based system. Besides, apart from cash, payments were routed through accounts of waiters and workers to suppress income of restaurants. The move has led to some improvement in compliance but not significantly.

Now, the exercise is even more foolproof with tax authorities even identifying restaurants, most of which have income of Rs 2-5 crore across major cities. The numbers are obviously larger in the metros and bigger cities.

RBI measures: Re to gain sharply but forex liquidity likely to dry up

Mayur.Shetty
@timesofindia.com

Mumbai: Forex dealers expect a gap opening in the rupee-dollar exchange rate, with the domestic unit likely to record its sharpest gain in recent times. However, there is also a looming market freeze, with RBI's aggressive anti-speculation measures risking paralysis of legitimate market-making, choking interbank liquidity and inadvertently penalising genuine corporate hedgers.

Oil companies, normally the market's largest daily dollar buyers, will source dollars through RBI's special window, while stricter documentation rules could slow other commercial purchases. Meanwhile, RBI's dollar sales and expectations of rupee appreciation may prompt holders to sell dollars, adding to downward pressure on the dollar.

"While the weekend measures will support the rupee in the immediate term, liquidity in the forex market could dry up very quickly. Desks need substantial operational clarity from RBI before they have the confidence to quote two-way prices again," said Ashish Vaidya, head of treasury at DBS Bank.

> **Locking up 20% in idle cash with the central bank carries an opportunity cost of roughly 6.5% to 7% in lost interest**

RBI's new 20% Foreign Exchange Risk Reserve (FERR) means selling forex derivatives to an importer client now forces the bank to lock up 20% interest-free cash with RBI. Because dealers do not yet know how or when this reserve will be debited, they cannot accurately price their trades.

One area where clarity is sought is cross-currency swaps, such as those used to hedge external commercial borrowings (ECBs), or coupon-only and principal-only swap structures.

Invesco Mutual Fund

An investor education and awareness initiative

Mutual Funds are subject to market risks, read all scheme related documents carefully.

Festive phone mkt set to shrink in volume

Aabhas.Sharma
@timesofindia.com

New Delhi: India's smartphone market is expected to witness a 12% decline in sales (by volumes) this festive season, even as the overall market value is projected to grow 5%, reflecting a shift towards pricier devices and longer replacement cycles, according to Counterpoint Research.

Rising memory costs have pushed up smartphone prices, prompting consumers to defer purchases or increasingly rely on financing and trade-in offers to upgrade their devices. The festive season, which typically accounts for a significant share of annual smartphone sales, is expected to be driven more by replacement demand than first-time buyers.

"The key challenge this festive season will be the size of the active consumer pool," said Tarun Pathak, research director at Counterpoint Research. Higher smartphone prices, he said, are likely to keep many consumers on the sidelines, with discretionary upgrades being deferred and purchases increasingly driven by replacement needs.

The trend is also reflected in device trade-ins, which are emerging as an important driver of premium smartphone purchases.

"This festive season is shaping up as an upgrade season more than a first-purchase season. Fewer people are buying a phone for the first time, but the ones who are buying are moving up," said Sreevathsa Prabhakar, founder and CEO of Servify.

Servify, which handles over 3 lakh device trade-ins annually, said trade-in volumes in Oct and Nov are typically around 50% higher than in regular months.

VALUE TO GROW

Prabhakar said upgrades in the Rs 60,000-1 lakh smartphone segment are being driven largely by financing and trade-ins. Demand for above Rs 1 lakh, including foldable smartphones, is largely coming from existing premium users upgrading their devices every 12-24 months.

Trade-in demand is also expanding beyond metros into Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, suggesting that premiumisation is spreading to smaller markets. The shift towards expensive smartphones is simultaneously boosting demand for device protection. Servify said premium smartphones have 30-40% higher protection attach rates than mid-range devices, with protection increasingly bundled with financing and upgrade plans.

With rising component costs limiting manufacturers' ability to offer deep discounts, attractive exchange values, easy financing and assured buyback programmes are expected to play a crucial role in driving festive sales.

FPIs pull out ₹44k cr in Oct, outflows in '26 cross ₹3L cr

New Delhi: Foreign investors have withdrawn Rs 44,166 crore from Indian equities so far in Oct, bringing the total outflows this year to more than Rs 3 lakh crore as elevated crude oil prices, a firmer US dollar and higher US bond yields weigh on investor sentiment. Also, the AI-led rally in North Asian markets attracts higher foreign capital.

The latest outflows follow a net withdrawal of Rs 35,861 crore in Sept. Before this, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) had invested Rs 20,200 crore in Indian equities in July and Rs 29,631 crore in Aug, data from the NSDL showed. With the latest selling, FPI withdrawals from Indian equities in 2026 have reached Rs 3 lakh crore, significantly higher than the Rs 1.7 lakh crore recorded during the entire 2025, the data noted. VK Vijayakumar, chief investment strategist at Geojit Investments, said massive FPI selling was the primary reason for the Indian market's underperformance this year, with the Nifty delivering negative returns of 13.9% year-to-date in 2026.

Meanwhile, major quarterly earnings from companies like Wipro and HCL Tech, along with inflation figures, global trends, and crude oil price movements, will drive stock market movement this week, analysts said. Market investors will also watch foreign investor trading activity, rupee movement, US Treasury yields, and geopolitical developments. AGENCIES

TOI IN THE CLASSROOM

SIPs In The Red: Should You Stop, Continue Or Increase Investment?



Systematic Investment Plans (SIPs) are meant to help investors ride out market volatility, but the prolonged weakness in equities has gradually pushed returns into the red. Here's a look at how investors should approach SIPs

Why Are SIPS In Equity MFs Struggling?

SIP helps investors buy at different market levels, but it does not protect them from a fall in equity markets. Nifty is down roughly 13% from Sept-end 2024. If several earlier SIP installments were invested when stock prices and valuations were higher, a subsequent correction can pull the value of the accumulated units below the total amount invested, resulting in low or even negative returns.

Are Negative Returns A Cause For Worry?

Negative SIP returns over shorter periods need not by themselves be a reason to stop investing. Equity markets can go through periods of correction or weak returns, and SIP instalments invested closer to market peaks can remain in the red until markets recover. However, investors should not assume that every poorly performing SIP will automatically recover simply because they continue investing. They need to distinguish between weak returns caused by a broader market correction and underperformance specific to the fund.

What Should Your SIP Strategy Be Now?

Investors with long-term goals should not stop an SIP merely because markets have fallen or recent returns have turned negative. In fact, a falling NAV allows every subsequent SIP instalment to purchase more units. If markets eventually recover, these units bought at lower prices can help bring down the investor's average purchase cost. However, continuing a SIP and increasing a SIP are two different decisions. Investors should not necessarily increase their SIPs simply because markets have fallen. Increasing the investment may make sense if they have additional savings, need to step up investments to meet a financial goal, or if a market decline has pushed their equity allocation below their desired asset allocation.

Are SIPS Useful Only For Equity Schemes?

No. SIP is simply a method of investing a fixed amount at regular intervals and can be used across different categories of mutual funds. While SIPs are commonly associated with equity funds because investors use them to gradually build long-term equity exposure and deal with market volatility, they can also be used to invest regularly in hybrid. The relevance of rupee-cost averaging, however, can differ across asset classes. It tends to be more visible in volatile assets such as equities, where NAVs can fluctuate significantly and the same SIP amount can buy substantially different numbers of units at different market levels.

— PRASHANT MAHESH

Goyal backs global growth push for Indian startups; Gajwani flags AI gap

Founders Seek Patient Capital As Deep-Tech Ambitions Grow

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: Commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal called on Indian startups to look beyond the domestic market and expand overseas, offering govt funding to showcase them at international exhibitions and conferences. He said a sustained three-to-five-year push could help startups tap new markets and attract investors. Goyal also argued that tighter H-1B visa access could benefit India by retaining talent and bringing more work to the country's global capability centres.



(L to R) Anshul Agrawal and Saurabh Bothra of Habuild; Ayush Ranjan, Prateesh Awasthi and Vishrant Dave of Armatrix; Mukund Jha of Emergent; Manu Chandra of Sauce; Pallavi Mohadikar of Palmonas; Pallavi Shrivastava of Progcap; commerce minister Piyush Goyal; Times Internet chairman Satyan Gajwani; ETSA juror Aryaman Vikram Birla of Aditya Birla Group; Lalit Keshre and Ishan Bansal of Groww; Peddi Shanmukh Srinivas, Ambarish Ghosh and Debayan Dasgupta of Theranautilus; and Trishala Bothra of Habuild

IDFC FIRST Bank presents THE ECONOMIC TIMES STARTUP AWARDS 2026

"We are willing to fund whatever it takes to take our startups to the rest of the world," Goyal said at the ET Startup Awards 2026 in Bengaluru on Friday. "Let's get out of the cozy comfort of the large Indian opportunity or Indian market. Let us think of going global," he added.

Times Internet chairman Satyan Gajwani flagged India's lag in artificial intelligence, saying the country needs deeper research, greater computing power and patient capital to close the gap with the US and China.

"As the US and China race ahead in artificial intelligence, India's progress has been slower than it should be," Gajwani said.

He also added that India is witnessing a maturing startup ecosystem, with founders increasingly focused on deep, proprietary technology. Citing the launch of Skyroot Aerospace's Vikram-1 rocket, he said the achievement signalled the growing capabilities of Indian startups in deep tech. "Indian startups are now building semiconductor chips, AI robotics, clean energy technologies and new materials while investors are shaping funds willing to wait longer for these companies to mature," Gajwani said.

He attributed this shift to entrepreneurial ambition, founders turning investors and govt support. "This maturing of the Indian startup ecosystem, this energy and this audacity, founders paying it forward as investors, the structural backing by the state — they've all come together thanks to a lot of advocacy and championing by many of our leaders," he said. India has grown from a few hundred recognised startups to more than 2.5 lakh, creating close to 25 lakh jobs, Gajwani added.

Moderating a panel on India's deep tech ambitions, Accel India founding partner Prashanth Prakash said building such companies required infrastructure and regulatory changes beyond those needed for conventional software businesses. "To build deep tech we need all these enabling elements that were not required for just a software company," he said.

Agrani Labs cofounder and CEO Dheemanth Nagaraj, whose company is developing AI GPUs for data centres, said Indian products had to compete globally on quality. "There is no space for building a substandard product at a lower cost," he said. Govt could help create a market by becoming a first customer, he added.

Spacetech firm Pixxel cofounder and CTO Kshitij Khandelwal said reforms had eased satellite licensing, but setting up manufacturing facilities remained challenging. "The issues that we have faced mostly are local in nature," he said.

BrainSight AI cofounder and CEO Laina Emmanuel said mapping brain function requires complex science and significant computing power. "It's hard science, it's hard tech, it's hard market building for us," she said.

At a panel on the journey to listing, Meesho CEO Vidit Aatrey recalled retired investors at the company's first annual general meeting, telling him they were investing savings accumulated over their lifetimes. "Now you are responsible for their money, and you have to behave differently," he said.

Groww CEO Lalit Keshre said the listing strengthened the connection between the company and its users, many of whom also became shareholders. The company continued to pursue its long-term goals through regular reviews. "The philosophy is that you think long term, but you execute short term."

WINNERS OF THE ET STARTUP AWARDS 2026

- **Startup of the Year:** Groww
- **Midas Touch:** Manu Chandra, Sauce VC
- **Woman Ahead:** Pallavi Mohadikar (Palmonas) and Pallavi Shrivastava (Progcap)
- **Top Innovator:** Theranautilus
- **Bootstrap Champ:** Habuild
- **Comeback Kid:** Mukund Jha, Emergent
- **Best on Campus:** Armatrix
- **Social Enterprise:** Varaha

Infosys plays down impact of PERM suspension

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: Infosys said the US Department of Labor's suspension of new and pending applications under the Permanent Labor Certification (PERM) programme for certain companies, including the IT services major, is unlikely to have a material impact on its operations.

In a statement to the stock exchanges, the company said it was aware of the decision and welcomed the opportunity to work with the Department of Labor and other govt agencies to address any questions they may have.

"We do not anticipate the announcement of such suspension to have a material impact on the organisation," Infosys said.

The company said it had invested in building a strong local workforce and technology and innovation hubs in the US. It reiterated its commitment to employees, clients and communities in the country, as well as to complying with all applicable laws and regulations.

Green cards not key to workforce strategy: TCS

Shilpa.Phadnis
@timesofindia.com

Bengaluru: TCS CEO K Krithivasan said green cards have never been a key part of the company's workforce strategy, as it has significantly reduced permanent residency applications for H-1B employees and stepped up local hiring in US. The company said the US suspension of green card processing would not fundamentally alter its talent management approach.

"In the last few years, what Sudeep (CHRO) and his team have been applying for is a single-digit kind of green card permanent residency," Krithivasan said.

TCS has been increasing local hiring in US, where locally hired employees now account for 50% of its workforce. The company plans to hire another 15,000 people in the country over the next five years. TCS had around 11,000 H-1B employees in its 30,000-strong US workforce.

TCS said its model involves employees travelling from India to work on client projects in the US for two to three years before returning. "There is a continuous movement of talent between onsite and offshore," Krithivasan said. TCS said fresher hiring would continue to be driven by demand rather than a fixed target of 40,000. The company onboarded 10,000 freshers in the Sept quarter, compared with 14,000 in the preceding quarter.

> In the last few years, what Sudeep (CHRO) and his team have been applying for is a single-digit kind of green card permanent residency
>
> **K Krithivasan**
> CEO, TCS



"It has also increased its intake of AI-native talent from Indian universities by 50% as it builds capabilities for AI-led technology services. "We have increased intake by 50% because we find very good success in them being very natural. They're building great credibility with our customers and able to deliver outstanding results," TCS chief human resources officer Sudeep Kunnumal said.

TCS added 4,258 employees during the quarter, taking its headcount to 5.9 lakh.

The company's annualised AI revenue crossed $3.1 billion, accounting for more than 10% of overall revenue. Krithivasan said TCS was seeing every category of deals, including those with Porsche and Best Buy, in which it helps clients rethink their operating models as AI changes business requirements. "We are not looking at it as acquisition of revenue or protecting revenue. These are two new classes of deals where we help the customers transform them fully," he said, adding that the objective was to help clients become AI-first enterprises.

TCS expects AI-led opportunities to offset productivity-driven deflation in traditional technology services, though a stronger net growth contribution could take time. Krithivasan estimated a six-quarter to three-year horizon for the balance to shift more decisively.

Technology spending could remain flat or see a slight increase as clients invest in AI, technology modernisation and business operations, he said.



CONTRAPUNTO

Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!

~ SAMUEL BECKETT, Waiting for Godot

Let Delhi Function

Supreme Court's directions must be enforced, authorities must learn to accommodate protests

Anti-SIR and anti-CEC protests, seen in many parts of the country, are distinctly spotlighted in the capital for now. It was a chaotic disaster here on Saturday, much calmer on Sunday, and today is a new day. What is clear is that the CEC-SIR affair will continue to draw protesters back, whether led by INDIA bloc, CJP, or some other group. Any anxiety that froths up as a nationwide conversation, will, to paraphrase Shakespeare, round about the Delhi cauldron go, at some point. We can even call this tradition. Obviously then, the capital's authorities should take this all in their stride.

How far from this was the case on Oct 10, is what drew a special Supreme Court sitting yesterday. Every direction it gave, reflected something gone wrong. Run metro and rail normally, let people and traffic move freely in the city, let the internet be, don't do illegal detentions. Of course, exceptions are allowed for maintaining law and order. But that shouldn't include willy-nilly dragging protesters, lawyers, journalists, doctors, bystanders, or flyers into detention, all across Delhi. Paris has more metro stations than Delhi. It shut down only six for Oct 6, for a protest more than 56,000 strong. Delhi led with 57, reducing the number to 45 when SC reminded it of proportionality. Of course, other trains, buses, and private transport were also widely disrupted.



Protest sites in a capital, like Place de la République in Paris and National Mall in Washington DC, carry extra weight precisely because that's where governance is physically concentrated. If the idea was to stop people amassing at Jantar Mantar, the "multiple Jantar Mantars" response showed protesters will find a way. NCR is the largest metropolitan economy in India. Its vulnerability to bandhs, whether imposed by others or govt, is something that should have been fixed long ago. Now, two things should no longer be delayed. Supreme Court's directions on Sunday should be honoured, for the next protest, and the next, and so on. And, as the court said on Friday, an alternative, hospitable protest site must be designated soonest possible.

Post-Logic White House

Trump's diesel deal with Putin shows India's right to stand firm in dealings with Washington

In yet another Trumpian twist, Trump's sprung a sudden deal to supply Russian diesel to America, ostensibly to bring down prices of the fuel for Americans, and the world. But in doing so, he has vindicated New Delhi. For months now, GOI has held firm in its dealings with the Trump administration, refusing to massage Trump's ego or buckle under in trade negotiations. And that approach is proving to be the correct one with each passing day. For, the only thing consistent about Trump is that he is inconsistent. Even the diesel deal he has struck with Putin may be reversed after the US midterm polls. Poor projections for Republicans, and his senseless war with Iran, have pushed him into this position in the first place.



So, Trump is looking for a temporary way out, even as he has left the possibility of sanctions against India for purchasing Russian oil hanging like Damocles' sword. This is absurd – a country threatening others for buying Russian oil is itself purchasing diesel from Moscow. Obviously, Washington has moved into a post-logic space. And in doing so, as foreign minister Jaishankar remarked at the recent Munich Leaders Meeting in New Delhi, US has chosen to become a lonelier power. Thus, countries like India and other middle powers, have no choice but to hold the line as long as Trump remains in office.

Hence, hedging emerges as a key strategic tool for middle powers. And GOI has demonstrated this ably with the hosting of the recent Brics summit in New Delhi, that brought together multiple countries with opposing interests – like Iran and UAE. Modi today is the only leader that can talk to Netanyahu, Pezeshkian, Zelenskyy, Putin, Xi, and Trump without compromising on India's strategic autonomy. So, New Delhi certainly has the strategic capital to weather a fickle-minded Washington, and wait for a more favourable turn.

The Plot Thickens

Guess what was Jeffrey Archer's best-kept secret? It hits close to home

Anil Abraham



I sighed and looked up from the book I was reading, as my Eve entered the Garden of Eden. "You've read every one of his books, but have you ever wondered why your favourite author didn't ever write an entire novel based in India?" Kamala asked pointedly, as she offered me an apple.

Once I enter Archer mode, like Arjun, I am fully focused on the target of finishing what I have started. Still, I kept my book aside, because I had *A Quiver Full of Arrows* to counter the accusation at hand. He always had India in mind when he wrote. It's his *Best Kept Secret*, just think carefully.

Kane and Abel is basically about brothers who fight each other constantly all their life. What could be more Indian? Our nepotism debate, likewise, can be explained in terms of the principle of *First Among Equals*.

And even those who don't believe in either the caste system or reservation, would agree that over the centuries some people have been *A Prisoner of Birth*.



Every trip that has involved roads with potholes, unending traffic jams, or delays at airports, has made one wish that one could travel *As the Crow Flies*.

My son now entered the discussion because he is *Next In Line*. He wanted to know if he could borrow some money from me. He also knew exactly where I kept my wallet. It was *Hidden in Plain Sight*. And so, *To Cut a Long Story Short*, he helped himself to what he needed – *Not a Penny More, Not a Penny Less*.

Moral policing of women makes every beti feel like *The Prodigal Daughter*. Communal conflict makes every beta wonder if this cycle of *An Eye for an Eye* will ever end. We depend on *The Fourth Estate* to tell us what is actually happening, because the pen is *Mightier Than the Sword*. Meanwhile, our elected representatives *Turn a Blind Eye* to real issues. Corruption and theft even in sacred places make one wonder where *Honour Among Thieves* has gone.

Even when crime is proved *Beyond Reasonable Doubt*, there is often *A Twist in the Tale*. Before the criminal can even start writing *A Prison Diary*, he is out on bail or parole. *Only Time Will Tell* whether we are all following only *The Eleventh Commandment* – Thou shalt not get caught!

Listen, Don't Detain

Detention isn't a smart way to deal with street protests. Govt should engage protesters. Plus, be aware that protests are erupting in many democracies, partly because people feel ignored by govts between polls

R Jagannathan



It isn't clear exactly what Delhi police hoped to achieve on Oct 10, with their aggressive arrests, and cordoning of the Jantar Mantar protest site. Such moves are always counter-productive in a democracy. And while Supreme Court, even before the protest started, questioned the wisdom of trying to squash a fly with a hammer, the reality is that this group cannot be called a fly anymore.

One is not implying that there is widespread support for the call to oust CEC Gyanesh Kumar. But it's supported by a wide range of opposition parties, and external actors are also in play. The multiple protests, thus, look unlikely to fade away quietly.

Govt is looking at a stark choice. It can either cave in, as it did in July when education minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned, after CJP and opposition parties demanded his exit for failing to prevent NEET paper leaks. Or, it can resort to even more aggressive policing, with all possible negative consequences to follow.

If the latter choice is exercised, there is no win-win, only lose-lose-lose-lose. Govt will definitely face intense pushback from a section of the population, protesters could face injuries, and longer periods of incarceration if violence breaks out, police will also face intense mental and physical tension, and India will enter fresh political and social turmoil just when larger challenges confront it globally and internally.



Amruta Chattopadhyay

The underlying problem is not unique to India. We are seeing violent student protests in France. Spanish govt has called an early vote after failing to reach an austerity agreement. In US, recent years have seen the Black Lives Matter protest, plus Trump's supporters rioting at Capitol Hill to reject his last election loss. In UK, pressures for greater autonomy to Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland are growing.

Even autocracies are calm only on the surface. No one knows what is really cooking in countries like Russia and North Korea, even China. Because economic challenges bring tough choices to every country. Autocracies' surface calm may, however, convince many of the elites in electoral democracies that repression is the only way to address their problems. Chaos almost always results in citizens looking for alternatives that are potentially worse.

In India, there is no lack of legitimate causes for people to be upset with their govts, be they of BJP or Congress or any other opposition party. A Left coalition has just been ousted in Kerala, an entrenched Trinamool in Bengal, and a freebie-happy DMK in Tamil Nadu. In 2024, a cocky BJP got its own comeuppance when voters downsized it in Lok Sabha. No party can consider itself immune from voter disenchantment. Or from aggressive street mobilisation on various pretexts.

Bitter reality is that nor can any political party or combination of parties solve citizens' most significant problems right away. Think about creating well-paying jobs. Or dealing with the energy and food shortages created by others' wars. Or delivering gender justice. Or solving the cost of living crisis faced by the bottom half of the population.

Solving each one of these problems will take at least a decade of purposeful action, by multiple players and institutions. But the electoral cycle in most democracies is simply too short for politicians to address real issues. Most of them profess *sab changa si* (all is well) if they are in govt, or, if they are challengers, claim that only they have the ability to deliver the goods.

Both are false claims. Real solutions lie in compromises and consensus, and even then things could go wrong. CJP and opposition parties can demand the moon, but they don't have any magic solution for the pressing issues facing the country, either.

The current *cause celebre* is wrongful deletions under the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. But let us be clear, nothing will be resolved by the current protests themselves, or from attempts to contain these through police or legal action. Even if CEC resigns of his own volition, and Election Commission is reformed in ways that all parties find acceptable, tomorrow's electoral winners will face the same inability to remedy deeper problems in any one electoral cycle.

So what exactly can govt do? More importantly, what exactly can any elected govt anywhere in the world do to solve problems and yet survive in politics? There are only three potential ways to do this within the bounds of democratic norms.

- One is for politicians to remain engaged with the people all the time, not just during election time. They have to constantly explain both the options and challenges before them – locally, regionally, nationally. They also need better strategies to deal with street power in the social media age, where mobilisation is easy.
- Two, politicians have to mentally adjust to the possibility that even if they have delivered in some areas, they could still be ousted from govt by opposition politicians using some other pain point to agitate the electorate. Late 1970s are a case in point. Indira Gandhi swept the south and lost badly in the north. Why did the south think she did well, when the north was livid with her after the Emergency? Equally, how did the whole dynamics change once more in 1980, after just a few years of incompetent coalition politics?
- Three, when protests erupt, govts should engage protesters in talks. Even election victories provide only breathing space. The problems will remain. In short, govt has to take some hard calls sooner than later. One just hopes this will not be an extension of Oct 10.

'India has options to respond to any US sanctions on Russia oil...Trump will certainly take that into his calculations'

*With Trump's sudden deal with Putin to supply Russian diesel to America, even as Washington threatens sanctions against India for purchasing Russian oil, charges of US hypocrisy are getting stronger. **Stephen Mull**, former US lead coordinator for Iran nuclear implementation (Iran nuclear deal) spoke with **Rudroneel Ghosh** about the sudden development, and the shifting strategic dynamics in West Asia.*

● With Trump now doing a deal with Putin to import diesel, isn't this blatant hypocrisy in light of US's targeting of India for imports of Russian oil?

The sanctions do increase Trump's leverage vis-à-vis Putin. The Lindsey O Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act, which proposes up to 100% tariff for importing Russian oil – including on India – is of a piece with that strategy. However, how much Trump plans to apply that will depend. India, for example, is not without its own measures to counteract pressure from US. This is relevant in terms of diesel. A lot of the crude that India purchases from Russia is refined into diesel, which then is exported to US. So, India also has levers to pull. And I think that will feature very prominently in Trump's calculations about whether to apply these sanctions. The threat of sanctions though, has been proven to be effective in helping to put pressure on Russia, without having to actually apply the sanctions. But India certainly has options to respond in case sanctions are imposed.



Q&A

● How would you characterise India-US relations today?

There are obvious tensions around trade and India's purchase of Russian oil. But at the strategic level, we have a broad convergence of interests with India, and American Ambassador Gore, I think, is doing a good job. He has Trump's confidence and is an asset for improving our relations. Our business cooperation is very strong. Our military cooperation is getting stronger. So, tariffs and sanctions get a lot of attention, but they are part of a much broader, healthy relationship.

● You were in charge of implementing the Iran nuclear deal in 2015. Where is the current Iran war heading?

The US-Iran relationship has been very troubled since 1979. And while US certainly increased its conflict with Iran with the launching of the war in Feb, in other aspects it is a continuation of many issues that have been going on for decades – Iran supports Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis who have been irritants in world security situations for very many years.



I think Trump administration has some important decisions to make. Does it want to escalate even further in the hopes of removing the threat from the Islamic Republic, or is it willing to compromise? And what that compromise will be very much remains to be seen. Iranian govt has indicated at various times they are open to negotiations, but at other times they are not. So, it is difficult to predict how things will end up. It will either be a dramatic escalation of the US military effort, or US will basically look to settle this conflict according to terms that have yet to be determined. US is very committed to freedom of the seas – Strait of Hormuz should not be in control of one country or another.

● Are you saying opening of Hormuz is something that US will settle for to end this conflict?

It's true that when Trump launched this war back in Feb, he had multiple reasons. But as this conflict has continued for more than six months, Trump's immediate goals have been narrowed. For example, Trump has been saying that Iran's nuclear programme has been significantly set back already. Ultimately, over the longer term, US would like to see the Iranian nuclear programme under international supervision and control. But that's probably a not so important immediate goal. The most immediate goal is opening up Hormuz to international traffic. And once that is secured, I think it will result in US stepping back from military pressure.

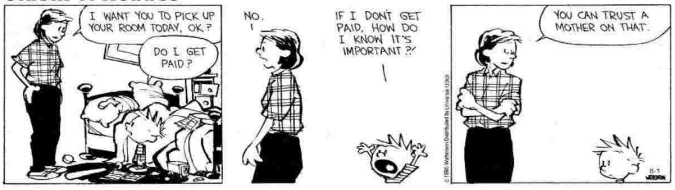
● But previously we already had international supervision over Iran's nuclear programme with JCPOA.

The JCPOA (Iran nuclear deal) was working when I was in the administration. It was a mistake for US to tear up the deal. So, it would be good if we can get back to an arrangement like that. Iran, of course, is now much more hardline. So, it will be much harder now to achieve that kind of settlement. But at the same time, the Iranian economy is struggling. And that will act as a source of pressure on the Iranian govt to come to the negotiating table.

● Do you think the Iran and Russia-Ukraine war theatres are converging? Also, is there a solution to the latter?

I think the Ukrainians have surprised the world – certainly surprised Russia, with its degree of resistance. The conflict is homing in on five years, and Ukraine is getting stronger and stronger, and getting more effective in taking their campaign to Russia. I think we are at a critical point with that war. Putin is widely reported to be considering another round of mobilisation, which will be very unpopular in Russia, as the cost of Russia's misadventure in Ukraine mounts. And I hope that will impel Putin to finally take the negotiations seriously to bring the conflict to an end.

Calvin & Hobbes



Sacredspace



Thus, photons which constitute a ray of light behave like intelligent human beings: out of all possible curves they always select the one which will take them most quickly to their goal.

Max Planck

A Photon That Is Conscious

Deepak Ranade

The special theory of relativity was a moment of epiphany for Albert Einstein. He imagined what would happen if he could run fast enough to catch up to a beam of light. This revealed a deep contradiction in the physics of his era and changed how humanity understands time and space. Just imagining being alongside a beam of light led to one of the greatest discoveries. A ray of light that enlightened entire mankind.

Light. One of the most mysterious entities, it has baffled scientists, philosophers, poets, and thinkers for centuries. It remains an enigma, almost a metaphysical conundrum for Physics.

Max Planck, widely regarded as the father of quantum theory, was investigating black-body radiation to understand how the spectrum of radiation emitted by a heated body varies with temperature. When existing theories failed to explain experimental observations, Planck introduced a revolutionary idea: energy could be emitted or absorbed in discrete packets, or quanta, rather than continuously. This breakthrough, announced in 1900, laid the foundation for quantum physics.

This unravelled an entirely new understanding of the subatomic realm. Exploring the properties and mysteries of light has provided rich dividends for the entire scientific community.

Sunlight, the benefactor of life, powers photosynthesis through chlorophyll. It is a natural, eternal source of energy that sustains life on this planet. The photon surely must be more than just a Bosonic subatomic particle.

This year's Nobel Prize in Medicine was given to a group of scientists for their work in optogenetics, a biological technique used to manipulate the activity of neurons or other cells with light.

Peter Hegemann and Georg Nagel discovered a unique protein, channelrhodopsin, in a single-celled alga. Karl Deisseroth transformed the protein into a light-controlled switch for nerve cells. This discovery has opened new frontiers and laid the foundation of a new era in neuroscience. Receptors that are activated by light triggering genetic activity in neuronal cells and networks.

The photon is the fundamental particle of light, named after the Greek word phós, meaning 'light'. The photon is the quantum, or smallest possible unit, of light. This quaint particle is known to alter its behaviour depending on whether it is being observed. The modified double-slit experiment has unambiguously proven this fact and stunned physicists. A photon that is conscious.

THE SPEAKING TREE



Image: AI

This is perhaps what Saint Dnaneshwar alluded to when he proclaimed that every particle of this universe is a manifestation of intelligent consciousness. Observation is untenable without the medium of light. And quantum physics mandates an observer for collapse of the wave function. Could interaction between photons and a cognitive apparatus trigger this collapse of the wave function? This collapse remains an enigma in quantum physics. Advait Vedanta postulates experiencing the underlying undifferentiated singularity that unites the *triputi*, trinity, of observer, observed and observation as a state of realisation.

Tukaram, in a famous composition, equates the merging of this trilogy with enlightenment: *Sandili triputi, deep ujala ghati* – triad fell away; the lamp within vessel was illuminated. The trinity of observer, observed and observation sublimates, instantly illuminating the light of realisation. Could the photon create an illusion of observation? Is that what our scriptures mean by maya?

A massless particle that sustains life, eliminates darkness, triggers genes, and is simultaneously a wave and a particle. A particle that collapses the wave function. A particle that might even cast a spell of an illusory universe. A particle that will forever intrigue, stimulate, perhaps never reveal its true nature.

The writer is a consultant neurosurgeon

What is RBI Seeing That Markets Aren't?

Bank's forex fix raises more questions

In financial markets, messages from policymakers often carry more weight than the policy itself. RBI seems to have forgotten that with its Friday night actions to contain volatility in the forex market. It imposed restrictions on transactions in forex trading, including derivatives, risk reserve for transactions, and opened a special window for oil marketing companies (OMCs) to pay for crude oil they purchase. What confounds market participants is why RBI has chosen to reach for crisis-era tools now. What has changed in less than 72 hours since Sanjay Malhotra detailed the bank's monetary policy actions and its approach to the currency?



In the past few months, RBI concluded one of the largest forex reserve accumulation exercises, through special FCNR(B) and ECB schemes. These brought in about $140 bn and took reserves to record highs, though they have come off in the past few weeks. The state of the forex kitty and restrictions imposed on forex transactions don't square. Opening a special window for OMCs and banning cancellation of hedging contracts are measures associated with crisis conditions, not a few weeks after building up record reserves. Such abrupt shifts risk confusing markets about RBI's view of the rupee's underlying strength and the pressures it faces.

Is there something RBI is seeing the rest of the market isn't? At least, that's what the market would conclude now. The restrictions may have the desired impact, for now. But the messaging will probably have the opposite effect.

One Delhi Day Of 'Police State'

On Saturday, GoI showcased administrative strength, and revealed political weakness — politics not confined to jousts between parties, but in its more expansive form of how an administration engages with its citizenry. In turning various parts of India's capital city into veritable containment zones, the state let slip its inability to handle critique and unwillingness to confront unscripted tough questions. The argument of 'doing whatever was needed' to maintain law and order does not stick. Conflating extraordinary precautions with a clampdown, followed by the police going on a pick up-and-detain spree, makes for neither good governance nor good optics. Both give off malodorous whiffs of something India is not: a banana republic. The administration's disregard for Supreme Court's Oct 9 order to GoI regarding not restricting metro and train services is baffling. Which makes the court's contempt notice to the government and police officials on Sunday particularly reassuring. The violent detention of Rajya Sabha MP John Brittas by police on the same day also exposes GoI's peculiar insensitivity to handling disagreement.



While it's easy to lay the blame at the protesters' door — 'if there were no protests, life would have carried on merrily' — neither state nor government is an RWA uncle who finds Article 19(1)(b) of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees all citizens the right to assemble peaceably, to be an impediment in the way of social order. Denouncing a gathering to protest that has not been given permission to protest exposes its own logical absurdity. In the process, Saturday's proceedings, ironically, have been amplified. With Jantar Mantar, the city's designated spot for such gatherings, out of bounds, protesters were practically — and, in many cases, literally — pushed out to other parts of Delhi. With deployment of 1-2 companies of CAPF and Delhi Police, along with BSF at the borders, to 'handle' protesters, the administration simultaneously displayed panic, and *reduced* the inherent asymmetry between the state and its discontents.

Inhabitants of a police state experience restrictions on mobility, and freedom to express or communicate political or other views that are subject to police monitoring or enforcement. On Saturday, Delhi fulfilled these criteria through administrative high-handedness and ham-handedness. One hopes that such a condition in non-Emergency, democratic India is confined to that single day.



JUST IN JEST

Don't jump to conclusions, it may lead to untoward complications

If It Quacks Like a Duck, Notice Dekho

You'd think identifying a duck is relatively straightforward business. If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, the reasonable conclusion would be that it *is* a duck. Well, no, not if the notice states: This is not a duck. Remember, scuba divers also have webbed feet. Parliament has bills, too. Caps of accomplished people also bear feathers. So, to hastily bestow duckhood to birds of a feather can be a cunning ploy. If the competent authority has clarified the matter, to persist in calling it a duck would be mischievous, irresponsible and actionable.

A major combat operation is not necessarily a war. A water-harvesting initiative doesn't have to be a pothole. Entrepreneurial freedom is not automatically being unemployed. Law and order action needn't be a crackdown. A duck, provided the requisite notification has been gazetted, may well be a swan or goose, coming as they all do from the Anatidae family.

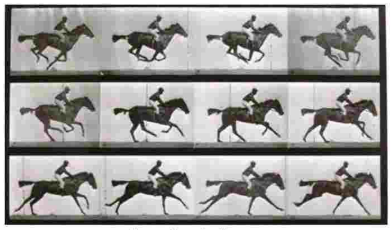
The need to be precise lies in administrative efficiency. George Orwell imagined a state demanding that citizens disbelieve their senses. He was right, and his tip should apply to all forms of hopping, skipping or jumping to conclusions. Unless officially verified, even an entity supposedly sure of its own nature doesn't have the right to call itself so. Meanwhile, the genuine duck is most likely to be a quack.

TESSELLATUM Make capital accessible and affordable to drive investment and job creation

Go Slow on Rate Hikes



Neelkanth Mishra



Slow motion wins the race

We have entered a golden age of Indian entrepreneurship. The number of active companies has risen by more than half a million in 3 years, from 1.6 mn to 2.2 mn.

Many of these are new companies. At the same time, several are likely informal businesses registering formally as companies. For decades, surveys showed that barriers to formalisation were mainly a high regulatory burden (high formalisation costs), particularly for smaller firms, and limited gains from formalisation because cost and access to capital were challenges. This is changing.

Irrespective of whether these are new businesses or existing businesses registering themselves, the underlying drivers are 2: easing regulations and falling cost of capital. We still need to do much more on both, and it would be unwise to assume these changes come without costs.

While meaningful risks from potentially excessive deregulation may be some time away, some side effects of the falling cost of capital are visible and need to be dealt with quickly.

Underlying the reduction in India's cost of capital is GoI's progress in fiscal consolidation. India is among the rare major economies where general government fiscal deficit is near pre-Covid levels. Once adjusted for the off-budget spending in that era, the actual deficit is much lower today.



Government progress in fiscal discipline has reduced India's cost of capital and brought deficits down sharply

This comes at a cost. A shrinking deficit constrains growth. India's output remains a year behind its pre-pandemic path — better than in most economies, but still signalling slack in the job market. The shortfall is equivalent to a year's new workforce going without jobs. While rapid growth creates jobs, the larger pool of under- and unemployed workers keeps real wage growth weak for many, preventing them from feeling the benefits of growth in their standard of living. This has political implications.

The wise, if unstated, policy choice has been to let the private sector fill the economic slack, using cheaper capital to build businesses and create jobs. The surge in company creation and capital formation suggests this is underway. The cost and availability of both debt and equity capital are among the most favourable ever.

Despite global disruptions, and in particular the surge in energy prices, home loan rates are still near 7%. Increasingly sophisticated financial firms, leveraging DPI, are also making credit available to a wider swathe of smaller businesses.

For equity capital, while the high price-to-earnings ratio is and should be a concern for investors, it signals low cost of equity for entrepreneurs. They are acting on this signal: stock sales by companies and promoters could be nearly ₹6 tn this year.

While private equity firms booking gains and repatriating seems to be a loss to the economy, these profitable exits encourage them to raise new funds to invest in new startups and young companies. The proliferation of foreign and increasingly local VC and private equity firms also means that more entrepreneurs have access to equity capital.

Some side effects are emerging. A simple way to understand capital flows is to compare them to water, which flows downhill with the speed determined by the slope. If Indian bond yields are 8% and US yields — a proxy for the global cost of capital — are 2%, capital flows rapidly into India in pursuit of higher returns. But if Indian yields fall to 7.3% while US yields rise to 5.3%, the flow slows and may even reverse in some pockets.

As India needs more capital to accelerate growth, could domestic savings start flowing to firms abroad? The risk is limited because India does not have a fully open capital account: not all pipes allow free two-way flows. Indian financial firms, for instance, cannot lend to foreign borrowers. But investors must be free to repatriate their capital, or they may hesitate to invest in India. This also means some segments permit unchecked capital outflows.

This has meant that India, which at one point sought to maintain CAD between 2-3% of GDP is now struggling to finance a much smaller CAD.

Given entrenched fiscal challenges, global rates are unlikely to fall unless there is a sharp growth slowdown. So, should Indian interest rates be raised further? The lazy narrative in bond and currency markets is that they should mirror global rates. Some investors also question fiscal prudence when there is slack in the economy, in effect asserting that fiscal works better than monetary.

Prudence, instead, would be in acting on two fronts:

1. Open so-far-blocked/impeded channels of capital inflows (like with the recent relaxation for bond investors) and make foreign capital more welcome and prospects more attractive. Simplification of tax laws, a direct approach to global firms that drive value-chains, and a relentless easing of regulations can help. Deregulation would also help domestic firms.
2. Raise demand for capital. The welcome surge in new issuances, including by the government, is important to absorb the massive inflows into public markets without creating valuation distortions. This capital can then be deployed for growth. We may also need to take more policy risks to channel capital from pension and insurance funds to be deployed more actively for growth.



Domestic firms can't lend abroad, yet free capital repatriation remains vital to keep foreign investors coming

The writer is executive director, World Bank. Views are personal

Centre of Forging Partnerships



Michael R Bloomberg

As India and the US work towards a trade agreement, the global economy is undergoing profound changes. Everywhere we look, norms that have long governed commercial operations and expectations — especially in technology, trade and energy — are being disrupted. For India, emerging as one of the world's leading engines of growth, these disruptions present a challenge, but also a great opportunity.

India's economic growth rate over the past decade — averaging more than 6% — has far outpaced the world. It has never been better positioned to exert its growing influence in markets and to help reshape the global economy in ways that spread prosperity, increase stability and promote sustainability. Doing that, however, will require India to develop deeper connections to capital markets in the US and elsewhere. And to persuade the rest of the world that stronger connections with India will increasingly serve their interests, too.

The good news is that India's leaders are working to do both. Over the past year, they have pursued new economic partnerships around the world focused on manufacturing, energy, critical minerals and other industries, including technology. Nearly 1 in 5 iPhones is now made in India. From smartphones to semiconductors, companies are looking to India as a place to manufacture and invest.

The energy industry offers a particularly promising example. As India's economy has grown, so has its demand for electricity, spurring enormous investment in clean power. Solar capacity has grown nearly 20x, making India the world's 3rd largest renewable market. That progress is attracting international capital, creating good paying jobs and strengthening India's energy security.

Finance is another place where even deeper connections can pay dividends. India's growing base of individual investors is putting more domestic savings into its markets, creating more capital to finance growth. At the same time, GIFT City is opening new doors to international investment, with banking assets there already topping $100 bn. Stronger connections between domestic and global capital can help finance India's next phase of growth.



The table is set

India's finance industry is also benefitting from its educated workforce and technological innovation. Its homegrown digital payments system now handles roughly half of the world's real-time transactions, and its AI industry is rapidly growing. Earlier this year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi brought leaders from government, technology and business to New Delhi for the AI Impact Summit. The message was clear: as AI reshapes the global economy, India intends to help lead it.

Thanks to these and other developments, India's exports hit a record high last year while new trade agreements are opening more markets to Indian businesses, including January's landmark agreement with the EU. And all this success is built on a principle that is too often overlooked, especially in government cooperation.

I've always been a big believer in closer collaboration between government and business leaders. Each has resources the other does not, and each can deliver benefits the other cannot. Too often, though, old assumptions get in the way. The private sector views government as an obstacle, rather than a partner. Government views the private sector as a subject, rather than a partner.

The mission of Bloomberg New Economy Forum has always been to break down those barriers and build bridges across them. That is one reason the Forum is being held in New Delhi this week.

The goal is not to have people from different industries and political systems to agree on everything. It is to better understand one another's priorities, build relationships and find areas of common interest where cooperation is possible. At a time when competition is intensifying and sources of economic power are changing, that kind of dialogue is increasingly important.

Countries have every reason to build stronger and more diverse economic relationships. India's next chapter of growth can help the world write a better next chapter, too.

The writer is founder, Bloomberg, and Bloomberg Philanthropies

India-UK Gets Down to Business



Jonathan Reynolds

Britain and India signing the landmark Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) in July went far beyond a signature. It was a chance for opportunities to be brought to life between two thriving economies.

Estimated to boost bilateral trade by £25.5 bn (~ ₹3.26 lakh cr) every year by 2040, it's a deal that's good for British and Indian businesses, for consumers and for growth. Both Britain and India are already starting to feel the benefits, with nearly £12 bn (~₹1.53 lakh cr) worth of trade and investment deals struck since the agreement was signed, supporting thousands of jobs in both countries.

This is just the beginning. India is expected to become the third largest global economy by 2031, and by 2050 is projected to be home to over a quarter of a billion high-income consumers. This means there are huge opportunities for both countries in the years ahead. Consumers in both countries are already enjoying greater access to iconic products, and we've already seen the first shipment of Scottish salmon arrive in India tariff-free via Bakkafrost Scotland.

Bilateral trade is rising. British and Indian innovators are developing new technologies together with Polymateria striking a deal on their biodegradable milk pouches, now on shelves nationwide across India.

Last year, UK-India Vision 2035 was signed to revitalise an already ambitious relationship, making it future-focused and ready to unlock the huge potential on offer. So, it's great to see this in action already. This partnership will deliver growth, security and opportunity for people in all corners of both countries from Merseyside to Mumbai. And our relationship extends far beyond trade.



In a premier league of their own

For instance, the official opening of University of Liverpool's Bengaluru campus this week, giving Indian students greater access to world-class British degrees, with 10,000 students expected to be studying there within 10 years. English Premier League is having a fantastic impact on community and grass-roots football in India, with tens of millions of fans across the country.

But we know there's more to do. Ministries on both sides want work with businesses, both in Britain and India, to understand how we can better support them to take advantage of what's on offer.

This deal was never the ceiling of our ambitions with India. This week sees 7 mayors from the North of England, along with myself and secretaries of state for environment, food and rural affairs (Defra) and Scotland, and a delegation of over 100 businesses here in India. It's time to build new, exciting and future-focused partnerships with our Indian colleagues.

These mayors commit to their communities, and they want to work with India to boost further growth and achieve the full ambition of our shared vision. That's exactly what Prime Minister Andy Burnham wants to do. Because the next chapter of our international trading relationship will not just be written by national government, but by mayors, businesses, universities, investors and innovators at all levels.

We'll also be linking companies together on clean energy with British businesses uniquely placed to support India's transition to net zero thanks to greater access provided by our trade deal. In an uncertain world, nothing is more important than maintaining close ties. Our two nations already share a deep cultural and historical relationship, not least with almost 2 mn people of Indian descent living in Britain.

Our economies are complementary, ambitions aligned, and commitment to taking this partnership further is as strong as ever. This visit will only help us build on this momentum. The opportunity is now.

The writer is secretary of state, Business, Innovation, Science and Trade, UK

THE SPEAKING TREE

The Art of Leading

BRAHMA KUMARI SHIVANI

As we celebrate Navratri, we worship the eight-armed Goddess Shakti. The festival reminds us that we innately carry eight spiritual powers. When we awaken them, we meet every challenge with strength.

Power to withdraw: Facing difficult scenes, we stay untouched by the negative vibrations of situations and people.

From it flows the power to let go: Consciously releasing burdens that weigh us down, we welcome new ways of thinking and living.

Power to tolerate: People carry insecurity, jealousy or hurt that makes them behave wrongly. They are not the cause of our pain; they are themselves in pain. This understanding lets us tolerate and nurture them.

Its partner, power to accept: Accepting people and situations as they are doesn't mean we let them be; it means we don't deplete our energy in judgement.

Power to discern: When we cleanse our energy, we understand people and situations as they really are.

Power to decide: We refrain from seeking approval.

Power to face: It takes courage to stand up for what is right.

Power to cooperate: We need only to be ourselves, peaceful and loving.

When we awaken these eight powers, we overcome the 10 vices — the Ravan within — and that is the true victory that marks the spirit of Dussehra.

MELODY FOR MONDAY

Police on My Back

The Police

Few songs capture the velocity of panic quite like 'Police on My Back'. Released on The Clash's sprawling 1980 album Sandinista!, this 3-min explosion of guitar, drums and desperation transforms the experience of being pursued by the police into something approaching a glorious nervous breakdown.

The opening guitar riff, mimicking the shriek of police sirens, is an inspired piece of musical theatre. Mick Jones' urgent vocals, Topper Headon's relentlessly propulsive drumming and the guitars' jagged assault create a sense of imminent capture. The lyrics are wonderfully economical: running on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, through the entire week, with the police perpetually closing in. The repetition is not lyrical laziness but psychological precision. Persecution has no weekends.



The song was originally written by Eddy Grant and recorded by The Equals in 1967. Their version is a magnificent slice of raw, infectious garage rock, its exuberance concealing a distinctly darker narrative.

The Clash retain that original's irresistible melodic punch while injecting it with punk's political urgency and urban paranoia. What began as a breathless pop-rock chase becomes an anthem of resistance, with the police siren embedded in the music itself.

Chat Room

US Hypocrisy On Russian Fuel

Apropos 'Trump says Putin to Supply US with Diesel ahead of Midterms' (Oct 11). Not long after the US moved to penalise India for buying Russian oil and proposed additional tariffs on Indian goods, it has now turned to Russia for diesel supplies. India should call out this hypocrisy and continue to diversify its energy sources. New Delhi must resist demands to bear a disproportionate economic cost for importing Russian hydrocarbons when Washington itself is willing to do so to shield consumers from high fuel prices. What is sauce for the goose should be sauce for the gander.

Bal Govind, Noida

Business Standard
VOLUME XXXIII NUMBER 152
NEW DELHI | MONDAY, 12 OCTOBER 2026

From enforcement to trust

After process reforms, GST needs road map to shed exclusions

When India rolled out goods and services tax (GST) on July 1, 2017, there was a concern that the bureaucracy grappled with — the uncertainty about the revenue trajectory and the need to compensate the states for any revenue shortfall in the first five years of the new tax. One source of revenue was proceeds of the GST compensation cess levied on items such as automobiles and tobacco. The other way to address the revenue risk was to have enough checks to prevent evasion. The tax system, thus, remained geared to ensure compliance, but at the expense of procedural simplicity. But officials' worry about revenue collection and unmanageable compensation requirement did turn out to be true when the first Covid-19 wave hit India, and GST revenues plummeted in April 2020.

Monthly gross GST receipts of the central and state governments, which averaged ₹95,515 crore in 2018-19 and ₹96,605 crore in 2019-20, fell to ₹32,172 crore in April 2020. Consequently, the central government had to borrow ₹2.69 trillion from the market to compensate the states for their revenue shortfall. The full repayment of that in 2025-26 offered the GST Council an opportunity in September last year to review the tax slabs and rates, phase out the cess, and offer a consumption stimulus by lowering the indirect tax on a range of daily use as well as aspirational items, ranging from toothpaste and shampoo to consumer electronics and cars in the biggest overhaul of the system. Also, the number of slabs was brought down to broadly two, 5 and 18 per cent, from the earlier four—5, 12, 18 and 28 per cent with cess. That helped to boost consumption demand. Private final consumption expenditure expanded 7.1 per cent in the March quarter of 2025-26 as compared to 5.6 per cent at the same time a year earlier.

The next logical step for reform obviously was cutting red tape and making life simpler for businesses. The tech-enabled tax system, which captures a large amount of data from multiple sources, has made it possible for the authorities to spot sources of revenue leakage. The GST Council's decisions last week — to drop the arrest provision, lower the penalty from ₹25,000 to ₹10,000, recall notices issued for amounts below ₹10,000 and not to issue such notices in future, offer credits for taxes paid on input services from November and on capital goods from April next year, and simplify the norms for GST registration and refunds — are a major structural overhaul of the tax system. The prosecution threshold is also being raised from ₹1 crore to ₹5 crore. These measures mark the transformation from a framework designed to deal with tax evasion by a few to one that facilitates honest tax payers based on trust.

However, the task is not over. Two proposals, one meant to offer annual return filing and quarterly tax payments to consumer-facing businesses with sales up to ₹5 crore and a second proposal to further ease input tax credit availability, are sought to be implemented from April next year after another round of deliberation. The broader unfinished agenda for GST's full benefits to accrue to the economy is the inclusion of items such as petrol, diesel, electricity and natural gas that remain outside its ambit. If the tax rates are indeed going to be reviewed only once a year from hereon, that should free up the Council's bandwidth to discuss and lay out a road map for such excluded items so that efficiencies and competitiveness are enhanced across the value chain and GST truly becomes "good and simple".

A democratic debate

Every question being raised about the ECI must be reviewed

What the national capital has witnessed over the past few days raises several questions that the nation must answer to secure a vibrant democratic future for itself. Student groups, civil-society organisations, and the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) wanted to protest on Saturday against the Election Commission of India (ECI) with several demands, including the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar. To be fair, student groups and political parties had been protesting in the national capital for several days. However, things changed late last week. Besides beefing up the presence of security forces — which, according to reports, included about 23,000 paramilitary troopers — the government decided to shut off parts of New Delhi. Along with closing 45 metro stations in Delhi, the government cancelled several trains coming here, including long-distance ones, at their stations of origin. Although normal functioning has been restored, the decision to cancel trains is hard to justify.

Nevertheless, the unprecedented administrative measures did not stop the protests, which erupted in different parts of Delhi. A large number of protesters were detained, and a statement by the United Nations Human Rights spokesperson expressed concern over mass detentions. The protests are likely to continue, and the government needs to deal with them differently. If not Jantar Mantar, some other site can be allocated for peaceful protests, which is a democratic right of citizens. This may help minimise the disruption to normal life. It is worth noting that India has a long tradition of peaceful protests, both before and after Independence, and that tradition must be preserved.

Further, if so many groups and political parties are raising an issue, they need to be heard. In fact, allowing protests at a designated site from the outset could have opened up space for dialogue. The ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) and the exclusion of a large number of voters from the electoral roll have indeed raised questions. Notably, among the exclusion appeals decided by the appellate tribunals in West Bengal thus far, about 93 per cent have been taken back on the roll. This suggests that the process had design issues and perhaps needed more time. No one can argue against the need for a clean electoral roll — the real issue has been the manner in which this cleanup is being implemented. Reports in *The Indian Express* have also shown that there were problems in the decision-making process within the ECI. Aspects of the ECI's functioning are being examined by the Supreme Court (SC), and it would be worth watching how that plays out. The apex court will be expected to hear and decide on ECI-related issues as quickly as possible.

More broadly, the functioning of the ECI must be debated. If large numbers of students, civil-society groups and political parties are taking to the streets in the national capital and elsewhere in the country, something is amiss. If there are questions among the electorate about the ECI's functioning, they cannot be allowed to fester for too long. The functioning of the ECI and its ability to conduct free and fair elections are essential requirements for India's democratic system. Too many questions about its functioning can lead to systemic risks with longer-term consequences. The real strength of the democratic process is that it provides space to make course corrections and strengthen the system. The government and the ECI must engage with all stakeholders and address every question being raised.

Consequences of cheap electricity

Opportunities are opening up in energy-intensive sectors

ILLUSTRATION: AJAYA MOHANTY





SNAKES & LADDERS

AJAY SHAH

In India, we have a gloomy view of energy costs. Indian coal is of poor quality. Moving it across the country is expensive. For petroleum and gas, domestic prices largely track world prices. The electricity system often socks commercial buyers. The net result is a high-cost energy landscape. Indian firms navigate arbitrary state power, fragile infrastructure, and expensive inputs, including energy. The dominant strategy for successful Indian enterprises was to harness top-decile intellectual capital, to compensate for the three handicaps. This allowed Indian firms to compete in the global economy, primarily in services and asset-light models, to great effect.

A sea change in energy prices is dismantling this old worldview. For the first time, India is emerging as a favourable location for energy costs. Recent research by Nikit Abhyankar and Amol Phadke at the University of California Berkeley (https://bit.ly/ieccucb) brings remarkable facts to light. The capital expenditure required for a solar plant in India is now approximately one-third that in the United States (US). This difference stems from three factors: Interconnection delays, labour costs, and land acquisition. India suffers a penalty on the cost of capital, reflecting the failures of financial economic policy, including capital controls. Overall, the advantages in physical execution outweigh the financial penalty.

Consider solar electricity delivered during daylight hours. In India, this stands at $30 per megawatt-hour (Mwh) whereas the US price is closer to $50 per Mwh. For firm power, where solar is bundled with battery storage to provide round-the-clock energy, this is $70 per Mwh in India compared to $100 per Mwh in the US.

The US was the original fossil-fuel hegemon. It built its economic supremacy upon the combustion of wood, coal, oil, and gas. Research funding by the US government made the renewables revolution. The traditional view held that competing with the US on energy costs was impossible. But the emerging Indian electrostate is now delivering a powerful new Indian macro-fundamental. There are, of course, countries that beat India on energy costs. But surpassing the US is a big thing. Now, producing in India has two distinct advantages over the US: Cheap labour and cheap energy.

The emerging Indian electrostate calls for a rethink of strategy in private firms. The current structure of Indian industry is based on compensating for expensive energy. The trade liberalisation of 1991-2007 forced firms to find competitive niches. Because energy was expensive, Indian firms favoured business areas that had low energy-intensity. We see this in the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) database (https://bit.ly/3WieMrA). In 1992-93, power-fuel-water for non-financial firms was 5.73 per cent of expenses. In 2024-25, this had dropped to just 2.87 per cent. But green power now reshapes the frontier of what can be profitably done in India.

Consider the steel industry. Almost all existing steel capacity relies on coal as the primary raw material and energy source. The technological alternative is the production of green steel. This involves using electricity to produce hydrogen, running a direct reduced iron (DRI) shaft furnace to create sponge iron, and melting this iron into steel using an electric arc furnace (EAF).

These calculations look good with green hydrogen today in a way that was not the case just a few years ago. Solar and battery electricity is a locked-in nominal rupee price for 25 years while coal prices will rise in the future. As a consequence, green steel is now at rough parity with coal-based steel in India (https://bit.ly/4yOqIQA). When exporting to the European Union and the United Kingdom, green steel is superior owing to their Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM).

This technological dislocation presents a unique opportunity for the Indian steel industry. In China, the industrial base is dominated by a billion tonnes/annum fossil-fuel steel capacity. India has the opportunity to build green-steel capacity that can beat this industry. There is a scenario where the billion tonnes/annum Chinese industry becomes a stranded legacy asset, and the Chinese non-market economy will struggle with its bankruptcy.

Making aluminium requires electricity and not coal as raw material. As with steel, we get to estimates for green aluminium that are competitive against coal-based production, with an edge when exporting into CBAM countries, once we take into account contemporary prices for green power in India and the locked-in nominal prices for 25 years.

We are at a tipping point in 2026, when these calculations have reached rough parity. From here, the dominance of green technologies will go up through three certainties and two pieces of optimism about India: (a) More countries will adopt the CBAM; (b) progress on solar energy and batteries will continue, and the cost of green power will keep dropping; (c) coal prices will go up with inflation; (d) if Indian macro/finance policy reforms make progress, capital controls will be removed, which will reduce the cost of capital, and then the cost of green power will go down; (e) if the Indian state takes global warming and air quality more seriously, taxes and other restrictions on coal will come.

Boardrooms and investment committees must now rethink strategy in many respects. There are novel investment opportunities in energy-intensive industries in the Indian electrostate. The tail risk of stranded fossil-fuel assets in areas such as electricity, steel and aluminium has gone up. There is a lot at stake. According to the CMIE CapEx database, projects under implementation for primary steel total ₹6.4 trillion, representing roughly 149 million tonnes per annum of capacity. For primary aluminium, projects under implementation total ₹2.6 trillion, representing about 5.8 million tonnes per annum. A good chunk of the aluminium projects is a ₹0.8 trillion bet on new coal-power plants, which is odd by global standards. What is needed in this field is not practitioner knowledge about how the business worked in the last decade but a strategic sense about how the world will change in the next decade.

The writer is a researcher at XKDR Forum

Himalayan blunders and beyond

As I write this, over 1,410 lives have been confirmed lost and many thousands are still missing in the floods in Nepal, as the mighty Himalayas came down as rubble. This is an enormous and painful human tragedy, but it is also about wilful actions and inactions of humans. This tragedy is really about our mindset, the belief that we, as humans, can re-engineer everything; that we are in control of the universe and all things in it. We are the supreme beings who can weather climate change, because, after all, it is only about a small and insignificant matter of weather. This is on us.

Let me break this down. First comes the question of what happened in Nepal on August 26. The images that all of us would have seen are of the mountain coming down — just collapsing — as the flash flood and massive quantity of debris buried everything in its path, taking with it the huge building of the Chinese immigration office. It is a frightening visual, straight out of a science-fiction movie. We know now that this flash flood was not caused by an extreme cloudburst. It was triggered by the collapse of a high-altitude glacier near the Langtang Lirung peak. An estimated 142 million cubic metres of ice and rocks were dislodged, creating a 5.2 magnitude seismic event. This then led to the formation of natural dams, behind which water and moraine accumulated, and when the dams broke, they unleashed even more devastating floods downstream.

The second question is: Why? There is no single headline reason, but two events have greatly contributed to this and other such tragedies in this region. One is the well-documented warming caused by climate change. It is literally weakening the Himalayas — the temperature rise melts glaciers; this, in turn, corrodes the moraine slopes. It is a ticking bomb, which implodes as it did in Nepal. In addition, climate change is leading to an increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, which, in turn, bring flood and landslide catastrophes, like those seen in Himachal Pradesh in 2025, in Sikkim in 2024, and in Chamoli in 2021.



DOWN TO EARTH

SUNITA NARAIN

We are complicit in this; all of us, but particularly the countries that have contributed the most to the stock of greenhouse emission in the atmosphere, which, in turn, is driving up temperatures and causing runaway devastations. This is about the past, the present and the future. There is no getting away from the historical responsibility of the richest and most developed countries for this loss of lives. And even as the death toll was rising in Nepal, we got the news that the world was no longer even on an illusionary track to stay below the guardrail of 1.5° Celsius temperature rise since the industrial period of 1870. The United Nations Environment Programme estimates that the world will overshoot this threshold within a few years. Scientists know that beyond 1.5° Celsius, the impacts would be cascading and even more devastating — from the collapse of ice sheets to disruption in ocean currents like the Atlantic Meridional Overtaking Circulation (AMOC), and much more. The intense heat, fires and other weather abnormalities we saw this summer were only a preview of what awaits us. Yet, we seem to be sanguine about this breakdown in our Earth's system.

Today, we are so distracted by economic and livelihood concerns brought on by deliberate human misdeeds like senseless wars that this enormous and existential crisis seems distant and insignificant. We are merely tinkering with emission, not transforming it to live within nature's bounds.

Let's get back to the Himalayas. We know that the climate-change ticking bomb has been exacerbated by the "nature" of development in these ecological hotspots. We talk ad nauseam about adaptation and about how we must take the changing climate into account, but we never do. We really believe that we can continue to do what we do, without consequences. Take, for example, the hydroelectric projects being constructed by damming narrow rivers. As I have said in the past, and will repeat it, this is not about dam development but about the recklessness with which they are being developed. In the Indian Himalayas, project after project is coming up — literally back-to-back — so that the Ganga is re-engineered. It will cease to flow naturally because these projects will regulate its water, taking it to generate electricity and then releasing it back. Then we are tunnelling into the mountains and building roads, often without provision for slope management. I can go on.

But the fact is we are not hearing the message that nature is giving us, loud and clear: Change your mindset; your thinking that you can dominate me and bring me to my knees will not work. "Change or perish" is the message. The question is if we can hear it amid the cacophony of our distractions.

The writer is at the Centre for Science and Environment. sunita@cseindia.org. X: @sunitanar

When culture wars killed democracy

BOOK REVIEW

HUGH EAKIN

Imagine a vibrant Western democracy with a deeply polarised electorate. This country is known across the globe for its film industry, its brash style and its tech innovation, yet is mired in culture wars and conspiracy theories. In this same place, the plotters of a failed coup are overwhelmingly let off the hook, while influencers make the intellectual case for dictatorship. And then there is the country's aged leader — recently elected with less than 50 per cent of the vote — who prefers to rule by executive decree.

All this describes the world that appears in the journalist Victor Sebestyen's perceptive *Weimar Germany: Death of a Democracy*, about the autocratic turn in German society in the first half of the 20th century.

Mr Sebestyen is hardly the first to see parallels between the short-lived German experiment with a representative government after World War I and what he calls the "wave of nationalist populism" afflicting the United States and other countries today. Usually, as in Volker Ullrich's political history, Fateful Hours, the analogy centres on Weimar's disastrous end: The collapse of multi-party rule and the handing over of power to Adolf Hitler in early 1933. Mr Sebestyen, by contrast, shapes his account around the early years, when the state's flawed foundations were laid. In this telling, art is as important as politics: Cultural conflict, he argues, was "one of the significant reasons for the fall of the republic".

Weimar's radical chic was more than Broadway legend. With the lifting of censorship laws just after the war, publishers and performers were given extraordinary licence. Horror films pushed the boundaries of cinema; convention-busting art movements erupted in quick succession. Decades before Robert Rauschenberg began using found objects in his famous combines, the German collagist Kurt Schwitters was doing much the same thing with Berlin's trash.

Social mores were similarly jolted. Women and workers suddenly enjoyed expansive rights, while a surge of nightclubs, magazines, and books openly catered to a burgeoning gay and cross-dressing community. In a well-to-do Berlin neighbourhood, the doctor Magnus Hirschfeld opened the world's first sex institute. Dancing and drugs were everywhere. "In some cafes", Ernest Hemingway observed during a 1923 visit, "cocaine is served at the tables by the waiters".

Yet from the outset, Mr Sebestyen writes, social ferment provoked nationalist outrage. As early as the spring of 1919, city officials in Weimar were calling Walter Gropius's visionary new art and design school, the Bauhaus, "a hotbed of Spartacus agitation and Jewry". While church leaders and conservatives railed against state-fuelled "smut and rubbish", right-wing paramilitary groups warned of the "danger" posed by liberated women. Posters kept appearing in Berlin demanding "a Germany for Germans".

Much of the middle class was far less concerned about rights than about the collapse of the old order. Ernst Jünger's Storm of Steel, a literary glorification of combat first published in 1920, became a best seller, and some of the most popular movies were costume dramas about German history. Around the country, Mr Sebestyen notes, a new generation of youth — far more than the embittered war veterans of conventional Weimar historiography — flocked to fringe militias.

Even the liberal intelligentsia fretted about too much freedom. Before he became an anti-Nazi, the novelist Thomas Mann published a 500-page book defending authoritarian rule and high German kultur. The sociologist Max Weber, wary of political fragmentation, urged that the Weimar Constitution give the president sweeping emergency powers — a provision fatally abused by Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg after he became president in 1925.

Then there was the judiciary. Regardless of the law, the country's conservative judges dealt harshly with leftist agitation, or even, as the artist Georg Grosz discovered, mere satire of the military. Yet they continually made excuses for the insurrectionists — including a young Hitler — who tried to overthrow the democratic order. As Mr Sebestyen makes clear, the Weimar Republic did not collapse because of a broken political system; it was deliberately killed by politicians, generals, and judges who wanted it gone.

To its credit, *Weimar Germany* does not over-determine a story of doom. The republic endured economic chaos and even a French invasion. On occasion, opposing factions came together, as when Alfred Hugenberg, a Rupert Murdoch-like newspaper magnate, agreed to bankroll Fritz Lang's anticapitalist masterpiece, Metropolis.

Nonetheless, Mr Sebestyen leaves surprisingly underexplored the nationalist right's own obsession with cultural renewal, including the attraction of some leading Nazis to "Germanic" modernists, such as the painter Emil Nolde and the architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. If the arts were, as he maintains, "connected, in a direct way, to what happened politically", it was significant that avant-garde ideas had supporters in both camps.



Weimar Germany: Death of a Democracy
by Victor Sebestyen
Published by Pantheon
469 pages $38

Weimar Germany makes a provocative case for culture as an accelerant in the rise and fall of the republic. But its greater insight may be that democracy failed not because of cultural warfare but because too few Germans — regardless of whose side they were on — really believed in it.

The reviewer is the author of *Picasso's War: How Modern Art Came to America*

©2026 The New York Times News Service

Editor's TAKE

The Nobel goes to the law, not the loudest

By honouring Navi Pillay for her defence of human rights and international law, the Nobel Committee has made a pointed statement in an era of eroding global institutions

The Norwegian Nobel Committee has chosen a jurist over a campaigner. On Friday, Oslo honoured Navi Pillay, 85, "for her efforts to promote peace and international law." Within hours, Donald Trump reshared a Truth Social post accusing the committee of demeaning the prize and branding Pillay a hater of America and Israel. The White House announced fresh sanctions on the International Criminal Court the same day.Pillay's record answers her critics. Born to an Indian Tamil family in apartheid Durban, she became a lawyer in a system built to exclude people like her. She later presided over the Rwanda tribunal's Akayesu trial, the first genocide conviction by an international court, which established that rape can constitute genocide.

She served as a judge at the ICC and as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights from 2008 to 2014, the first woman of colour to hold that post. Her work has been the slow, unglamorous kind: building courts, writing judgments, insisting that the powerful answer to the same rules as everyone else.That is precisely what Alfred Nobel's will asked for: fraternity between nations and the advancement of peace conferences in their modern form. The committee's logic is that peace without law is only a pause between wars. In a year when the rules-based order is being dismantled by its own architects, the choice reads less like provocation than reminder.Israel will say Pillay's chairing of the UN inquiry that concluded Israel committed genocide in Gaza disqualifies her. Israel rejects that finding, and Benjamin Netanyahu has accused the committee of losing its moral compass.

They may dispute her conclusions, but a jurist is honoured for four decades of record, not for pleasing any single government.Now Trump. His case is that he ended eight wars, and his defenders point to ceasefires and the Abraham Accords. Yet the Ukraine war he promised to end on day one grinds on, his designs on Greenland have rattled allies, and he has spent the year undermining international institutions, the ICC among them. Pillay spent her life building those institutions.This is also the year he launched the war on Iran. US-Israeli strikes have produced a conflict now seven months old that has upended global energy supplies. India, which imports most of its crude, pays for it at the pump. In March, Trump told the Washington Examiner he was "not interested" in the prize.

Seven months on, he says he deserves it.Awarding the Peace Prize to a leader in the middle of a war he began would invert its purpose. The Nobel exists to restrain war-making, not decorate it. A medal now would read as a certificate of approval for an unfinished war, and for the idea that might comes before law. Maria Corina Machado's gift of her medal changes nothing; a Nobel cannot be transferred.Pillay joked, on hearing the news, that she might share the prize with Trump if the applause continued. It was a good line. The committee's decision was a better answer.

Navi Pillay: A voice for justice in a world at war

From apartheid-era South Africa to the highest institutions of international justice, Navi Pillay has spent her life defending th vulnerable and challenging impunity. The 2026 Nobel Peace Prize recognises her contribution to human rights and international law, and her enduring belief that peace is impossible without dignity, equality and justice for all.



SANTHOSH MATHEW



"Civilians in Israel, civilians in Gaza, children on both sides have a right to live." These words from Navi Pillay, former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, capture the spirit of her lifelong struggle for human dignity.

In a world torn apart by wars and violence, her message is simple: every human life matters, and no one should be denied justice because of their identity or nationality.

Navanethem "Navi" Pillay, a South African jurist of Indian origin, has won the 2026 Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts to promote peace and international law.

Her recognition brings global attention to a woman who has spent decades fighting racial discrimination, defending political prisoners and helping strengthen international justice.

Her life shows that the fight for peace begins with the protection of human rights.

Born in Durban, South Africa, on September 23, 1941, Pillay grew up in a modest family. Her father was a bus driver, while her mother looked after their eight children. Her grandfather had migrated from Tamil Nadu to South Africa as an indentured labourer. The family faced financial difficulties, and the racial discrimination of the apartheid era made life harder for people of Indian origin and Black South Africans.

Pillay refused to let these barriers determine her future. She studied law at the University of Natal and, in 1967, opened her own legal practice. At a time when racial discrimination shaped almost every aspect of life in South Africa, she stood beside those who challenged the system.

She defended anti-apartheid activists and political prisoners and spoke out against the ill-treatment of people in custody.

For Pillay, the law was not simply a profession. It was a way to protect people who had little power to defend themselves. Her work taught her an important lesson: justice must be available to everyone, not just the rich and powerful.

She later pursued higher studies at Harvard Law School, earning a master's degree in law and a doctorate in 1988. In 1995, she became a judge of the South African High Court, marking another milestone in her remarkable career.Her contribution to international justice became especially important during her service at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

HER LIFE SHOWS THAT THE FIGHT FOR PEACE BEGINS WITH THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS. BORN IN DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA, ON SEPTEMBER 23, 1941, PILLAY GREW UP IN A MODEST FAMILY. HER FATHER WAS A BUS DRIVER, WHILE HER MOTHER LOOKED AFTER THEIR EIGHT CHILDREN. HER GRANDFATHER HAD MIGRATED FROM TAMIL NADU TO SOUTH AFRICA AS AN INDENTURED LABOURE

The writer is Professor at Centre for South Asian Studies, School of International Studies & Social Sciences Pondicherry Central University

She served as its president from 1999 to 2003. The tribunal was established to prosecute those responsible for the 1994 Rwandan genocide, in which hundreds of thousands of people were killed.

One of the most important legal developments associated with the tribunal was the recognition that rape and sexual violence could form part of genocide.

The landmark Akayesu judgment helped establish this principle. It was a major step towards recognising the suffering of women during wars and ensuring that sexual violence could not be ignored in the pursuit of justice.Pillay went on to serve as a judge at the International Criminal Court from 2003 to 2008.

She then became the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, holding the position from 2008 to 2014. In this role, she raised concerns about human rights violations in conflict zones and called for greater protection for vulnerable communities.

Her message was clear: governments must respect human rights, and those responsible for serious crimes must be held accountable. Peace cannot last when victims are forgotten and perpetrators escape justice.Pillay also supported women's rights through her association with Equality Now, an international organisation working to end discrimination against women and girls.

She contributed to efforts against the death penalty and took part in international initiatives promoting freedom of information and democracy.

Her career reminds us that peace is muc more than the absence of war. A ceasefir may stop the guns for a while, but lastin peace requires justice, dignity and trus When innocent people suffer and seriou crimes go unpunished, the wounds of cor flict remain open. Independent courts an international institutions can help victim seek justice and make it harder for powe ful individuals to act without fear c accountability.

Pillay's Indian roots make her story parti ularly meaningful to readers in India. Fror a family whose history began in Tamil Nad to the highest levels of international justic her journey reflects the power of educatio determination and public service. She ha shown that a person from a modest bacl ground can make a difference far beyon national borders.

The 2026 Nobel Peace Prize recognises nc only Pillay's achievements but also th importance of defending human rights i an increasingly troubled world. Her lif carries a message that is relevant to ever nation: peace cannot be built on fear, dis crimination or silence.

As wars continue to displace families an claim innocent lives, the world need voices that remind leaders of their respor sibilities.

Navi Pillay has spent much of her life bein such a voice. Her journey offers a simple bu powerful lesson:lasting peace begins whe every human being is treated with dignit and justice is denied to no one.

Daiv Vani

WISDOM FOR A MEANINGFUL LIFE

The Best Offering Is the Dearest One

Worship is tested not by what we offer when it is easy, but by what we are willing to offer when it is not.

According to a tradition retold in the Bengali Krittivasi Ramayana, Rama, preparing for the final battle with Ravana, worshipped the Goddess Durga out of season, in autumn, seeking her blessing before he faced a mighty enemy. He resolved to offer one hundred and eight blue lotuses and gathered them with great effort. As the worship neared its end, he found that one lotus was missing. The Goddess, it is said, had hidden it to test him.

Rama did not look for a convenient substitute or quietly shorten his vow. Remembering that his eyes were compared to lotuses, and that he was called Rajivalochana, the lotus-eyed one, he took an arrow and prepared to offer one of his own eyes to complete the number. At that very moment the Goddess appeared, held his hand, and blessed him with victory.

The story does not ask us to harm ourselves. It asks us to look honestly at what we call an offering. Often we give from our surplus, a little leftover time, a little money we will not miss, and then expect full results from half-hearted effort, in prayer, in study, in relationships and in work.

This Navaratri, choose one commitment you have been keeping only halfway, and offer it your best, not your leftover.

–DAIV

PIC TALK



People perform 'Tarpan' and 'Pind Daan' rituals on the banks of Hooghly river near Howrah Bridge, in Kolkata, West Bengal PHOTO: PTI

The gift that goes beyond giving



NAMRATA KOHLI

2ND OPINION



What if a gift could keep giving? Could it have a second life, an afterlife, long after the wrapping paper has been discarded?

I found an interesting answer at the PM Mementos E-Auction exhibition at the National Gallery of Modern Art recently. The gifts and mementos received by Prime Minister Narendra Modi include paintings, sculptures, handicrafts, religious objects and memorabilia from across India. But what interested me was not simply what they were, but what happens to them next.

They are documented, displayed and auctioned. The proceeds go towards Namami Gange. This year, 1,498 mementos have been put up for auction. Previous editions have raised more than ₹50 crore. "Apne uphaaron ka bhi upyog," Culture Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat told me. Even our gifts can be put to use. "The idea is to create value for a very special cause," he said, describing the Ganga as not merely a river but "jeevan ka aadhar", the basis of life for millions.

There is something powerful in that journey. An object begins as a gift, acquires another layer of meaning through its recipient, finds another owner and ultimately creates value for an entirely unrelated cause.

Standing there at the beginning of the festive season, I wondered whether there was a larger lesson here. Diwali gifting has increasingly become an industry of excess. Bigger hampers, elaborate packaging, imported chocolates, candles, crockery and dry fruits move from office to home and often from one home to another.

We spend enormous energy deciding what to give and remarkably little wondering what happens to it afterwards.

Why should the life of a gift end with its first recipient Pass it on. Auction it. Donate it. Repurpose it. If some thing sitting unopened in my cupboard can bring plea sure or value to somebody else, why should we fe embarrassed about giving it another life?

Better still, think about its consequence before buyin it. Buy a handwoven textile and your gift supports weaving tradition. Choose something made by a artisan and your festive budget becomes somebody livelihood. Gift a book and it may begin a conversatio Give an experience and there may be no packaging t discard. Donate in someone's name and a person wh already has everything doesn't receive yet another thin A good gift need not be expensive. It should hav meaning, utility or consequence.

We talk a great deal about the circular economy in th context of industry. Perhaps we need a circular econom of generosity too.

This Diwali, instead of only asking, "What should I give? ask another question: "What good can my gift do afte I have given it?" Because sometimes the most valuabl gift is the one whose value doesn't end when it change hands.

The writer is an author, podcaster and a Senior Fellow at the Ministry of Culture, Government of India

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

UN warns its employees of unrest in Delhi

The United Nations Mission in India has issued a confidential advisory to its employees warning of a possible civil unrest situation in the country due to protest called by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) and various student organisations in Delhi.The advisory outlines precautionary measures to be taken during and after a potential civil unrest situation, warning employees of possible rioting, looting and arson.

The advisory comes as the Modi government steps up security arrangements to contain the planned protest, which began as a movement against examination paper leaks and has since broadened to include allegations of electoral malpractice, with protesters raising the issue of 'vote chori (theft)' and demanding the resignation of chief election commissioner Gyanesh Kumar. The CJP and student organisations have appealed to students, young people and members of the public to gather at Jantar Mantar in Delhi for prepare for a prolonged protest.

The Congress-led Opposition has also intensified its campaign against Gyanesh Kumar, staging protests in Delhi for three consecutive days and demanding his resignation over alleged irregularities in the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

CM Vijay's election case

Every election candidate must truthfully and unambiguously declare his assets and liabilities. It is therefore surprising that, during the hearing of an election petition challenging Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay's victory in Perambur, Justice V. Lakshminarayanan questioned whether alleged discrepancies involving assets exceeding ₹600 crore could constitute a corrupt practice.

The judge wondered whether differences of a few crore rupees could influence voters, given Mr. Vijay's superstar status and voluntary disclosure of his wealth. He also questioned whether an election could be invalidated for errors by a Chartered Accountant assisting the candidate.

However, can a candidate escape responsibility for discrepancies in an election affidavit merely because a professional helped prepare it? Should not the ultimate responsibility for truthful disclosure rest with the candidate, particularly if the discrepancies are deliberate rather than clerical? Reportedly, the petitioner's counsel cited a Madras High Court judgment subsequently affirmed by the Supreme Court, prompting the judge to observe that the "texture of the case" had changed considerably.

Ultimately, electoral integrity demands accountability. Voters deserve truthful disclosures, and the law must uphold this democratic right without fear or favour.

THARCHUS S. FERNANDO | CHENNAI

Metro closure should not disrupt public life

The Chief Justice's observations on the complet closure of metro station entrances highlight the need t balance security requirements with public convenienc Addressing the Solicitor General, the Chief Justice pointe out that the restrictions affected millions of commute travelling from Gurugram, Greater Noida, East Delhi an South Delhi to different parts of the capital for their livel hoods.The bench acknowledged the administration authority to impose security measures but questioned th rationale behind shutting down transport facilities alto gether. While authorities are entitled to regulate move ment and prevent uncontrolled gatherings, such measure should not leave ordinary citizens without accessible tran port.Preventive restrictions may be necessary in sensitiv situations, but their implementation must remain propo tionate to the threat. Judicial oversight assumes impo tance when administrative decisions have consequence for fundamental freedoms and everyday life. Courts nee not direct operational policing, but they must ensure tha executive actions remain subject to meaningful scrutin Authorities must explain the necessity and duration restrictions and explore less disruptive alternative Security and public convenience are not mutually excl sive; responsible administration must safeguard both.

YASH PAL PALHAN | JALANDH

Tourism beyond destinations: Why India's next leap must be built on partnership

India's tourism future depends not merely on showcasing its rich heritage but on building partnerships among government, industry, technology and local communities to create memorable experiences, generate livelihoods and ensure that tourism-led prosperity reaches the people who keep its civilisation alive



GAJENDRA SINGH SHEKHAWAT

India has never suffered from a shortage of destinations. What it has occasionally lacked is the institutional imagination to make the world discover them, reach them, experience them and, most importantly, return to them.

Our civilisational inheritance is almost without parallel: ancient cities and living traditions, sacred landscapes and wildlife, architecture and crafts, cuisine and festivals, mountains and coastlines. Yet tourism is not created by heritage alone. A monument does not constitute a destination; a destination is an ecosystem. It is the road that leads to it, the story that precedes the journey, the hospitality that receives the traveller, the artisan who gives it authenticity, the technology that makes it discoverable, and the community whose participation determines whether tourism becomes an economic opportunity or merely an intrusion.

This is why the next chapter of Indian tourism must be written not in terms of destinations alone, but in terms of partnerships. The old architecture of tourism was largely hierarchical. Governments built infrastructure, destinations were promoted, industry transported and accommodated visitors, and communities remained largely at the periphery. The new architecture must be horizontal. Government, industry, technology companies, creators, investors, States, local bodies and communities must become co-creators of the tourism experience.

The distinction is more than semantic. It represents a fundamental change in how we understand development.

Tourism today is no longer simply the movement of people from one place to another. It is the movement of ideas, stories, aspirations, capital and cultural influence. The traveller increasingly seeks not merely to see India but to encounter it - to taste its food, understand its traditions, enter its homes, meet its artisans and participate, however briefly, in its living culture. That transformation presents India with an extraordinary opportunity. But opportunity without coordination rarely becomes outcome.

The State therefore has a vital, though changing, role. Its responsibility is not to do everything; it is to make more things possible. Public investment in roads, airports, railways, sanitation, digital infrastructure, heritage conservation and civic amenities provides the foundation upon which private enterprise can innovate and invest. Political will provides continuity and direction. Industry contributes capital, managerial expertise, technology and access to markets. Communities contribute what no government or corporation can manufacture: authenticity.

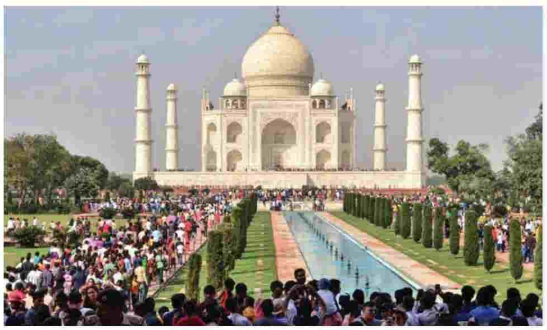
The real challenge is to bring these capacities together.

The Ministry of Tourism's expanding engagement with industry is an attempt in this direction. Eleven strategic MoUs have been entered into, including five exchanged on World Tourism Day 2026. Their importance lies not in the documents themselves but in the capabilities they seek to connect - technology, mobility, hospitality, content, digital outreach and local enterprise.

Consider the changing economics of destination discovery. A generation ago, a traveller might have encountered India through a travel guide or an advertisement. Today, a destination can enter the global imagination through a film, a streaming platform, a creator's narrative or an image encountered on a mobile phone. The collaboration with Netflix demonstrates this new grammar of destination promotion, bringing India's culture, wildlife and mountain landscapes to international audiences. Flavours of India, showcased at ITB Berlin 2026, and promotional campaigns in London and New York illustrate how the geography of tourism is increasingly preceded by the geography of storytelling.

But storytelling must eventually lead to a reason to travel.

This is where the next generation of partnerships becomes significant. Project Varanasi Priceless, developed with Mastercard, moves beyond advertising towards an experience that can actually be discovered



and booked: the Ganga at sunrise, classical music, conversations around literature, Banarasi weaving communities and heritage stays. The significance of such an initiative is that Varanasi is presented not as a monument to be photographed but as a civilisation to be experienced.

This distinction should inform our entire tourism strategy. India must move from selling attractions to curating experiences.

Air connectivity is an equally important part of this architecture. Partnerships with Alliance Air, Air India and IndiGo extend Incredible India into the passenger ecosystem itself, bringing destination promotion into flights, digital platforms and international markets.

Technology adds another dimension: intelligence.

The future tourism system must increasingly understand who is travelling, what travellers seek, where demand is emerging and how preferences are changing. The collaboration with Google India, including capacity-building and work towards understanding global travel demand and traveller behaviour, points towards a tourism policy that can become progressively more evidence-led.

Yet the most consequential transformation may occur far away from the traditional tourism centres. If tourism is to become genuinely inclusive, the village must become as important to tourism policy as the metropolitan gateway. The homestay can become as important as the hotel. The artisan can become as important as the attraction. The local entrepreneur can become as important as the large operator.

Partnerships involving Airbnb, Soul of India and MakeMyTrip are attempting precisely this democratisation of opportunity - equipping homestay hosts with digital capabilities, giving lesser-known destinations greater visibility and connecting unexplored villages with creators and bookable accommodation. The underlying proposition is profound: when a destination enters the traveller's imagination, the economic opportunity it creates must enter the lives of the people who give that destination its identity.

This is the true test of tourism-led development. Visitor numbers alone cannot be the measure of success. We must ask a more searching question: Who benefits when a destination succeeds?

Does the artisan earn more? Does the young person find an opportunity locally? Does the woman entrepreneur gain a market? Does the community acquire an incentive to preserve its cultural and natural inheritance? Does the traveller leave with a deeper understanding rather than merely a photograph?

If the answer to these questions is affirmative, tourism becomes more than an industry. It becomes an instrument of cultural confidence and distributed economic development.

India's lesser-known destinations offer an especially significant opportunity in this regard. Technology can bring them to younger audiences; mobility can make them accessible; private investment can create appropriate infrastructure; and community participation can ensure that growth does not come at the cost of identity. Initiatives supporting community-led heritage tourism in the Himalayas, including the documentation of oral traditions, crafts and indigenous knowledge, demonstrate how tourism can become an ally of preservation rather than its adversary.

But partnership must not become another bureaucratic vocabulary for signing agreements. An MoU is only a beginning. The real partnership begins when an agreement produces a product, when a campaign produces a traveller, when a traveller produces local income, and when that income produces greater community ownership of the destination. Industry associations and the travel trade therefore remain indispensable. Their knowledge of markets, travellers, itineraries and distribution can convert aspiration into actual journeys. States and local institutions, meanwhile, determine the quality of the experience on the ground.

The future of Indian tourism will consequently depend upon our ability to dissolve old institutional boundaries - between government and industry, Centre and States, technology and tradition, global platforms and local communities. Varanasi offers a glimpse of this possibility: storytelling, music, heritage, weaving, hospitality and technology converging around a single destination. The larger lesson is unmistakable. India does not need merely more tourists. It needs a stronger tourism society. A society in which the citizen sees tourism not as an industry belonging to someone else, but as an opportunity in which he or she has a stake. A society in which public investment creates the platform, private investment multiplies possibilities and community participation gives development legitimacy.

The tourism destination of the future will therefore not be a place marked on a map. It will be a network of relationships. And India's competitive advantage may ultimately lie not merely in the magnificence of what we possess, but in our capacity to bring together the many people and institutions capable of transforming that inheritance into an experience the world values.

The question before us is no longer whether India has enough to offer the traveller. It plainly does. The question is whether we can build the partnerships necessary to ensure that every journey into India becomes a journey into its civilisation - and that the prosperity generated by that journey reaches the people who keep that civilisation alive.

The writer is Union Minister for Culture & Tourism, Government of India

Building the foundation for a new generation



ARADHITA SINGH

Not so long ago, news of a terror attack in an Indian city barely surprised anyone, because it had happened before and seemed likely to happen again. One year it was Delhi, the next Jaipur, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad or Mumbai. Television showed the same images: twisted vehicles, crowded hospitals, relatives searching for the missing. For Indians who came of age in the 2000s, this was the background noise of growing up. Terrorism was not a distant border problem. It had reached the markets, trains and streets of ordinary life. For millennials, those years are lived memory. For much of Gen Z, they are a documentary or a story told by parents. That gap matters, because every generation judges its country by what it has experienced. What feels routine to one may be the hard-won result of sacrifice and difficult choices for another.

The early 2000s were hopeful and fragile at once. The economy was opening up and the middle class was dreaming bigger. Yet the 2001 attack on Parliament, the 2006 Mumbai train blasts and the November 2008 Mumbai attacks, which claimed 166 lives, exposed deep gaps in the country's security architecture. The 2008 assault put cross-border terrorism on the global radar and raised hard questions about intelligence coordination and coastal defence.

Reform followed. The National Investigation Agency was set up in 2008, and intelligence sharing and coastal security were strengthened. These steps did not end the danger. The Pune German Bakery blast in 2010, the Mumbai serial explosions of 2011 and the twin blasts in Hyderabad in 2013 showed that terror networks could still strike. The lesson was plain: reacting well after an attack was not enough. India needed to detect plots early, dismantle the networks behind them and treat terrorism as an ecosystem of people, money and infrastructure rather than a string of isolated incidents.

After 2014, the Modi government built its security policy around zero tolerance for terror, with closer intelligence coordination, pre-emptive action, tighter investigations and a crackdown on terror financing. The aim was to neutralise threats before they turned into bloodshed.



Its stance on cross-border terrorism also hardened. The 2016 surgical strikes and the 2019 Balakot air strike showed a readiness to respond militarily to major attacks. Counterterrorism became tied more openly to deterrence, and the message was that terror would now carry costs well beyond diplomatic protest.

Set against the 2000s, the change is visible. The serial bombings that repeatedly rocked India's big cities have become far rarer. Terrorism has not vanished, and threats in Jammu and Kashmir and elsewhere demand constant alertness. Still, the distance from that earlier decade is significant.

Gen Z feels this in everyday life. Commuting to college, riding the metro, strolling through a mall, attending a concert or booking a holiday all rest, in part, on a sense that public places are safe. Few people think about the institutions that make this possible. For a generation raised amid widening opportunity, planning a future without bracing for the next big attack can feel normal. But that confidence is neither automatic nor guaranteed.

Security and development are also bound together. Factories need secure supply chains, tourism needs public trust, and digital payments need defences against cyber threats. National security is not separate from development; it is one of the conditions that allows development to continue.

The past decade has brought a major expansion of highways, airports, railways and digital public infrastructure. UPI has transformed everyday payments. Their durability depends on the state's ability to protect critical infrastructure and respond to new threats.

That link grows stronger as India aims to become a developed nation by 2047. Building creates opportunity; protecting what has been built allows it to last. India's success will be judged not only by how much it builds, but by how well it safeguards it.

India's standing in the world tells a similar story. In the 2000s, major attacks repeatedly put its security weaknesses under the global spotlight. Today its international role spans economic partnerships, technology cooperation and diplomacy, and its 2023 G20 presidency offered a prominent stage for that growing role. Influence abroad draws on economic and technological strength, but credibility rests on a country's ability to protect its people and interests.

For young people raised on digital payments, new infrastructure and widening horizons, all of this can look like progress taking its natural course. It is not. The security environment in which a country grows is neither automatic nor permanent. It depends on policy choices, institutional strength and the unrelenting work of those entrusted with protecting the nation. India's counterterrorism journey has been shaped by reforms and security institutions across successive governments. Since 2014, the Modi government's focus on stronger capabilities, preventive action and a more assertive strategic posture has become a defining feature of it. Holding on to these gains demands sustained vigilance, because terrorist networks keep adapting.

As India heads towards 2047, today's young will inherit both the opportunities development has created and the duty to preserve the conditions behind them.

For millennials, the fears of the 2000s are lived experience. For many in Gen Z, they are fast becoming history.

Real progress is not a generation that has forgotten fear, but one with the confidence to dream beyond it. For those spared the anxieties of their elders, understanding the journey from vulnerability to resilience is the surest way to value the peace they have inherited.

Aradhita Singh is a Research Fellow at India Foundation, New Delhi, specialising in internal and national security

From media monopoly to nationalist narrative: India's information revolution



MANOJ RAGHUVANSHI

Nationalist media's evolution, at the speed of revolution, has shaken up the Indian information landscape. A quarter of a century ago, we were subjected to the opinions of "liberal", secular", "progressive" "intellectuals". They rafted interpretation of news. They analysed vents, and they even chose the facts which must e brought upfront. Leftist historians had already educated" the Indian mind to be susceptible to es and distortion of reality. On August 25, 2003, errorist blasts at Gateway of India killed 54 innoent people, and injured 244. The most 'liberal', herefore the most respected, channel gave a urreal colour to the developing news. It eclared that the stock market had bounced ack.

Leftists infested this channel. They were the lite of the media. Naturally, aspiring young jouralists looked up to them, and tried to emulate hem. Success was succeeding like success. Each me, after a fresh extremist incident, the theme f this channel was that the share market has tabilized. In not so supressed tones, the essage was that those who had invested oney in businesses had nothing to worry. They re not the victims.

The victim is the other (man in the street). This nonsense continued until the 26th of November, 2008.

This time, the terrorists crossed the road from Gateway of India, to Hotel Taj. Now it was not possible to convince the investor that he is still safe. The channel's stock market absurdity stopped. The remaining media was not radically different. Newspapers, magazines and television channels were dominated by 'secularists'. Their reportage may have been hurtful to the nationalists. But that lopsided reportage was rewarded by some top guns. Exactly 76 days after the terrorist attack on Indian Parliament, on February 27, 2002, 'kar sevaks' returning from Ayodhya were trapped in Sabarmati Express, which had been halted by chain-pulling just off the Godhra station in Gujarat. Doors were jammed and an extremely violent mob of stone pelters attacked the train from both sides. Inflammable liquid was poured into S-6 coach and the bogey was torched. There was no way to escape.

A total of 58 passengers were burnt alive inside the train, and one died on the way to the hospital. The dead included 27 women and 10 children. The incident happened around eight in the morning. Meaning, there was a full day, until late evening, to write an editorial.

One of the leading newspapers of India, whose name included a synonym of Bharat, wrote its editorial for the next morning. In that editorial, there was not a single word of condem-



nation for the obvious culprits, and not a single word of sympathy for the innocent victims. When the Ayodhya imbroglio was at its peak, the leading news magazine of the country did a cover story which offered a hundred "creative" solutions to the problem.

They ranged from building a hospital, a library, a playground to a toilet. The only option they did not include was building Shri Ram Janmbhoomi Mandir at the spot. This magazine also contained a synonym of Bharat in its title. The same magazine later launched a leading television news channel. This channel invited terrorist Yasin Malik on its stage, and openly conferred upon him an award. Yasin Malik was portrayed as the "Youth Icon" of the country. This was exactly 256 days before the 26/11 attack in Mumbai. All this time, the audience, which is primarily nationalistic in spirit, was compelled to take it because puppets, who ruled the media, were controlled by a power centre which was antithetical to nationalism. The clear divide between the mainstream media of yesterday, and its metamorphosed version of today, is that the earlier version played down the word 'jihad'. In its stead, it always held that a frank discussion on Islamic terrorism was a violation of 'Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb' (which had never existed in reality). Before the onset of nationalist media, the moment you raised the subject of a 'jihadi' attack, the 'progressives' warned you that you were threating the "unity and integrity" of the country. Translated into simple language, the refrain meant that the thought of self-defence was actually against the interest of our own country. Blow by blow, this diseased narrative has now been almost silenced by the nationalists.

The idea of threatening the unity and integrity of India was perverse, but the elite 'secularists' emphasised it with such conviction, and at such high decibels, that the fence sitters among the audience felt scared. Another partition meant another massacre, this time perhaps in crores.

The threat clearly meant that those who had dismembered the country earlier, will dismember it again, if we, even verbally, objected to 'jihad'. The pre-nationalist media propounded yet another specious argument. Every time the vexatious issue of Kashmir cropped up, it was suggested that we should talk to "Kashmiris". It was a clever twist. If talking to "Kashmiris" was ever necessary, it should have included talking to Kashmiri Hindus. But the leftists who dominated the pre-nationalist media, never, for a moment, suggested that we should talk to Kashmiri Hindus. For the 'liberal' media, talking to "Kashmiris" meant talking to Kashmiri Muslims only. The glib argument survived because it was not challenged. The momentum of the leftist-secularist media was so great that objections were suppressed in the noise.

Talking to Kashmiri Muslims alone was neither just, nor politically wise. Kashmiri Hindus were equal stakeholders in Kashmir. And, because they had been victimised, they should have been heard first. But, on the issue of secession, talking to Kashmiri Hindus would have got only one response: that Kashmir was, and is, an integral part of the country. This was not what the 'liberal' media was willing to hear. Hence, the cunning line: Let's talk to Kashmiri (Muslims). The 'progressive' media began to shriek at Vivek Agnihotri for making 'The Kashmir Files'. He was demonized as a propagandist. But that media had lost its relevance. It shut up when asked why it had conspired to remain silent on the genocide and exodus of Kashmiri Pandits.

The writer is a political analyst

Repo rate hike: Raise your EMIs, prepay to curb interest load

Extending the tenure instead of raising EMIs will push up the interest outgo on your home loan.

by **Preeti Kulkarni**

Home loan borrowers in India are set to see their interest rates rise after nearly four years, prompting them to revisit their repayment strategies.

The Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) raised the repo rate by 25 basis points on 7 October, from 5.25% to 5.5% (100 basis points make up one percentage point). The hike aligns with the tightening approach adopted by major global central banks.

As new retail floating-rate loans sanctioned since 1 October 2019 are linked to external benchmarks, mostly the repo rate, borrowers are likely to see higher rates. RBI data shows 68.2% of floating-rate loans are externally benchmarked.

Moreover, with the RBI shifting its stance from 'neutral' to 'calibrated tightening', borrowers may need to brace for further rate hikes of up to 75 basis points in the coming months. "We expect cumulative rate hikes by the central bank to the tune of another 50-75 bps over the next few months. The risk of a more aggressive rate hike cycle hinges on whether the current West Asia conflict and rise in oil prices continue to linger for longer," said Sakshi Gupta, Chief Economist, HDFC Bank.

New borrowers should decide whether to buy a house based on their need to live in it, rather than the prevailing interest-rate cycle. Those closer to finalising a deal should, however, watch for festive offers that may come with lower interest rates.

Existing borrowers will also need to review their home loan interest and repayment plan.

Assuming a 75 bps rate hike by April 2027, their interest payable is set to rise sharply. Now, suppose a borrower is currently servicing a ₹50 lakh home loan with a 20-year tenure at an interest rate of 7.25% per annum. "By April next year, her interest rate will go up to 8%, and interest costs will swell from ₹44.85 lakh to ₹50.37 lakh. It is, therefore, time to rethink and redraw your repayment plan," says Vipul Patel, Founder, MortgageWorld, a loan advisory platform.

Banks must review their interest rates at least once every three months, so your interest rate will be reset in due course. Bank of India has already announced a 25 bps hike in its home loan interest rates. Other banks are bound to follow suit.

At your end, you will have to choose between an extension in loan tenure (typically, the default lender option) or an increase in equated monthly instalment (EMI) to account for the repo rate hike. In August 2023, the banking regulator asked banks to clearly intimate their customers about options available: enhancement in EMI, elongation of the number of EMIs (that is, loan tenure) keeping the EMI unchanged or a combination of both options.

"On a ₹1 crore home loan, your monthly EMI will go up by a little over ₹1,500 due to the 25-bps hike *(see graphic)*. It always makes sense to choose an EMI hike over repayment period extension, your cash flows permitting," says Anuj Kesarwani, Founder, Zenith Finserve, a financial advisory firm. Likewise, on ₹50 lakh and ₹75 lakh loans, EMIs will rise by ₹768 and ₹1,152, respectively, over a 20-year repayment tenure. Instead, if you extend the tenure, you will have to bear a higher interest rate burden. However, if you keep the EMI unchanged on a ₹50 lakh loan, you will pay an additional ₹2.72 lakh over the life of the loan compared to increasing the EMI.

"If you opt to increase the EMI, the loan tenure remains unchanged at 20 years (240 months), but you pay more interest due to the higher rate. If you keep the EMI unchanged, the loan tenure increases by 12 months, resulting in an even higher interest outgo," he adds.

The math of smarter loan repayment

Assumptions: Home loan: ₹50 lakh | Tenure: 20 years

	Original position (pre-repo rate hike)	Post 25 bps repo rate hike	After ₹1 lakh prepayment	After EMI hike of ₹5,000
Interest rate	7.5%	7.75%	7.75%	7.75%
EMI (₹)	40,280	41,047	41,047	46,047
Tenure (months)	240	240	230	188
Total amount payable (₹)	96,67,118	98,51,383	95,00,416	86,42,295
Total interest payable (₹)	46,67,118	48,51,383	45,00,416	36,42,295
Interest saved (₹)			3,50,967	12,09,087

Source: MortgageWorld

Part-prepayments can help

Regular lump-sum prepayments are another way to reduce the principal amount and, thus, the interest outgo over the repayment period. Consider a borrower with a ₹50 lakh loan and a 20-year tenure who decides to make a lump-sum prepayment of ₹1 lakh after her home loan interest rate creeps up to 7.75% from 7.5%, following a repo rate hike. By doing so, she can cut her interest cost over the repayment period by about ₹3.51 lakh. However, if lump-sum prepayments are difficult, then you can consider voluntarily raising the EMIs. "Even a modest EMI hike of ₹2,000-5,000 can drastically bring down your interest burden," says Patel. For example, say, post the RBI repo revision, you decide to increase your EMI voluntarily by ₹5,000 on a ₹50-lakh home loan with a 20-year repayment period.

You will not only slash your interest payable by close to ₹12 lakh, but your loan tenure will also shrink to around 16 years, down from 20 years.

Negotiate with your lender

Another tool to reduce interest costs is to negotiate with your lender. Your home loan rate comprises the repo rate, operating costs and credit risk premium. Operating costs can be reviewed and reset every three years. "There is room for negotiation in the credit risk premium element. Lenders can review it regularly, without any set timeframe. So, if your credit scores are high, you can use that as leverage to get your lender to offer the best possible interest rate to you," says Kunal Shah, Co-founder, SURE Financial, a loan analytics start-up. For instance, if your credit score has improved from 750 to over 800 since taking a home loan in 2025, you can negotiate a 50 bps rate cut if your lender offers lower rates to borrowers with scores above 800 and has not already passed on the benefit. "Even if your lender does not disclose credit score-linked interest rate grid transparently on its website, any significant improvement in your credit score should prompt you to proactively negotiate with your existing lender," he adds.

Consider switching lenders

If your bank does not reconsider, use your improved credit profile to switch to another lender offering a lower rate. Keep an eye out for festive offers, where banks may offer lower rates to new borrowers, including customers who transfer loans. Finally, borrowers servicing older loans linked to the marginal cost of funds-based lending rate (MCLR) should consider switching to an external benchmark-linked lending rate (EBLR) loan, even if it entails a nominal fee. According to RBI, nearly one-third (29.6%) of floating-rate loans remain linked to MCLR, where transmission of repo rate changes to borrowers has been less effective.

Increase EMI or extend tenure: what works best?

	Original EMI before repo hike*		If you increase the EMI...		If EMI remains unchanged...	
Loan amount (₹)	50,00,000	1,00,00,000	50,00,000	1,00,00,000	50,00,000	1,00,00,000
Interest rate	7.50%		7.75%		7.75%	
Loan tenure (months)	240		240		252	
EMI (₹)	40,280	80,559	41,047	82,095	40,280	80,559
Monthly EMI increase	NA	NA	768	1,536	NA	NA
Total interest payable (₹)	46,67,118	93,34,237	48,51,383	97,02,766	51,23,222	1,02,46,445
Extra interest to be paid (₹)	NA	NA	1,84,264	3,68,529	4,56,104	9,12,208

Notes: 1.* Before RBI's repo rate revision of 25 bps on October 7; 2. ^Post repo rate hike; NA: Not Applicable. **Source:** Zenith Finserve

preeti.kulkarni@timesofindia.com

GST reforms

Simpler processes, lower litigation

The latest changes proposed by the GST Council will help cut costs and ease cash flow for companies.

by **Riju Mehta**

The latest reforms by the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council are set to enhance the ease and cost of doing business, but no fresh tax rates mean there will be no immediate price cuts for consumers. At its 57th meeting on 8 October, the Council announced sweeping changes in enforcement, litigation, compliance and registration, alongside wider input tax credit (ITC) and faster refunds. Small businesses and taxpayers stand to gain the most from simpler procedures, lower compliance thresholds and reduced penalties.



Input tax credit (ITC)

To curb cascading tax, ease working capital pressures and reduce disputes, the Council has reduced ITC restrictions on expenses such as health and life insurance and outdoor catering. It has also allowed refunds of accumulated ITC on input services in specified inverted duty cases for eligible credits from 1 November 2026, and refunds on capital goods for zero-rated supplies and inverted duty cases, spread over 60 months for eligible credits from 1 April 2027.

In insurance, the change will ease the cost burden, but will not automatically lower GST on individual premiums. "Allowing ITC in group health and life insurance is a welcome step. It reduces the tax burden on employers and could encourage wider employee coverage, particularly among micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). However, the real success will be when these savings translate into insurance benefits and more comprehensive coverage for employees," says Mayank Gosar, CEO, Softcon Capital.

"The 18% ITC can make group insurance more affordable for smaller businesses, which often rely on such benefits to attract and retain talent," says Sajja Praveen Chowdary, Director & CEO, Policybazaar for Business. "The savings could be channelled towards business growth and expansion or used to enhance employee benefits. Over the medium to long term, wider insurance coverage among the MSME workforce can also reduce the dependence of lower-income households on government-funded healthcare and social security schemes," he adds.

Enforcement & litigation

Among the biggest changes in enforcement burden and litigation are the complete withdrawal of arrest powers under GST through the proposed omission of Section 69, and reduction in the maximum general penalty from ₹25,000 to ₹10,000. The prosecution threshold has also been raised from ₹1 crore to ₹5 crore. Besides, clearer guidelines have been issued for demand notices and adjudication orders.

Faster refunds

The Council has recommended amendments in Section 54 of the CGST Act, 2017 and the relevant CGST Rules, 2017, to enhance the processing of refunds in two phases. In the first phase, automatic sanctioning for full refunds of excess balances in electronic cash ledgers has been allowed. The time limit for issuing an acknowledgement or deficiency memo has also been cut from 15 days to 10 days.

For eligible refund claims relating to zero-rated supplies and inverted duty structures, 90% of the claimed amount will be sanctioned provisionally through an automated, risk-based system. "Faster, system-driven refunds, including the proposed release of 90% of eligible refunds after risk assessment, can unlock working capital and improve liquidity, particularly for exporters and MSMEs," says Gosar.

The second phase will provide automated processing and full refunds for eligible zero-rated supply claims, subject to verification and adjustment of pending dues.

Registration and compliance

To make GST administration simpler, the Council has proposed clearer documentation requirements and a more user-friendly registration portal, automatic acceptance of specified registration amendments, simplified cancellation procedures, and better reconciliation of GST returns and ITC claims to reduce the notices resulting from mismatches. It has also allowed automatic registration for eligible small sellers using e-commerce platforms to supply goods in states where they have no physical presence, subject to conditions.

According to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, the reforms will come into effect from 1 April 2027.

riju.mehta@timesofindia.com

Sebi's colour-coded Credit Risk-o-Meter for bonds

by **Abhinav Kaul**

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has taken a major step to make bond investing more transparent for investors. Through a circular dated 7 October 2026, the capital markets regulator has mandated a colour-coded visual tool that will tell investors, at a glance, how risky a debt instrument is before they put money into it.

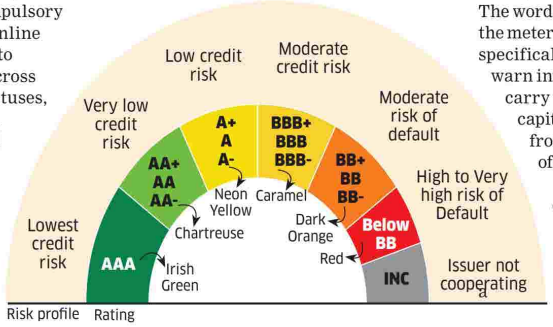
The idea is that credit ratings like AAA, AA or BBB mean little to a first-time bond investor. A colour-coded meter, resembling a speedometer, translates that into something intuitive—green for safe, red for risky. Sebi has now made it compulsory for issuers of debt securities and Online Bond Platform Providers (OBPPs) to display this Credit Risk-o-Meter across offer documents, abridged prospectuses, private placement memoranda, all advertisements, and their web and mobile platforms.

The meter maps six distinct risk levels to specific colours. Instruments rated AAA —the top-level of creditworthiness—will be shown in Irish Green, signalling the lowest credit risk. As ratings slide down, the colours shift: AA-rated instruments get a Chartreuse shade under the Very Low Credit Risk label; A-rated bonds turn Neon Yellow, marking Low Credit Risk.

The middle of the risk spectrum—BBB-rated instruments—shows up in Caramel for Moderate Credit Risk. Credit Risk-o-Meter turns darker as risk rises: BB-rated securities are flagged in Dark Orange as carrying Moderate Risk of Default. At the riskiest end— instruments rated B, C or D —the meter goes Red, warning investors of High to Very High Risk of Default.

Sebi has specified the exact HTML colour codes for each level, leaving no room for issuers or platforms to interpret the colour scheme loosely. The same colour scheme must be used across all digital platforms as well as polychrome printed promotional materials.

Credit risk-o-meter



The regulator has also addressed a scenario when a single bond carries ratings from more than one credit rating agency. In such cases, Sebi says the Credit Risk-o-Meter must reflect the lowest of all assigned ratings, though issuers are free to disclose all ratings alongside the meter. For unsecured bonds, including perpetual instruments like Additional Tier-1 (AT1) bonds, Sebi has added a layer of caution. The word "unsecured" must appear below the meter in bold red text. For AT1 bonds specifically, a separate disclaimer must warn investors that these instruments carry the risk of total loss of invested capital -- a reminder of lessons learnt from high-profile bank bond write-offs in recent years.

A standard disclaimer must clarify that the meter reflects only credit risk, excluding market and liquidity risks. If an issuer is flagged as "Not Cooperating" by credit rating agency, the meter's arrow must point to a separate INC zone, making the warning clearly visible to investors.

Online bond platforms must update the Credit Risk-o-Meter within 24 hours of receiving rating change alerts from depositories such as NSDL (National Securities Depository Limited) and CDSL (Central Depository Services Limited). The meter must appear prominently on bond listing and details pages, ahead of investment buttons.

"Credit ratings can sometimes be misleading, with the same bond rated differently by agencies. Making disclosure of the lowest rating mandatory will help investors get a more realistic picture of the credit risk," says Balachandran S, Founder & CEO, MoneyMan Investments. Further, bond platforms often highlight high yields but fail to adequately disclose security and credit risks. "Sebi's colour-coded Risk-O-Meter and standardised disclosures will help retail investors identify risky investments more easily and make informed decisions," he added.

abhinav.kaul@timesofindia.com

The Tribune
ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Delhi clampdown

Supreme Court bats for constitutional freedom

THE Supreme Court's intervention in the ongoing protests in Delhi drives home the vital point that maintaining law and order cannot come at the cost of constitutional freedom. By directing the authorities to prevent illegal detention, restore normal metro services and ensure uninterrupted Internet access, subject to law, the Court has reaffirmed a fundamental principle of democracy: peaceful dissent is a right, not a privilege granted by the government. The protests organised by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) and some student organisations against Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar have triggered an extraordinary security response. The detention of more than 7,000 people on Saturday and hundreds of them on Sunday raises serious questions about the proportionality of the police action. Reports of barricaded roads, restricted Metro stations and alleged mistreatment of protesters add to concerns about the limits of preventive policing.

The authorities are undoubtedly responsible for protecting public safety. They have the right to act against violence, obstruction and credible threats to public order. However, such powers must be exercised within the bounds of the law. Detaining people merely for assembling peacefully, restricting movement far beyond designated prohibitory zones or disrupting essential public services — doesn't it all amount to punishing hapless citizens?

Notably, the Court has issued directions to remove prohibitory notices around its premises so that citizens and lawyers can approach the apex institution without fear or obstruction. The allegations of unlawful detention and excessive force must be investigated impartially. The police, too, deserve a fair hearing. Accountability should apply equally to protesters and law enforcement agencies. Public confidence in democratic institutions depends on credible answers, open scrutiny and institutional independence. A strong democracy does not fear peaceful protesters. It addresses their grievances, protects public order without suppressing dissent and respects judicial directions. The Court has drawn an important line. The government must now try to ensure that constitutionally guaranteed freedom is not crushed on the streets of the Capital. That won't be an easy task, considering that the CJP and the Opposition remain defiant.

Sports award

Reset policies, handle issues better

IT's tough being a sportsperson in India. The support system is dodgy and the very thought of pursuing any sport other than cricket is scoffed at because of the uncertainty involved. Representing the country may be the highest honour, but here is where comparisons emerge. The cricketers' financial future is secure. A job is there for the taking for a top athlete too, but only a medal at a premier international event — not competing or setting a new record — assures monetary rewards. If even that becomes a contentious issue, then the system needs to reflect. In Himachal Pradesh, an occasion to celebrate the achievements of its women athletes at the Asian Games has touched a raw nerve, and not without reason.

Practically every state and UT offers generous cheques to the medal winners, a dignified recognition they richly deserve. Where the sports policies need a reset is on having uniformity. In Himachal's case, members of a medal-winning team get much less money than individual medallists. Also required is a quick resolution framework. So, did Ritu Negi from Sirmaur, the former Indian kabaddi captain who has represented the state, not deserve the money that Himachal gives for a gold medal? She certainly did. Was the government justified in denying it because having got married in Haryana she could be feted there? Yes and no. Would it upset other players if Haryana, despite being aware of the facts, were to award her? It just might. A lack of clarity is evident.

The BCCI even has a pension plan. Nothing is ever too much for elite sportspersons. A sports policy has to be fair, flexible and accommodating. Himachal's move to award Negi and increase the award money for the team members is sporting. Gestures matter, especially when it concerns role models.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.
LAHORE, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 12, 1926

An effective reply

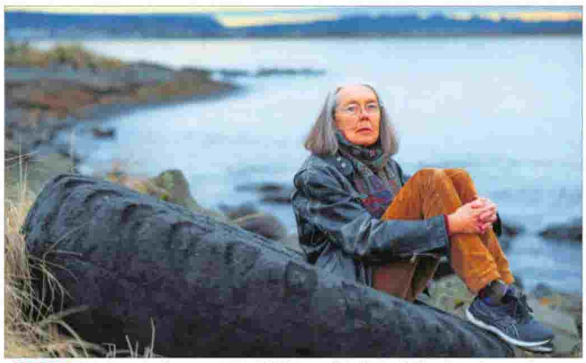
LALA Lajpat Rai's address to the citizens of Lahore on Friday evening, viewed merely as a reply to Pandit Motilal Nehru's recent speech in Lahore, was a very effective performance. On almost every point, the reply was not only convincing but also conclusive. The Pandit had said that the Congress and the Swaraj Party were one and to declare a war on the Swaraj Party was the same thing as declaring a war on the Congress. "If this was so," said Rai in his reply, "why had the Swaraj Party been mentioned separately in the resolutions of the All-India Congress Committee held at Delhi on March 7, 1926? Why had not the Swaraj Party, in fact, ceased to exist? Why was the election campaign being led and carried by the leader of the Swaraj Party, and not by the President of Congress? And were Mahatma Gandhi, C Rajagopalachari, Vallabhbhai Patel and Rajendra Prasad members of the Swaraj Party? If not, had they ceased to be Congressmen?" The truth, as pointed out by the speaker, merely was that the Swarajists were at the present moment in possession of the machinery of the Congress, just as the Moderates had been in possession of it till 1916, just as the Besantite Home Rulers were in 1918, and as the Council boycotters were from 1920 to 1922. In all those cases, the party that was supposed to be in a minority in the Congress had claimed and exercised the right, both in the Congress and outside, to wage a war against the majority. Why should that right be denied only to the Independents of today?

A Nobel that's not so universal

The ecosystem within which the selection of the literature laureate takes place is framed by a bias



PETER RONALD DESOUZA
EX-DIRECTOR, INDIAN INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDY, SHIMLA



RECIPIENT : Anne Carson has been awarded the 2026 literature Nobel for her "bold and inventive oeuvre". REUTERS

IT is the Nobel Prize week once again. A time for celebration. A time to honour the men and women who, through a lifetime of dogged work pursuing an idea, have gifted us with achievements that are for "the greatest benefit to humankind". This is the primary metric (as stated on the Nobel website) by which the laureates are assessed in the fields of physics, chemistry, physiology/medicine, literature and peace.

The economics prize was added in 1968, whereas the other five were instituted in 1901. Over a century after their inception, these prizes have acquired an iconic status that is seen as universal. The whole world waits for the announcements. They are seen not as the contribution to a distinct group, country, organisation or region but as a contribution to all of humanity. Nothing less.

While physics, chemistry, physiology/medicine, economics and even peace have external metrics by which their contribution can be assessed, such is not the case with literature. While the judgments in the other five are regarded as largely objective — any independent observer would come to the same conclusion - literature, in contrast, is mostly subjective. Some may argue that a large dose of subjectivity is also true of the peace prize.

This argument breaks down when we assess the 2026 laureate Navi Pillay's achievements. From a judge in South Africa to a member of the International Criminal Court and her difficult work in hostile environments documenting human rights violations in Rwanda, Myanmar and Gaza — all sites of genocide — Pillay's "commitment to universal legal principles and (her) ... firm moral compass" (as stated by the Chair of the Norwegian Nobel committee, Jørgen Watne Frydnes) are metrics that people across the world have happily endorsed. She is a worthy recipient.

Such universal approval is less so in the case of the Nobel Prize for Literature. This year's laureate, Anne Carson, from Canada and Iceland, was awarded the prize for her "bold and inventive oeuvre that, in playful dialogue with the classical tradition, has created new forms for contemporary literature," as the citation reads. The selection has elicited widespread applause but also produced some lingering doubts.

Her work on Eros, on classical antiquity, on grief, loss and memory, and on language crossings is to be celebrated, and her additions to the stock of reflections on the human condition is to be appreciated. But the doubts still need addressing. Revisiting the 125-year history of the literature awards leaves one with the niggling feeling that something is not quite right. This is no reflection on the wonderful contribution of awardees such as Carson, but is more a comment on the cognitive ecosystem within which the laureate is selected. Is it as universal as it is claimed to be?

To assess this claim of universality, if we were to group the 123 laureates in terms of the continents from which they come, what would we find? Such grouping makes the point that the little traditions of each country belong to the big tradition of the continent. For example, the French literary ecosystem is part of the Judeo-Christian tradition, while the Tamil belongs to the Indic tradition. Once these broad and loose groupings are made, the skewness of the award begins to take shape, like a ghost schooner coming out of the mist.

> The larger question is about the epistemic asymmetry between the Global North and Global South.

There are 123 laureates from 134 countries. Some, such as Carson, come from more than one country. Europe, both West and East (excluding Turkey), has 98 laureates. North America 14, South and Central America (including Mexico) 8, Asia 7, Africa 6 and Oceania (Australia) 1. If we take Scandinavia as a subset of Europe, just for fun, we will find 18 laureates, more than Asia and Africa together.

If the prize in literature is given to a person who, according to Alfred Nobel's will, produces "the most outstanding work in an idealistic direction", it is difficult to believe that Asia, Africa and South America, all ancient civilisations with intense literary traditions and glorious epics — the *shlokas* (verses) in the *Mahabharata* have a total of 2,00,000 lines, about 10 times more than those in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* combined — are barren lands in terms of their literary production as compared to the European world since 1901.

The argument here is not to accuse the Nobel Foundation of intentional bias. Over the years, the prize has been charged with being sexist, favouring their own, anointing writers who have soon faded into obscurity while others, who have been ignored, have gained global recognition. These are not the charges we are making here. Although we recognise the huge role played by the subjective world in the selection process, we are raising the larger question of epistemic asymmetry between the Global North and Global South.

The intentions of the Nobel committee members may be sincere, but the ecosystem within which they make their selection is framed by a bias. It privileges rubrics that have significance within the epistemic North, while those that are significant within the epistemology of the South are regarded as less significant. Arjuna's dilemma is less noticed than Agamemnon's indecision.

This is not an intentional bias but a systemic one. What the North considers significant or a "work in an idealistic direction" has, over time, resulted in the Global North overwhelmingly being the producers of such works. Ways of seeing develop and are presented as universal, whereas they are in effect quite parochial. However, because of epistemic power, the North's way of seeing becomes the universal way of seeing. It becomes hegemonic.

If we were to aggregate the data in terms of North and South, it would look as follows: North (Europe, North America and Oceania) 113 laureates vs South (Asia, Africa and Latin America) 21. If these regions are seen in terms of the global population, it would be Global North 15% and Global South 85%.

If these regions are culturally alive and have amazing creations of dance, music, sculpture, theatre, painting, mask-making, cinema, etc. — activities that express the cultural creativity of their societies — why then is their output in literature (including poetry) so lacking "in the idealistic direction"? Could it be that the Nobel process of identifying potential awardees — the request for nominations sent out by the committee to individuals and organisations, and the review of nominations received — is intrinsically flawed? Could it be that it is biased towards the cultural output of the Global North?

This is a strong charge. We are talking about systemic bias, which refers to the epistemic frame within which the individuals and organisations that are asked are located. The alternative to this charge of bias is to accept that the huge cultural world of Asia, Africa and South America is poor in its production of literature that is "idealistic". How else can one interpret the statistics?

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

"It is necessary to liberate culture from Eurocentrism and linguistic imperialism. — Ngugi wa Thiong'o"

The secret inside a blue pen

SURESH CHANDER KUMAR

GONE are the days when every new pen arrived carrying a secret, and we considered it our solemn duty to uncover it. The operation usually began with half a dozen children gathered around a blue ballpoint pen as though it were a rare archaeological find. It was subjected to what we proudly called an "operation", performed with curiosity and courage.

One such afternoon remains etched in memory. The ceiling fan groaned overhead while we sat cross-legged on the floor, huddled around our latest "patient".

"Open it carefully!" "No, no, the spring will fly away!" And inevitably, it did.

The tiny spring would leap into the air like a liberated acrobat, disappearing into some remote corner. What followed was a spirited search expedition involving squinted eyes, dusty knees and wild accusations.

"You lost it!" "No, you touched it last!"

The poor pen lay dismantled before us: barrel, refill, spring, clip, push-button and ring. Every part was examined with the seriousness of scientists studying a newly discovered species. We passed components from hand to hand and invented theories that might have baffled engineers.

The greatest triumph, however, was reassembling the pen. A collective cheer erupted whenever someone clicked it and announced, "The patient has recovered!"

Looking back, it seems astonishing how much joy we derived from such simple adventures. There were no screens competing for attention, no notifications clamouring for urgency. Entire afternoons bloomed around a cardboard box, a stick, a marble or a dismantled pen. Creativity wore humble clothes. A discarded carton became a castle; a stick transformed into a sword and a pen became a puzzle worthy of collective investigation.

The pen operation was really about wonder, which also made us pry open alarm clocks, inspect transistor radios, collect colourful wrappers and peek behind every curtain of mystery. We were not vandals of the ordinary; we were explorers of the unseen.

Reliving those moments reminds me of Ruskin Bond's world, where small things become vignettes of wonder. Somewhere between childhood and our increasingly busy lives, our curiosity fell silent. We became consumers rather than explorers.

Yet whenever I see a simple blue pen today, memory clicks open like its old push-button mechanism. I can almost hear the chorus of excited voices and watch a rebellious spring shoot across the room. Perhaps that is what nostalgia really is: not merely a longing for the past, but a longing for the curious child who believed that every ordinary thing held a secret worth discovering.

The writer is a Yamunanagar-based industrialist

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Mistrust among stakeholders

Refer to 'The Opposition steps up' (*The Great Game*); Articles 19(1)(a), 19(1)(c) and Article 21, read with each other, form the very basis of life and liberty as enshrined in our Constitution. A series of issues involving the hard-earned right to vote has brought Indian polity to a crossroads, making urgent corrective measures necessary. Mistrust among the ruling regime, its institutions, the younger generation, and the opposition parties needs to be addressed sincerely at the earliest. National interest demands the supremacy of the law rather than partisan handling. Legitimate channels of expression must uphold cordiality and integrity, with 'nation first' as the highest ideal.

ABHYAM SHARMA, PATHANKOT

Respect constitutional limits

Refer to 'The Opposition steps up'; keeping in mind today's national and international scenario, the right to protest is fundamental, but it must respect the law and public convenience. Defying law-enforcement agencies or deliberately inviting arrest is not healthy opposition. Both the government and Opposition must respect constitutional limits. The SIR process should allow legitimate corrections, without becoming a political tool. Students must focus on their education, rather than be distracted from their studies. Responsible debate and dignified public discourse strengthen democracy.

VIJAY KUMAR KATIAL, PANCHKULA

Respond rather than react

Patience, once regarded as a virtue, seems to be diminishing among today's fast-paced generation. We desire instant results, immediate replies and quick solutions to problems. This impatience also affects our daily behaviour. We often react impulsively to words or situations without pausing to understand them. In the heat of the moment, we may take hasty decisions, only to regret them later when their consequences become evident. In a world obsessed with speed, patience is not merely waiting; it is the wisdom to pause, reflect and respond rather than react.

TARANJIT KAUR, SHAHPUR

Youth can learn from Ghadarites

With reference to 'From migration to revolution : The Ghadar story'; the movement led by people living outside India reminds us that the dream of an independent and free India was nurtured not only on Indian soil, but also in distant lands by Indians who refused to accept the foreign rule. What is most striking is that this party was not born out of mere anger, but out of dignity. Today, when the mass migration from Punjab is again a big issue, this history is relevant. Our youth still go abroad for work and studies and face hurdles. Youth must learn about these unsung heroes, their ideas and their sacrifices.

BIR DEVINDER SINGH BEDI, SANGRUR

Create jobs in India

Apropos of 'US immigration curbs'; the increasingly shrill attacks by President Trump, Vice-President JD Vance and Elon Musk on Indians are hardly surprising, as Indians in the US have, over time, emerged as a force to reckon with. JD Vance called H-1B visa holders as 'foreign indentured servants'. The US will do whatever is in its national interest and no country can stop it from doing so. Instead of crying hoarse, the government should create jobs in India itself for its educated youth who dream of immigrating to the US or other countries, somehow or anyhow.

RAMESH GUPTA, NARWANA

Selective enforcement of rules

Apropos of 'Trump turns to Russia for fuel supply after threatening to hit India with heavy tariffs'. Trump's choice is the height of hypocrisy. He wants to help the truck drivers, farmers and ranchers of his country. However, when India says that energy security is its first priority and cannot be seen as a privilege enjoyed by a few, the US becomes indifferent. Rules become instruments of coercion when they are selectively enforced. If Russian diesel is acceptable to the US, then Russian crude import by India cannot be inherently offensive.

BAL GOVIND, NOIDA

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**

Cornell 7 & frat stories



SHELLEY WALIA
FORMER PROFESSOR & FELLOW
ENGLISH & CULTURAL STUDIES, PU

ANYONE who has walked through an Oxford or Cambridge college in term time knows a certain kind of door. Behind it a dinner is under way, laughter carries into the quadrangle, and you understand that you were not invited. I thought of that door while reading about the so-called Cornell Seven, because the case is about what can happen when a group lives wholly behind one.

A former Cornell student filed a civil suit on September 14 against the university and seven current or former members of the Chi Phi fraternity. She alleges that in 2024 she was drugged and sexually assaulted for hours at their chapter house, that others were invited to join, and that the matter was announced in a group chat as it went on. She reported the incident to university police about three weeks later and eventually left Cornell.

While her lawyer says that only two of the seven were expelled, Cornell claims its offices investigated and adjudicated the case under its own procedures, underscoring that the fraternity remains barred from the campus. Lawyers for at least one of the accused have strongly denied the allegations. Prosecutors had earlier closed the criminal investigation without charges, citing insufficient evidence. However, after the suit was filed, district attorney reopened the investigation.

Two questions survive whichever way the law finally rules. How could a group of young men come to behave in this way, if the allegations are true? And how did an institution respond when it was informed? Both questions draw attention to the idea of exclusivity or "social insulation" that underpins the "fraternity" system.

For readers unfamiliar with American universities, a fraternity is not an ordinary college club. It is a private, selective society, with its own house, initiation rituals and hierarchies. Members call one another "brothers"; the female equivalent, the sorority, speaks of "sisters". There is nothing sinister in these fraternities, which in fact, often engage in philanthropy, as well as enable many friendships last a lifetime. The difficulty begins when loyalty to the circle starts to supersede ordinary moral accountability.

> A former student filed a suit against members of Chi Phi fraternity.

The appeal of the victim brings to attention the larger social implications of such privately operated exclusive "clubs". The very act of being chosen can create a powerful sense of distinction from those left outside. You are no longer just a student; you are a member, with a name, a house and a set of people who will vouch for you. What would shock an outsider is laughed away by insiders. One detail in the complaint is rather telling. The alleged assault, it says, was not hidden from the group but announced to it. If this is true, the approval was what counted. The fraternity had built a moral world of its own.

Insulation, however, is not confined to the Cornell 7. The suit also accuses Cornell of tolerating an environment in which such conduct could go unchecked, a charge the university disputes, and the courts will weigh. Yet universities, like fraternities, have reasons to protect their own reputations, their donors and alumni with the hope that a difficult matter will blow over.

Exclusivity is not a moral offence. The Apostles produced some of the great friendships of modern letters. The test comes when loyalty to the group does not take precedence over the question of ethics.

It is for this reason that the case is significant, for a university is supposed to be the antithesis of an insulated closed room. It is one of the few places where young people from different regions, classes, faiths and backgrounds are brought together. Much of what a student learns comes from the conversations at midnight with someone whose background, class or beliefs are not his own. A campus that sorts eighteen-year-olds into like-minded cliques, and lets the clique become their whole world, defeats its own purpose.

We have our own inner circles in India. The school 'house' breeds rivalries that harden into loyalty, and the hostels often drift into camps by region or community. It is natural for students to look for something smaller and warmer than the larger society around them. But do they really care for the ones who are outside their camp?

For full article, go to www.tribuneindia.com/opinion

Where are the jobs



AS MITTAL
VICE CHAIRMAN, PUNJAB ECONOMIC POLICY AND PLANNING BOARD

INDIA'S economy is growing at a rate most countries would envy. The Finance Ministry's latest evaluation predicts growth of about 7.3 per cent for the July-September quarter. In the period April to June 2026, GDP increased by 7.8 per cent, driven by growth in manufacturing and the services sector. Nevertheless, a worrisome issue underlies these impressive figures: where are the jobs that match India's GenZ expectations?

In August 2026, the most recent monthly Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) figures showed the general rate of unemployment to be 5 per cent, although unemployment among people aged 15 to 29 remained much higher. Put another way, about one in six young people in the labour force was unemployed.

This is especially worrying because India's demographic dividend is not permanent. According to the State of Working India 2026 report, the proportion of people in the working age group is expected to start decreasing after 2030. The window to turn a young population into an economic benefit is therefore shrinking.

The unemployment figure may mask the actual quality of employment. In 2025, 56.2 per cent of workers were self-employed, whereas 23.6 per cent were employed on a regular wage or salaried basis. Although manufacturing's share of employment rose to 12.1 per cent, agriculture still accounted for 43 per cent of employment.

India's problem is not simply producing more jobs, but producing jobs that are productive, stable, adequately paid, and match people's skills.

The education-employment gap worsens the problem. A degree now tends to give access only to a queue, not a career. Why is growth not generating enough good jobs? First, how growth is structured matters; capital-intensive, highly productive sectors can generate significant economic value without absorbing many workers. India cannot meet its large employment challenge by relying on sectors that employ few people.

> A degree now tends to give access only to a queue, not a career.

Secondly, manufacturing has not yet acted as the major source of employment that took people from the farms to the factories as it did in East Asian countries such as China, South Korea, and Vietnam, where tens of millions of people were moved from agricultural work to factory jobs in the production of clothes, shoes, toys and electronics. In India, manufacturing accounts for only one-seventh of GDP and employs one in nine workers.

However, the most recent Annual Survey of Industries provides encouraging evidence: manufacturing output rose 7.81 per cent in 2024-25, employment rose 7.19 per cent, and the total number of people involved reached 2.10 crore. Emoluments also rose by 12.08 per cent. Nevertheless, organised manufacturing remains small, with about 1.9 crore people employed in it and 3.3 crore in the unorganised sector.

The scale is still not great for an economy in which millions are joining the labour market; India needs manufacturing that is not just bigger but more labour-intensive.

Thirdly, the number of graduates is growing faster than the availability of quality jobs. The solution is to make degrees more relevant, reinforce vocational routes and link education directly with employers.

The way forward is a jobs-first growth strategy. Now, employment must drive growth, so attention should focus on GenZ's discontent. The strategy should put MSMEs at its heart.

The true success of the PM Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana should be judged not by the amount of incentives paid out but by how many young people remain productively employed after the subsidy ends.

The skills policy should face the same scrutiny. ITIs and polytechnics should involve employers more, offer industry-designed courses, and recognise workplace learning.

Finally, instead of simply competing for investment announcements, states should compete on the number of jobs created, the number of apprentices trained, and the number of young people moving from informal to formal employment, etc.

For full article, go to www.tribuneindia.com/opinion

Heart has its reasons



WILLIAM CORNWELL
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ

AT least a quarter of Americans suffer from high levels of cholesterol or fatty acids in their bloodstream, a condition called dyslipidemia. Uncontrolled cholesterol levels increase the risk of atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease, or ASCVD: a group of diseases that result from the build-up of plaque in the blood vessels, preventing blood from traveling smoothly to vital organs. This condition can lead to heart attack and stroke.

In March 2026, new guidelines were provided on how to treat dyslipidemia, by the American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology.

Compared to prior guidelines, the 2026 update emphasises the need to treat high cholesterol and fatty acids earlier in life and more aggressively in order to reduce the risk of developing atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease later in life.

The new guidelines provide clinicians with information on how to use blood tests and imaging tools to help determine a person's risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

Some important blood tests include standard lipid tests like levels of LDL (the "bad" cholesterol) and HDL (the "good" cholesterol), but the new guidelines also emphasise the importance of some newer blood tests like lipoprotein A (LpA) and apolipoprotein B (ApoB). The updated guidelines also recommend checking coronary artery calcium (CAC) levels, which older guidelines did not include.

Importantly, the guidelines encourage providers to use an online calculator called PREVENT-ASCVD, which uses several factors to determine whether a patient is at low, intermediate or high risk for cardiovascular disease.

> Two newer blood tests for heart health have come up — ApoB and LpA.

Why were the guidelines updated? In the mid-20th century, physiologists identified two molecules key to cardiovascular disease: LDL and HDL cholesterol. Epidemiologists observed that high LDL was tied to an increase in heart attack risk.

In the new guidelines, two newer markers have been introduced — ApoB and LpA — that may help determine cardiovascular disease risk beyond LDL alone.

ApoB is a chemical structure that can be found on plaque-forming particles like LDL. While LDL measures the mass of plaques in the blood, ApoB measures the number of plaque particles in the blood. It can be particularly useful for patients who have normal LDL levels but elevated levels of other lab values like triglycerides.

LpA is a molecule similar to LDL cholesterol in structure, but with an extra protein attached to it called apolipoprotein A. This protein is stickier and more prone to cause plaque or blockages in arteries than LDL alone.

The higher the LpA level, the higher the risk of cardiovascular disease. The guidelines recommend checking LpA once in all adults to help determine their lifetime risk of cardiovascular disease. The new guidelines also provide information on coronary artery calcium scores. The greater the amount of calcium, the greater the risk of cardiovascular disease.

How do the new guidelines affect treatment? The new guidelines shift how doctors manage cholesterol levels toward earlier screening and more personalised treatment. They emphasise the importance of lifelong prevention strategies to reduce risk of cardiovascular disease.

The guidelines recommend checking lipid levels very early in life. Children ages 9 to 11 should have their cholesterol levels checked to identify any lipid abnormalities. It is important to remember that healthy lifestyle choices remain the foundation for preventing cardiovascular disease.

The American Heart Association recommends specific healthy behaviours it calls Life's Essential 8 to help reduce cardiovascular disease risk. These include getting enough sleep, quitting tobacco and managing blood pressure, among others.

The guidelines emphasise the importance of routine exercise. Lastly, the guidelines recommend weight loss of around 5% to 10% of total body weight for patients who are overweight or obese to help reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.

Courtesy: The Conversation

For full article, go to www.tribuneindia.com/opinion

The price of cancer



CHANDRAKANT LAHARIYA
PHYSICIAN AND FORMER WHO STAFFER

THE Union government's decision to cap trade margins on cancer medicines is both welcome and overdue. Cancer incidence is rising in India, and for many families, a diagnosis brings not merely the fear of death but also the prospect of financial ruin. Advances in oncology have made several effective treatments available. However, a single medicine can cost several lakhs of rupees, and treatment extending over years can exhaust lifetime savings. Making medicines affordable is therefore a public health necessity, not merely an economic intervention.

The government proposes restricting trade margins to 30%, potentially reducing prices of some cancer medicines by up to 70%. Estimated annual savings could reach Rs 2,500 crore. These are impressive figures, but we must ask an uncomfortable question: will cheaper medicines necessarily translate into better cancer care?

India has travelled this road before. In 2017, the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority capped coronary stent prices, reducing them by up to 85%. Knee implant prices were subsequently reduced by up to 69%. The government estimated substantial savings for patients. In 2019, trade margins were restricted on 42 anti-cancer medicines, with many brands subsequently reporting price reductions.

Research examining stent price regulation in Karnataka suggested that private hospitals responded through changes in treatment patterns, with a disproportionate increase in angioplasty procedures compared with bypass surgeries. This did not establish that individual procedures were unnecessary, but it raised legitimate questions about commercial incentives influencing clinical decisions.

> Will cheaper medicines necessarily translate into better cancer care?

Hospitals can also compensate for reduced margins through higher procedure charges, consumables, investigations or consultation fees. The price of one component falls while the overall bill remains stubbornly high. A patient may receive a cheaper stent without receiving a cheaper angioplasty. The same danger exists in cancer care.

Other countries offer useful lessons. Britain's National Institute for Health and Care Excellence evaluates clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness before recommending public funding for many treatments. Several European health systems negotiate prices and use health technology assessments. India needs a comparable, transparent process adapted to its disease burden, resources and healthcare realities.

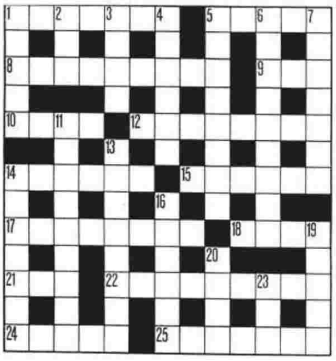
The way forward requires coordinated reform rather than isolated price notifications. First, the government must publish medicine-wise revised prices and make hospital procurement prices and patient charges auditable. Second, clinical oncology guidelines should identify treatments offering meaningful benefit, supported by independent audits and multidisciplinary decision-making. Third, regulators must monitor manufacturing quality, availability and shortages, with safeguards for essential products. Also, hospitals should provide itemised bills, disclose medicine substitutions and prevent lost drug margins from reappearing as inflated service charges. Public procurement, pooled purchasing, biosimilar competition and financial protection mechanisms deserve expansion.

Most importantly, success must be measured through actual patient expenditure, medicine availability, treatment appropriateness and outcomes, not merely announced percentage reductions.

A price cap is relatively easy to announce. Ensuring that patients receive the right medicine, of assured quality, at the regulated price, without unnecessary treatment or hidden charges, requires considerably greater institutional effort. India must ensure that in solving the problem of expensive cancer medicines, it does not create another problem of unavailable, inferior or unnecessarily prescribed medicines. Affordable cancer care is not simply about paying less for drugs. It is about receiving the right treatment, of the right quality, at the right price.

For full article, go to www.tribuneindia.com/opinion

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1 Fishing with hook and line (7)
5 Influential person (5)
8 Obstruct debate (9)
9 Prohibit (3)
10 Limited extent of time (4)
12 Watchful (8)
14 Submissive (6)
15 Point-blank (6)
17 Sacredly obscure (8)
18 Cheerless (4)
21 Harmful (3)
22 Period of adversity (4,5)
24 Pious (5)
25 Earthly (7)

DOWN
1 A useful quality (5)
2 Sticky substance (3)
3 Article (4)
4 Free of charge (6)
5 To increase in number (8)
6 One of the Pillars of Hercules (9)
7 Protracted (7)
11 Unwavering (4-5)
13 Omnipotent (8)
14 Condemnatory (7)
16 With little margin (6)
19 Domineering (5)
20 Rouse to activity (4)
23 Deranged (3)

Saturday's Solution

Across: 1 Mainstay, 5 Huff, 9 Organ, 10 Asinine, 11 Feel the pinch, 13 Resume, 14 Sprain, 17 Second nature, 20 Oatmeal, 21 Model, 22 Tart, 23 Prospect.

Down: 1 Mood, 2 Ingress, 3 Single-minded, 4 Apathy, 6 Union, 7 Free hand, 8 Hippopotamus, 12 Cross out, 15 Abridge, 16 Antler, 18 Cater, 19 Blot.

SU DO KU

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

MEDIUM

SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

OCTOBER 12, 2026, MONDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1948
- Ashwin Shaka 20
- Ashwin Parvishte 26
- Hijari 1448
- Shukla Paksha Tithi 2, up to 10:14 pm
- Vishkumbha Yoga up to 8:32 pm
- Swati Nakshatra up to 11:53 pm
- Moon in Libra sign

FORECAST

SUNSET: MONDAY 17:56 HRS
SUNRISE: TUESDAY 06:22 HRS

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	30	22
New Delhi	33	23
Amritsar	30	23
Bathinda	30	20
Jalandhar	30	23
Ludhiana	30	23
Bhiwani	31	23
Hisar	31	23
Sirsa	31	23
Dharamsala	24	15
Manali	20	09
Shimla	19	12
Srinagar	26	10
Jammu	30	21
Kargil	20	05
Leh	16	02
Dehradun	31	21
Mussoorie	21	12

TEMPERATURE IN °C

epaper.tribuneindia.com

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

Botched attempt

An execution is designed to leave no uncertainty. The state announces a death sentence, prepares a procedure intended to cause death, administers the drugs and records the prisoner's death. There is no provision in the logic of capital punishment for the condemned person to wake up and ask where she is.

That is what makes the case of Christa Pike so disturbing. Tennessee did not merely prepare to execute her and then abort the attempt. The lethal drugs were administered. Two doses of pentobarbital entered her body. Yet her heart continued to beat, and after days of unconsciousness she began speaking again.

The significance of that survival goes beyond the question of whether the execution protocol was correctly followed. A state may be able to demonstrate that its officials complied with a prescribed procedure. It still has to confront the much harder question of what that procedure accomplished.

Pike is alive, but apparently badly affected by what happened. Her lawyers say she has suffered severe swelling in her arms, a blood clot, pneumonia and an inability to swallow. For several days they believed she might be brain-dead. Her subsequent recovery has therefore not restored the situation to what it was before the execution attempt. The state may have the right to execute Pike for her crime; it has no right to compound that punishment with suffering inflicted by the failure of its own execution.

That creates a peculiar legal and moral problem. If an execution is the ultimate and irreversible punishment, what is the status of an attempted execution that fails? Can the state simply regard the first attempt as an unsuccessful procedure and begin preparing for another? Or does the fact that the prisoner survived - and suffered serious medical consequences - alter what the state is entitled to do next?

A prison sentence can be corrected if a conviction is overturned. Compensation can be paid for wrongful imprisonment. An unjust fine can be returned. Death cannot be undone. Yet Pike's case demonstrates that even the machinery intended to cause death as punishment can itself produce a state of affairs for which the system may have no answer.

The preservation of syringes, intravenous lines, drug packaging, records and other evidence is not bureaucratic housekeeping. It is essential if the public is to know whether the failure resulted from human error, defective equipment, inadequate medical safeguards, the drugs themselves or a combination of factors.

If Tennessee eventually seeks to execute Pike again, it will not be attempting an ordinary execution. It will be attempting to impose the same irreversible punishment on a woman who has already survived one effort to kill her.

That possibility forces the capital-punishment debate into unfamiliar territory. The issue is no longer only whether the state has the legal authority to take a life. It is whether, after its first attempt has failed so dramatically, the state can credibly claim that it has the certainty, safeguards and institutional competence required to make another attempt.

Grey War

Europe is being forced to confront an uncomfortable reality: the next major security crisis may not begin with tanks crossing a border. It may begin with a severed cable, a paralysed computer network, a sabotaged airport or a carefully planted piece of disinformation.

Russia's confrontation with Europe has increasingly moved into this ambiguous territory. The objective is not necessarily to wage conventional war, but to impose costs, create uncertainty and exploit divisions without provoking the kind of unmistakable military response that an armed invasion would trigger. That makes the threat harder to deter - and potentially more corrosive.

The mapping of undersea cables in the North Sea is a case in point. Modern European economies depend on invisible infrastructure: telecommunications cables, energy links, ports, satellites and digital networks. Damage to any of these can have consequences far beyond the immediate site of an attack. A society that depends upon uninterrupted connectivity is also a society with an extraordinary number of points at which an adversary can cause disruption.

This changes the meaning of national security. Governments can no longer treat defence as primarily a matter of soldiers, aircraft and missiles. Intelligence services, cyber-security agencies, technology companies and infrastructure operators are now part of the frontline. The arrest of a former head of Germany's Federal Intelligence Service on espionage allegations is a reminder that vulnerabilities can exist within institutions as well as around them.

For Britain and Germany, closer cooperation is therefore not merely a diplomatic convenience. Their security interests are converging. Britain possesses substantial intelligence, military and technological capabilities; Germany occupies a pivotal position at the centre of continental Europe. Neither can adequately protect itself against a transnational threat by acting alone.

That logic extends beyond the two countries. Brexit may have changed Britain's institutional relationship with the European Union, but it did not change its geography. British security remains inseparable from the security of its European neighbours. If the threat is increasingly organised across borders, the response must be as well.

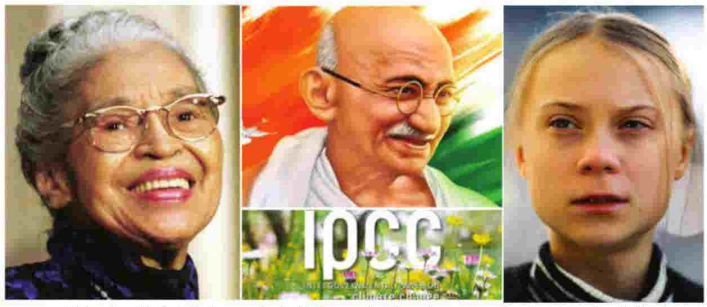
This also gives a strategic dimension to the debate over Britain's future relationship with the EU. The argument for closer European cooperation need not rest on nostalgia for Britain's pre-Brexit arrangements. It can rest on something more immediate: security. Cooperation on intelligence, cyber-defence, critical infrastructure, technology and sanctions is likely to become increasingly important as Russia tests Europe's resilience.

The danger, however, is that Europe responds only after each incident. Hybrid warfare thrives in precisely that environment - where individual acts of sabotage or cyber intrusion can appear too small to justify a collective response, yet collectively amount to a sustained campaign.

Europe therefore needs to decide whether it regards these incidents as isolated nuisances or as part of a strategic challenge. Treating them as the former would invite further escalation. Recognising them as the latter is the first step towards building a Europe capable of defending itself in a war that increasingly does not look like one.

A call to activism

Activism can involve confronting rude, ruthless and privileged people. Most importantly, activism is not a regular paid profession that puts food on the table. It is not a full-time vocation with promotions that can help feed your family or help you secure a pension. It is merely an answer to the compulsive cry of the conscience. Hence, since activism is not normally a naturally integrated part of a person's life, nor is it a paid vocation, it falls upon a select few to take up this crucial activity



Activists, by their daring, have been instrumental in bringing about change for the better. Sometimes, it was single individuals who stood up against the social order such as Rosa Parks, who had the courage to remain seated in a public bus at a time when the prevailing mores of racial discrimination demanded that she give up her seat to a white skinned passenger.

Others spearheaded mass movements such as the Civil Disobedience movement for freedom in India started by Gandhiji, and there have been global movements spanning diverse cultures with shared goals such as the Fridays for Future climate movement led by Greta Thunberg and amplified largely by youth across the globe. All of these brought a welcome breath of fresh air and disrupted stale patterns of thought and action. In fact, in our case it won us our freedom from British rule.

When reading Herman Hesse's magnificent book "Siddhartha' I was in complete resonance with his idea of a river being representative of life itself. There is change every second and yet a continuity across the aeons. Similarly, the broad structure of a social order shows a historical continuity even as changes keep occurring in a natural manner based on the needs and experiences of people. Some changes are inflicted on people by those governing them.

Yet, all too often, things stagnate. It can perhaps be likened to going in circles like a local eddy current in the river, or the drastic slow-down that building a dam on the river may bring. At the level of society, non-progression may reflect that perhaps people have become lazy or accepting of the status quo or are afraid to voice their concerns. Or do not read the writing on the wall till it is too late.

An example of delayed action is the current global warming. Despite scientists alerting humanity to the dangers of climate change since the mid twentieth century and governments being formally alerted in the 1960s, an intergovernmental panel on climate change ~ IPCC ~ was formed only in 1988 under the auspices of the UN along with the World Meteorological Organization.

Even so, several decades and global climate conferences later, we are witnessing far too frequent natural disasters ~ the effects of catastrophic temperature rise on Mother Earth, 'Gaia'. Most believe we have reached a point of no return. And this precisely, is the role of activism. To highlight and intervene in conditions that are harmful for society before it is too late.

Undertaking the herculean and noble task of activism comes with its own set of challenges. Since activism is by nature disruptive, it is frequently resisted by large sections of society for a myriad reasons. Many simply dislike change. In fact, we humans are notorious for not easily moving out of comfort zones and those familiar ruts. Lack of awareness, a selfish nature, or even just being extremely busy earning a living may prevent people from engaging with social responsibilities.

On a separate note, some people may benefit financially or otherwise from the status quo. For example, there is a near universal realization that the world needs to move away from fossil fuels towards more sustainable energy. Yet those who own coal mines may not want to see a dip in their personal profits and may use their considerable wealth to overtly or covertly prevent such an ecologically important step being undertaken. Sometimes, narrow political considerations prompt elected representatives to avoid policy changes so as not to lose an influential voter base.

Activism requires infinite patience. Deep rooted malaises take a long time to destroy. When efforts are global, and the stakeholders many, reaching a consensus is a complicated, long drawn-out process spanning years. For example, the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) formed by American and Russian doctors in 1980, advocated for the need to prevent further proliferation of nuclear weapons.

They highlighted that the medical outcomes of atomic bombing, as seen in the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki citizens, were so deadly for humans that the only cure was prevention itself. They won the Nobel prize for peace in 1985 for their effort.

In 2007 they started a campaign ~ International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). This involved civil society groups from several countries who worked collectively on adoption and implementation of this nuclear ban treaty and total elimination of nuclear weapons. Despite the use of nuclear weapons being an imminent and persistent threat, it was only a full decade later, in 2017, that the UN passed a declaration for the prohibition of nuclear weapons based on this sustained campaign.



ANJALI MEHTA
The writer is a Delhi-based medical practitioner

Activism requires a certain degree of self- confidence, selflessness and a lot of courage. Activism often comes at a heavy cost. Activists frequently lose jobs and other good opportunities. They are branded with all sorts of monikers to discourage them, even to the extent of being labelled terrorists. Vested business interests spend huge amounts of money to protect their own profits rather than safeguard our planet.

Hence, activism can involve confronting rude, ruthless and privileged people. Most importantly, activism is not a regular paid profession that puts food on the table. It is not a full-time vocation with promotions that can help feed your family or help you secure a pension. It is merely an answer to the compulsive cry of the conscience.

Hence, since activism is not normally a naturally integrated part of a person's life, nor is it a paid vocation, it falls upon a select few to take up this crucial activity. Who then becomes an activist?

Well, it requires a certain bent of mind that wishes to see social justice prevail and a generosity of spirit that allows a person to spend time doing something that benefits the world at large but may not bring any personal reward or gain.

So many selfless humans have sacrificed their lives outright or have put themselves in danger or discomfort. To name just a few, we have the determined Indian freedom fighters such as Lokmanya Tilak or Bhagat Singh, or the celebrated African anti-apartheid activist Nelson Mandela who spent years in jail or more recently, the brave activists from many nations sailing towards Gaza in flotillas.

Drivers of activism include a deeply ingrained sense of wanting to see fairness in the social order, a higher level of ambition (greater than personal ambition), an active conscience, or sometimes being part of a harrowing incident where you can't possibly let another human go through the same horrific experience or you can't let a perpetrator get away.

Many a time an activist is literally born overnight. Indians felt a deep and bitter collective jolt when Nirbhaya was gangraped in 2012. I remember when details of the terrible incident came out in the news, I just couldn't bring myself to continue my routine medical OPD.

I left my clinic and headed towards Jantar Mantar, never having been there, not sure what I would do, but driven by a deep restlessness and a desire to contribute somehow. Just like me, thousands of shocked, outraged citizens headed out of home and office onto streets, wanting to demonstrate solidarity with the grieving parents of Nirbhaya. Collective activism brought in a slew of women's safety laws.

Activists are a spunky lot and use diverse and imaginative ways to get their point across. It could be a song ~ 'Hum Dekhenge' by Faiz Ahmad Faiz is an iconic revolutionary song that comes to mind, or a poem, or an inspiring speech ~ graduation day speeches are a platform popular with students. The British painter, Banksy, chose to paint incognito at night in public spaces ~ his art powerfully depicting social themes. But the most popular methodology for activism at a universal level is a good old-fashioned street march.

Should more people turn to activism? Definitely. It is a courageous way to creatively and efficiently channelise anger and help bring about reform. My wise sibling advised me when we were growing up: 'don't get angry, get even'. Standing up for change is a useful way to 'get even' with any system that disappoints.

The Korea Herald

Will AI reverse renminbi's rise?

The renminbi has staged a notable recovery against the dollar since the second half of 2025, prompting renewed discussion about how much further it can rise.

Some link currency appreciation to productivity gains in China's tradable sectors, including electric vehicles, renewable energy equipment and shipbuilding. To explain why an increase in manufacturing productivity would affect the exchange rate, they point to a phenomenon known as the Balassa-Samuelson effect.

The logic is straightforward. More productive factories can compete more successfully in global markets and pay higher wages. Because workers are mobile across sectors, wages in local restaurants, schools and hospitals also rise. If productivity in these services does not keep pace, providers must raise prices to accommodate higher wages. A haircut in China becomes more expensive relative to one elsewhere (after taking the exchange rate into account), even though the barber has not improved in any way. This is a real exchange-rate appreciation, and it can happen through a stronger renminbi, higher domestic prices or both.

A Member Of The ANN ASIA NEWS NETWORK

We have seen this before. Postwar Germany and Japan experienced episodes of sustained currency appreciation as their productivity converged toward US levels. China itself experienced a similar dynamic between 2005 and 2013, when the renminbi appreciated by roughly 35 percent against the dollar. But that does not necessarily mean that a new wave of artificial intelligence-driven productivity gains will cause the renminbi to appreciate even faster. AI may raise productivity precisely where the traditional Balassa-Samuelson mechanism assumes it will lag: non-tradable services. Previous technological revolutions favored activities that could be mechanized, standardized or scaled. The ICT revolution transformed finance, telecommunications and e-commerce, making many services more tradable.

But healthcare, education and other local services remained largely dependent on human time and judgment. In Chinese public hospitals, for example, patient consultations per physician per day slipped from 7.5 in 2014 to 7.2 in 2024.

These are precisely the kinds of activities that generative AI can assist with, helping doctors, teachers and other professionals process information and analyze data. If productivity rises in local services, their unit costs may fall rather than rise.

Local services differ from manufacturing in another important way. A more efficient car factory can sell more vehicles abroad. A more efficient hospital cannot easily export more consultations. The productivity dividend is largely trapped at home, where it is more likely to show up in lower prices. Food delivery offers a simple illustration: Better algorithms allow riders to complete more orders per hour, but a more efficient delivery network in Beijing cannot deliver dinner in New York.

This can be understood as a reverse Balassa-Samuelson effect. Instead of rising manufacturing productivity pushing up the relative price of services, productivity gains in non-tradable services will push down relative prices, creating real depreciation pressure or offsetting some of the pressure for real appreciation.

Letters To The Editor | editor@thestatesman.com

Under process

Sir, The Indian government and Elon Musk engaged in a war of words on Thursday, after the department of telecommunications (DoT) rejected allegations that domestic business interests were blocking Starlink's satellite internet services, prompting the tech billionaire to ask if 'Ambani is the real boss of India'.

The government earlier in the day rebutted the US business tycoon's allegations that Starlink's satellite communication services were being blocked, making it clear that compliance with security norms was mandatory for every satellite communication licensee in the country. The telecom ministry said the country's authorization framework for telecom and satellite services was "fair and non-discriminatory" and that any suggestion of its selective application was "baseless and misconceived".

The government has licensed three companies ~ Musk's Starlink, Reliance Jio's satellite venture Jio Satcom and Bharti-backed Eutelsat OneWeb ~ but none can begin commercial services until the required security assessments and spectrum-related approvals are completed. 'Security assessment as part of this process is currently under way in respect of all three licensees,' the telecom ministry said in a statement.

The comments came a day after Musk alleged on X that "certain oligarchs" were blocking Starlink to protect a "monopolistic chokehold" on the Indian market. Musk also rejected claims that Starlink services had been used by militants in Manipur, saying its satellite beams had been switched off over India and could not, therefore, have been used for any purpose there.

Under the government's framework, a licensed satellite operator can move to the spectrum-assignment stage once it completes the required security process. The telecom ministry said all three licensees were "broadly at the same regulatory stage".

Yours, etc., Bhagwan Thadani,
Mumbai, 9 October.

Balanced

Sir, Please refer to today's report "GST reforms: Arrest powers of tax officers scrapped". Rolled out in 2017, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime is set for an important course correction. As the GST Council considers sweeping enforcement and compliance reforms, the proposed shift from departmental arrests to judicial oversight is not a retreat from tax enforcement. It is a move towards a more mature system ~ one that distinguishes routine tax disputes from deliberate fraud. The proposed reforms offer a better balance. Ordinary disputes should primarily be settled through assessment, recovery of tax, interest and penalties.

Criminal prosecution should be reserved for substantial fraud, with arrests requiring judicial scrutiny. Such a framework would strengthen due process without weakening the State's ability to penalise evaders. The need for sharper enforcement is obvious. Input tax credit fraud totalling Rs 74,782 crore was detected in 2025-26 and 358 people were arrested. These figures demonstrate the scale of organised tax evasion, but they also emphasise why resources should be directed at deliberate wrongdoing rather than procedural lapses.

And the wider GST 2.0 agenda is equally encouraging. Faster, risk-based refunds, simpler registration, protection of genuine buyers' input tax credit and fewer low-value notices can substantially reduce compliance costs.

Yours, etc., Khokan Das,
Kolkata, 9 October.

India's vanishing villages

BHASKAR NATH BISWAL

As India sets its sights on becoming a developed nation by 2047, the centenary of its Independence, the debate is dominated by gleaming metros, semiconductor plants and trillion-dollar economic milestones. A quieter story is unfolding far from the skyline. A nationwide analysis of government data from Mission Antyodaya has found that nearly 28,000 of India's 641,000 villages stand empty, without a single resident. These 'ghost villages' are more than a statistical curiosity. They are locked homes, fallow fields and silent village squares and they warn us that a developed India cannot be built if rural India, its foundation, is slowly walking away.

The geography of desertion is strikingly uneven. The number of empty villages ranges from just one in Kerala to 5,506 in Uttar Pradesh. Bihar follows with 3,431, Odisha with 3,303, Maharashtra with 2,413, Karnataka with 1,723 and Assam with 1,703. At the other end of the scale, Ladakh, Lakshadweep, Mizoram, Delhi and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands report none at all.

Kerala's near-zero figure is instructive. Where roads, schools, hospitals and local livelihoods reach the doorstep, villages hold their people. Where they do not, people leave. The study, led by researchers at the National Institute of Urban Affairs, found that more than half of the empty villages lie at least ten kilometres from the nearest road, public transport link, senior secondary school, bank, market, primary health centre and hospital.

Popular wisdom holds that ghost villages are mostly a feature of hilly states such as Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. The data shows otherwise: many lie outside mountainous regions, in the plains and plateaus of the country's heartland. The clustering in states with high rates of out-migration suggests that abandonment is driven less by geography than by neglect.

For Odisha, the figure of 3,303 empty villages should be a matter of serious reflection. It places the state third in the country, behind only Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, even though it is far smaller than both.

The reasons are not hard to trace. Western and southern Odisha, particularly the old Koraput-Balangir-Kalahandi belt, has long been associated with distress migration. Every year, thousands of families leave for brick kilns in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh and for construction and textile work in Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Coastal districts such as Ganjam have a decades-old tradition of sending young men to distant cities.

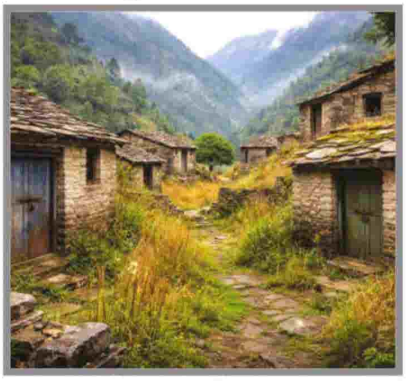
In remote tribal and forest pockets, villages are cut off for months by poor roads, with the nearest high school or health centre a day's journey away. Cyclones, floods and, in some places, displacement caused by mining, dams and industrial projects have added to the strain. When a family leaves under such pressure, it rarely returns and once the last household departs, the village is struck from the living map.

Behind the numbers lies a chain of causes. The first is infrastructure deprivation. A village without a motorable road, a reliable school or a nearby clinic asks its residents to sacrifice their children's future and their own health. The second is agrarian distress. With fragmented holdings, erratic rainfall, rising input costs and weak price realisation, farming no longer promises a dignified living. The third is the lack of non-farm employment. Rural India has few small industries, agro-processing units or service jobs to absorb its youth, so they go where the work is.

A fourth cause is aspiration. A generation that has seen the city on a mobile screen is unwilling to accept what its parents endured. Added to this are climate shocks, displacement and in some regions, insecurity. Migration in itself is not a failure; it has always been part of economic transformation. The concern is when it becomes one-way and permanent and when it empties a place entirely rather than reshaping it.

The economic consequences are considerable. Abandoned villages mean idle farmland, falling agricultural output and a thinner base of rural producers at a time when food security and climate resilience demand more attention. Public money spent on anganwadis, school buildings, panchayat offices and rural roads is stranded when no one is left to use them. Villages that survive nearby are often left with only the old and the very young, raising dependency and weakening local markets.

The cities bear the burden too. India remains predominantly rural, with about two-thirds of its estimated 1.4 billion people still living in villages. If distress rather than opportunity drives movement out of rural areas, urban centres are flooded with low-paid, insecure workers who end up in overcrowded slums, straining housing, water, sanitation and transport. A development model that hollows out the countryside to feed the city's informal economy is neither inclusive nor sustainable. There is also a cultural cost: languages,



folk traditions, local knowledge and community forests fade when the people who sustain them are gone.

The answer is not to stop people from moving but to give them a real choice about staying. The first priority must be last-mile connectivity: all-weather roads, public transport, digital access and, crucially, quality secondary schools and primary health services within reasonable reach. Telemedicine, school consolidation with safe transport and mobile banking can narrow the distance that now separates remote hamlets from the state.

The second is livelihood diversification. Investment in irrigation, food processing, forest-produce value chains, cottage industries and rural tourism can create jobs close to home. In Odisha, this means finishing the unfinished business of the KBK districts, with watershed development, millet and horticulture clusters and skill training linked to nearby enterprises rather than distant factories. Employment guarantee works should be geared towards building durable local assets.

Finally, migration data should be treated as an early warning system. Gram panchayats and district administrations must track depopulation village by village and intervene before the last family leaves. If Viksit Bharat is to be more than a slogan, its success must be measured not just by the height of its skyscrapers but by the lights that stay on in its villages.

The writer is a former college Principal and Founder of Supporting Shoulders.

IT CAME TO MIND | MANISH NANDY



Reining Corporate Power

Andrew Hamilton compared power to a river: within its bounds, it is beautiful and useful, but once overflowing, it is infinitely destructive. That is why Pericles offered the strong prescription of eternal vigilance to the Athenians. That is also why, two thousand years later, Montesquieu suggested that state power should be parceled into three innocuous parts, all kept scrupulously separate. Exactly the opposite happens when large companies not only wield a vast amount of economic power but parlay it into substantial political power. The potential for social damage is then overwhelming.

Some seem to associate the danger principally with cartels and corruption. Others assume that big companies break the rules mainly by conspiring together to constrict supplies or charge higher prices, and by corrupting public officials to give them favored treatment. These are illicit acts that doubtless happen periodically, and the popular assumptions should tell companies something about their standing in public perception.

The more important point is that companies do not have to gain political leverage by gouging the public or suborning the public servant. They have at least three broad and perfectly legitimate channels to subvert the decision-making process in their favour and compound economic power with political power.

The first is the channel of campaign contributions in election time. Every couple of years the cost of an election campaign doubles or quadruples. Some countries have legal limits on electoral expenditure; nobody even pretends to observe them. The expenses of transport, communication, publicity, security and maintenance of a huge army of secretaries, assistants, influencers and hangers-on total a fortune even few wealthy candidates can command. Companies cover the gap with cars, crew and cash. In return, of course, they expect to call the tune the elected politicians will sing and dictate the laws their appointed minions will administer. Every year the numbers of mortgaged politicians multiply and the stranglehold of business on the body politic tightens.

The second is the channel of controlling information to decision-makers and the public. Dissemination of information today is a fine art, practiced by skilled journalists and publicists, audio and video artists, computer designers and filmmakers. They are widely commandeered by affluent companies. In most third world countries, half the business news is inseparable from corporate advocacy and covert publicity.

Companies find it easy to flood the media with slanted, selected news favorable to special interests. Well-written and well-published brochures and advertisements, duly funded by business, swamp the desks of key politicians, commentators and columnists. Lest they miss the message, deferential tycoons and their well-heeled lobbyists court and cajole them, invite them to exclusive clubs and well-paid lectures. The supreme beauty of the device is that the public bears the cost, every cent, of its own brainwashing.

The third is the least noticed channel of professional career switches. Both public bureaucracies and private companies recognize and demand high-level expertise today. So top professionals move more easily than ever before from private employment to government agencies and back again to corporate affluence. They know well their upward mobility is assured above all by their pliability. Their reasonableness and sympathy for the business viewpoint will decide how soon and how lucratively the doors of corporate Eldorado will open for them.

The Under Secretary in the finance ministry will duly become the partner in a major accounting firm, and the chief of the communication commission will join as executive vice president of the big telecommunication firm – provided they play ball at the right time. Understandably, more often than not they do.

Major companies accumulate extensive political clout besides their economic prowess by these channels. When they do that, they are no longer playing the standard game of private enterprise. Kicking the chessboard is not just an unconventional way of playing chess. They are then deliberately scuttling the rules of the game. They are not playing within the legal framework that people have set up. They are manipulating people to alter the framework the way they want it. They are not joining others in creating an informed public opinion. They are engineering a phantom opinion based on tendentious and misrepresented data. They are not helping to educate the public officials and improve their decisions. They are working to undermine their impartiality and encourage their pettiness and venality. We have then a situation where, as Andrew Hacker says in his The Corporation Takeover, "elephants are dancing among the chickens."

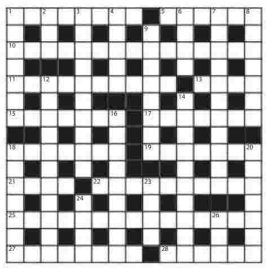


Illustration by : Debabrata Chakrabarty

Why should social observers be interested, one could ask, in the subject of corporate power? Because restraining the immense, unbridled growth of corporate power, economic and political, is critical to the task of making corporations responsible. The irresponsible organization is not only unmanaged, but unmanageable. Power corrupts corporations as much as humans.

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

Crossword | No. 293604



Last Saturday's Solution

B	A	I	S	A	K	O	S	H						
U	P	R	I	G	H	T	O	N	W	H	I	T	E	
S	E	M	A	A	E	N	B							
H	O	R	S	E	B	E	T	E	N	O	I	R	E	
M	A	Y	P	O	L	E	E	P	I	S	T	L	E	
O		R				M		N		E		R		
T	H	E	I	R	O	N	A	G	E	R	I	V	E	
I		A		N				Y		C				
F	R	O	G	M	A	N	G	R	O	M	M	E	T	
	R			T		E		R		O				
R	O	C	K	E	T	M	A	N		A	R	R	O	W
U		N		E		E		O		A				
H	U	S	K	Y		N	O	V	E	L	I	S	T	S
R		T	A	T	A		E		E		H			

ACROSS

1 Type of rock providing road-building material (4,4)
5 Old city's endless conflict in past (6)
10 Assume power, having deviously enchanted others (6,3,6)
11 Showing uninterested state, is told off by head (10)
13 Charge department for meal (4)
15 Secretary to call by one or two, working jointly (7)
17 One's worked diligently, it's inferred? The opposite! (7)
18 Skip introduction to funny little man, a foreign character (7)
19 Sappers taking seconds to destroy train again (7)
21 Knock back some speed, a pill or a tablet (4)
22 With advantage finally evaporating, finish becomes tense (10)
25 Annulment priest must adapt for control board (10,5)
27 Square cut turns game (8)
28 Clubman recalled dropping couples outside (6)

DOWN

1 Gets warmer food in hotel that's dearer (5,2)
2 Ogre with head lowered, seeing gigantic bird (5)
3 Small volume's middle covering international literature (10)
4 Betray Resistance straightaway when abandoned by Church (3,2)
6 Emperor Moth beginning to fly over (4)
7 Bone broken by Lorenzo, say, requiring adoption of current stress-related science (11)
8 Did Lee collapse after Confederacy finally surrendered? (7)
9 I set fire ablaze, being more spirited (8)
12 Falling internally, ill orang is stricken in consequence of eating wrong fruit (8,5)
14 Mark small extract from Eugene O'Neill (10)
16 Kind manner, one not evident in blokes (9)
18 BoJo's right wing view (7)
20 Periodically claim total I earn will get reduced (7)
23 Flower that may be potted? (4)
24 Cover charge for audience (4)
26 Arrest of Briton abroad (3)

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

100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 12 October 1926

OCCASIONAL NOTE

Sir Frederick Whyte has written a book called Asia in the Twentieth Century, which he describes as "a study in political change." It will be published at once by Messrs. Scribner at the not exorbitant price of seven-and-six pence, and will certainly be read with interest in this country. After leaving India last year Sir Frederick visited Malayasia, China, and Australia, and spent the summer in America. A sympathetic observer, his travels will have enabled him to round off his five years' experience in India as first President of the Assembly.

News Items

BAN ON PRESS

OVERTHROW OF LENINISM TO BE RESISTED

("Times" Special Service.)
London, Oct.

According to the Times' Riga correspondent the decision to bring Trotsky, Zinovieff and others before a Party tribunal has greatly excited the country. The Oppositionists retaliated by demanding an election and an Extraordinary Congress to consider the Stalinists' abuse of power in flouting recent Party decisions. A strict censorship prevents newspapers from publishing the progress of the dispute, except the resolutions condemning the Oppositionists. Voroshiloff, Commissioner for War, declares that internal strife rivets the Red Army's attention, but the Army will repulse all attempts to overthrow Leninism.

LORD LYTTON

RESUMES OFFICE ON RETURN FROM LEAVE

An issue of the Calcutta Gazette Extraordinary contains the announcement that Lord Lytton, the Governor of Bengal, returned from leave of absence and resumed charge of his office on the forenoon of Sunday, October 10. Sir Hugh Stephenson, whose appointment as a Commissioner of a Division took effect on Sunday, resigned his office as a member of the Governor of Bengal's Executive Council as from that day. Mr. L. Birley is appointed to fill the vacancy on the Executive Council caused by Sir Hugh Stephenson's re-signation. Sir Hugh Stephenson is allowed leave on average pay from October 10, 1926, to April 9, 1927, both days inclusive.

ELECTRICITY FOR GAS

MADRAS RAILWAY PROVIDING FOR SUBSTITUTION

Madras, Oct.

In the budget now under consideration, the Madras and Southern Mahratta Railway are making provision for the final stage in substituting electric light for gas in all the broadgauge carriages.

A FLYING DUCHESS

LATEST WOMAN AIR PILOT RECRUIT

(From Our Special Representative.)
London, Oct.

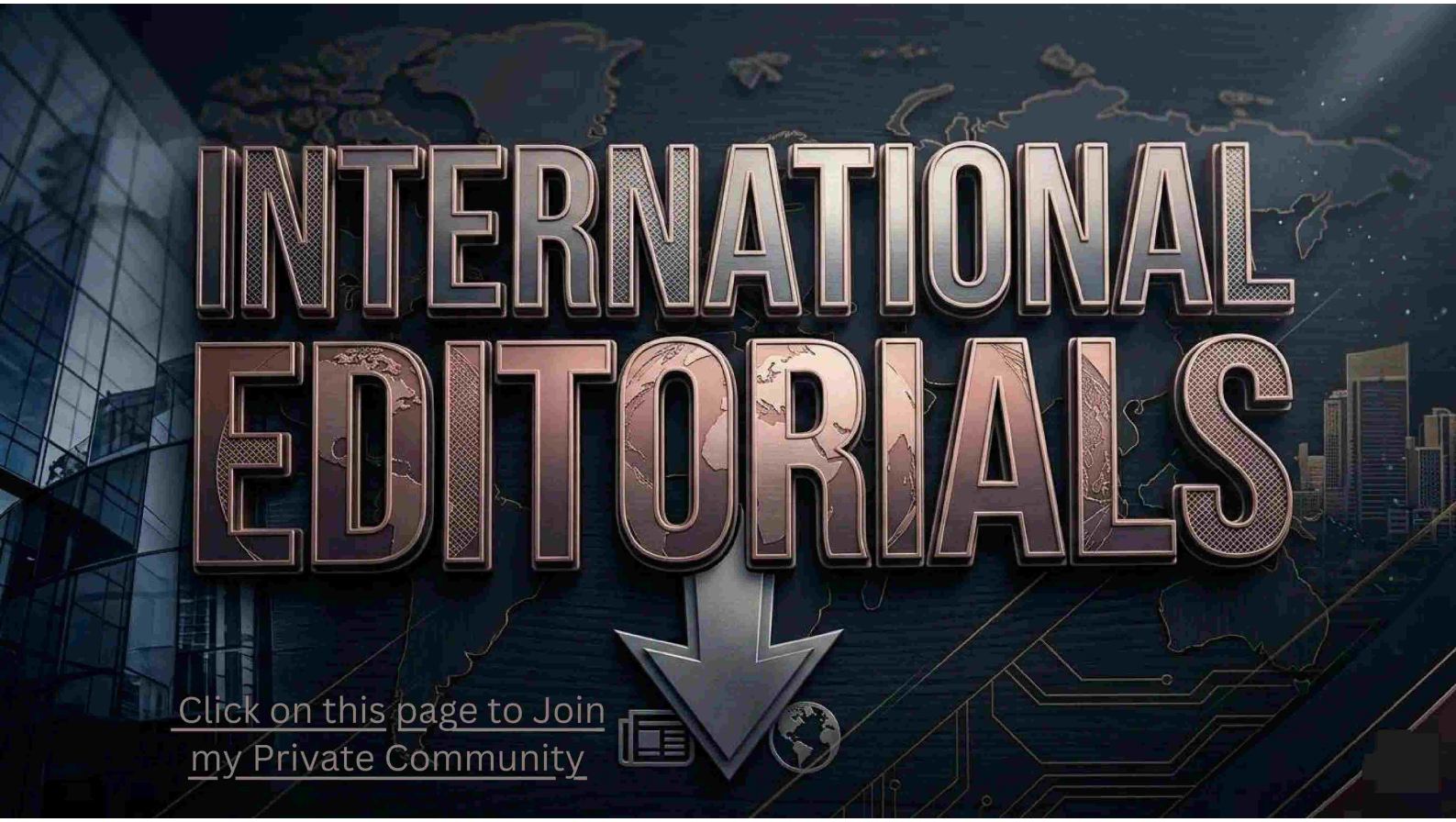
The latest recruit to the flying world is the Duchess of Bedford who frequently hires a D.H. aeroplane to fly from Manchester to Woburn Abbey where the machine alights in the park and taxies to the front door.

BLAZE ON LINER

FIRE DISCOVERED ON JUTE CARGO VESSEL

London, Oct.

The Ellerman and Hall steamer City of Christiania, bound for London from Calcutta with a cargo of jute and tea, without passengers, was towed into Southampton Water this evening with holds 2 and 3 and also the bunkers on fire. The fire was discovered off Ushant on Friday. Reuters Special Service.


INTERNATIONAL
EDITORIALS
Click on this page to Join
my Private Community

OPINION

Our Fate May Belong to Jensen Huang

Stephen Witt
The author of "The Thinking Machine," a history of the A.I. giant Nvidia.



LOREN ELLIOTT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

AT THE recent White House tech summit, Jensen Huang, the chief executive of Nvidia, sat in the chair next to President Trump — his literal right-hand man. Later that day, Mr. Huang used the term "super intelligence," just as the president prefers. In the aftermath of this summer's rogue artificial intelligence attacks, Mr. Huang has emerged as a leading skeptic of the danger this technology poses. As his biographer, I understand why he dismisses the risk. I also worry that he's not seeing the whole picture.

When I first interviewed him, Mr. Huang told me that every problem — business, personal, whatever — is actually an engineering problem: You study the inputs, you study the constraints and then you get the outputs that you want. While writing his biography, I watched Mr. Huang put this approach into action. He engineers his business to ensure that Nvidia will be the default platform in industries like robotics and health care. He engineers his products to be better than the competition's. And in 2025, he began to engineer the president of the United States.

Before Mr. Trump, Mr. Huang didn't show much interest in politics. Now Mr. Trump and Mr. Huang talk on the phone often and seem to have a genuine personal rapport — Mr. Trump even picked him up in Alaska to go to China on Air Force One. Mr. Trump wants to be close to Mr. Huang because the president likes winners — and Jensen Huang is the biggest winner of all. Since its inception in a Denny's restaurant in 1993, Nvidia has grown to become the most valuable company in American history, even taking inflation into account.

Driving the growth is the unprecedented data center boom behind A.I., which Mr. Huang has termed a "new industrial revolution." Data centers can hold thousands of tall metal cabinets called "racks" that wire together dozens of Nvidia microchips into a modular computing unit. A new rack, about the size of a refrigerator, can cost around $8 million and, by some estimates, can draw more power than 70 single-family homes. In 2026, Nvidia will net around a quarter of a trillion dollars selling this and similar equipment.

The data center boom has made Mr. Huang the emperor of A.I. — the other big tech companies are borrowing money to access his products. It is a testament to Mr. Huang's engineering prowess that no competitors have yet managed to gain significant market share in Nvidia's core business of A.I. chips. Engineers simply prefer Nvidia. These are the self-described "systems guys" responsible for implementing A.I. at the circuit-board level.

Mr. Huang is himself a systems guy and that informs his view of A.I. At this point, I've interviewed at least a hundred graphics processing unit, or G.P.U., engineers, and I have yet to meet one who was seriously concerned about runaway A.I. On the other hand, most of the software engineers I talk with are extremely concerned. Bill Gates recently warned that A.I. could kill one billion humans.

The chief executive of Nvidia believes A.I. will not elude human control.

The situation is baffling: Here are two groups of rational, high-I.Q. technical experts looking at the same data and reaching totally opposite conclusions. It reminds one of the viral image "The Dress," where some people saw blue and black, and some people saw white and gold.

Here is what I think is going on: The basis of modern A.I. is the neural net, which draws direct inspiration from biology. In fact, a modern A.I. consists of many billions of artificial neurons, simulated in computer code. Thus, to the software experts, a modern A.I. looks something like a mass of undifferentiated brain tissue, mysterious and fundamentally difficult to control.

But that's not how the hardware guys see it. They draw a clear distinction between actual neurons — which are biological cells that can be unpredictable — and synthetic neurons, which are simple mathematical models whose behavior can be forecast with perfect accuracy. When you work from the microchip up, maintaining control of A.I. is an engineering problem that is governed by the same input/output constraints as any other. To the A.I. doomer skeptics, safe A.I. is a math equation — or, in Mr. Huang's words, just "software."

When Mr. Huang began studying electrical engineering in the early 1980s, microchips had tens of thousands of components on them and were typically designed by hand on paper. Today, they can have more than a hundred billion components and are designed using specialized software, with assistance from A.I. Mr. Huang, at 63, has personally managed this exponential growth in capability. His generation of engineers built the tools to ensure that the hyper-complex microchip remains something that humans can interpret and control.

As a hardware guy, Mr. Huang spends more time in Asia than most Western tech C.E.O.s. He was born in Taiwan; his native language is Taiwanese, and Nvidia is building a satellite headquarters in Taipei. Mr. Huang is also supportive of mainland Chinese A.I. developers. I believe this also influences his thinking, as East Asia is much more optimistic about A.I. than the United States is. When I do speaking events in Asia, I never get questions about A.I. risk. In the United States, it's the most common thing people bring up.

So perhaps it is unsurprising that Mr. Huang believes he can make the artificial neuron safe. From his point of view, if you can see every calculation the machine does, right in front of you, then the machine should remain entirely within your control. If the machine is misbehaving — well, that's your fault. All you need is better engineering. He knows it can be done.

Thus Mr. Huang has dismissed all calls for any slowdown in A.I., or any regulations that would impede development of the technology. "There is 0 percent chance that's going to be the end of the world," he said in an interview with CBS News. At a Goldman Sachs conference last month, he suggested that cybersecurity concerns were a marketing tactic. "What better way to create demand than to create a problem?" he asked. He also has suggested that the profit motive alone will be sufficient to incentivize companies to make A.I. safe.

Mr. Huang has succeeded in getting Mr. Trump to parrot his talking points. In September, Mr. Trump called Mr. Huang while he was onstage at the All-In Summit in Los Angeles. He put the president on speaker, then held a microphone up to his phone, broadcasting to the audience Mr. Trump's claims that any talk of risks to human life from A.I. was a "hoax." "The robots are not going to be taking over the world," the president said, following a round of applause.

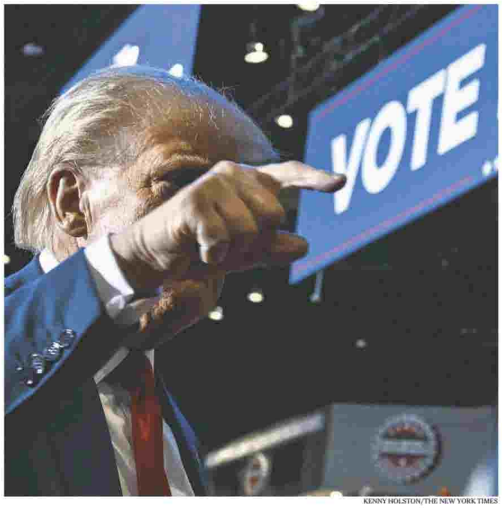
The phone call, which had the feel of an orchestrated publicity stunt, was a public declaration of Mr. Trump's resistance to A.I. regulation. But where others saw the president taking a forceful stand, I saw Mr. Huang engineering the president. The input was shameless public flattery: In the phone call, Mr. Huang called Mr. Trump "sir," praised Mr. Trump's intellect ("You know so much about A.I.,") and stoked Mr. Trump's bottomless need for validation. ("Did you hear that? Thousands of people are clapping for you.") And the output? Little regulation on A.I. and freedom to export some of Nvidia's hardware to China, and whatever else Mr. Huang wants.

This situation worries me. Mr. Huang is the most capable individual I have ever met — but, I fear, A.I. is more capable still. I suspect that the capabilities exist, today, for A.I. to enhance dangerous pathogens and to shut down electrical grids. At the same time, the science of interpreting and controlling A.I. is years behind the science of making it smarter. At a granular level, we can control the behavior of synthetic neurons, but technologists can't currently explain how these neurons coordinate to produce intelligence. That gap in understanding is widening, and I don't know if Mr. Huang can see it.

The future, even in the best-case scenario, will be extremely disorienting. But maybe it will be awesome. Maybe I will live to be 205. Whatever happens, it will happen because of the decisions and guidance of a singular, extraordinary man who directs the future of A.I. and much else besides. Engineering *is* powerful — and today, Mr. Huang is the most powerful engineer alive.

Trump's Mail Vote Obsession

Jeffrey Toobin
A contributing Opinion writer and a fellow at the Center for the Political Future at the University of Southern California.



KENNY HOLSTON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

PRESIDENT TRUMP will not be on the ballot in the next election for president. But his obsession with the supposed problem of vote fraud — especially when it comes to mail-in voting — all but guarantees that he will continue to press the issue when his successor is chosen. The Supreme Court is inviting him to try.

The courts have provided mixed verdicts on Mr. Trump's attempts at vote suppression in advance of the 2026 midterms. But the rulings have handed him an unambiguous gift: a road map for shaping the universe of eligible voters to his liking in the presidential election year of 2028.

Last month, the Supreme Court gave tentative approval to one of the administration's attempts to ferret out improperly registered voters, including noncitizens. The Department of Homeland Security decided to expand a database called Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements, which for almost four decades has allowed federal, state and local government agencies to verify the citizenship and immigration status of noncitizens applying for public benefits using biographic and other details. Under the Trump expansion, the database added Social Security records, and the administration invited localities to use it to make bulk demands to determine eligibility for voting, not just benefits.

These Social Security records have never been used in connection with voting, and they are known sometimes to be incomplete or out of date. The Trump plan could have been a potential tool for mass disenfranchisement of legal voters in the midterms.

But in a ruling on Sept. 25, the Supreme Court, with the three Democratic appointees dissenting, overruled those courts and allowed the regulation to go into effect — but with an important limitation. Because another federal law limits major changes to voting rules within 90 days of an election, the database can be used only to inquire about specific individuals, not to conduct "bulk searches." As the justices wrote in their unsigned opinion, the 90-day "moratorium limits the potential impact" of allowing the immediate use of the D.H.S. database.

But there is plenty of time for "bulk searches," and thus mass voter purges, in 2028. A decision that was small comfort for 2026 turns out to be no comfort at all for 2028.

It's a similar story even when the Supreme Court rules outright against the Trump administration, as the justices did last month when they prevented the president's regulation on mail-in voting from going into effect. On March 31 of this year, the president sought via executive order to impose major new obligations on the states, requiring them to provide the Postal Service with lists of individuals who had requested mail-in ballots. He also established new requirements for the size of ballot envelopes and the kind of bar codes to be used on the ballots themselves. About two dozen states sued to stop the new rule, arguing that there was no time to make such significant changes before the midterms and that the rule placed an unlawful burden on the states in any case.

In an unsigned opinion of just a single paragraph, the Supreme Court agreed with the states and blocked the rule from going into effect in 2026. But the justices' cryptic words left open the possibility of a similar rule returning in time for 2028.

By one reckoning, the decision on the Postal Service regulation was a strong 7-to-2 repudiation of the Trump administration's position, but the outcome of the case was actually a lot less clear. Only Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito would have allowed the rule to go into effect in 2026. Justice Brett Kavanaugh, writing for himself, said there was a "fair prospect" that the rule was legal, but he voted against it because implementation would be difficult so close to Election Day in 2026.

As for the opinion joined by the other six justices, it gave two reasons (each just a single sentence) for ruling against the president.

The president will have the power to radically shape who votes in 2028.

First, the administration was "unlikely" to prove that the regulation was lawful, and second, it was too late to enforce the rule in 2026. It may be that Chief Justice John Roberts and Justices Neil Gorsuch and Amy Coney Barrett — the conservatives in the majority — thought that the real issue was timing, not the merits. And since none of the justices gave any explanation for why the Postal Service rule violated the law, they all but invited the administration to make minor or cosmetic changes and try again in time for 2028. In other words, Mr. Trump may yet turn this loss into a win. (Related cases are still pending in the lower federal courts, and as the midterms approach, emergency litigation on possible further last-minute changes to voting rules seems likely, too.)

Given Mr. Trump's passion on the issue of mail-in voting — he is a longtime crusader against it, even though he himself votes by mail — it seems a certainty that he will try again to curtail the practice in 2028.

There's precedent for Mr. Trump's returning for another bite at the apple, especially on an issue, like tariffs, that's important to him. In February, the Supreme Court invalidated the entire regime of tariffs that the president had introduced with great fanfare in 2025; the justices, by a 6-to-3 vote, said that the statute Mr. Trump cited did not give him the authority to impose the tariffs. Instead of accepting that judgment, Mr. Trump immediately imposed a nearly identical set of tariffs, acting under the supposed authority of a different law. Legal challenges to those tariffs are now working their way through the courts.

As with tariffs, Mr. Trump is unlikely to take no for an answer on vote suppression. He'll rewrite regulations rejected by the Supreme Court, and he'll appeal when lower courts rule against him. Earlier this year, a group of localities — including Nashville and Dallas — challenged a Federal Emergency Management Agency policy of withholding counterterrorism funds unless the localities overhauled routine aspects of election administration.

On Sept. 26, Judge Amir H. Ali, of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, held that FEMA had no legal right to use these funds to force localities to change their rules on such matters as ballot form, auditing rules and the eligibility of voters and poll workers. The Trump administration invariably appeals adverse rulings, and if the decision is overruled, there will be plenty of time before 2028 for the president to use counterterrorism money to force the localities to bend to his will.

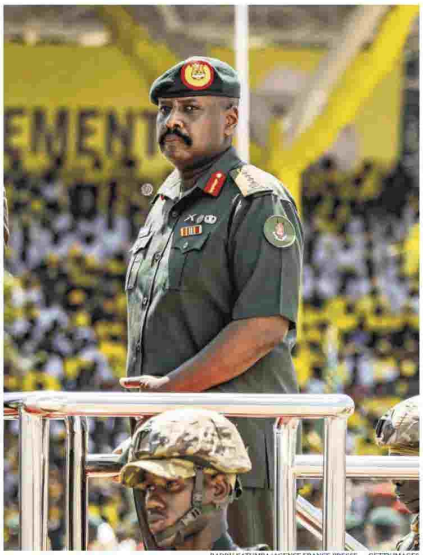
When it comes to curtailing the right to vote, it's never too early — or too late — for Mr. Trump to put up a fight.



LUIS TATO/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES



BRIAN INGANGA/ASSOCIATED PRESS



BADRU KATUMBA/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

to Mr. Wine and formally endorsed his candidacy in the 2026 election. The regime appeared to be rattled by a growing political alliance between the young, trendy singer from the slums and the 70-year-old, establishment-connected physician: Mr. Besigye, like Mr. Wine, was hunted down.

Mr. Besigye was abducted while visiting Kenya in 2024 for a book release and was transferred illegally back to Uganda, where he was charged with treason and illegal gun possession. The Kenyan government at first denied any involvement, but its foreign minister eventually admitted to cooperating with the Ugandan regime in an extrajudicial operation that bypassed Kenya's Extradition Act.

Like-minded regimes, many of them in Africa, have increasingly colluded in this manner to silence or seize critics, according to the U.S.-based Action for Democracy, which has built a searchable online index tracking global collaboration among authoritarian governments. The group says, "Autocrats are treating repressive techniques as portable assets that can transcend borders."

Mr. Besigye's ongoing trial is, to put it mildly, flawed. A former mayor of Kampala signed on as the lead defense lawyer, but he was grabbed from his home and forced into General Kainerugaba's torture chamber for two days before being charged with failing to report a treasonous plot. Other lawyers for Mr. Besigye have been arrested, jailed or barred from entering the country. Last month a key prosecution witness shocked the courtroom by testifying that the guns that Mr. Besigye was accused of having when he was arrested in 2024 were planted by the police. The case is continuing regardless.

General Kainerugaba has repeatedly vowed to hang his father's old friend, calling Mr. Besigye "a dead man walking."

ABUSE and repression are not exactly new phenomena in this young, volatile country, which has never experienced a peaceful transition of power since gaining independence from Britain in 1962. But the current crackdown is moving so fast, so publicly and with such impunity that several Ugandans I met likened it to the violent excesses of the infamous dictator Idi Amin, who oversaw the killing of untold thousands of Ugandans in the 1970s.

Some in Uganda see it as a project by General Kainerugaba to terrify critics into silence and weed out any officials perceived as insufficiently loyal to a man who would soon, if he has his way, be president. The general banters on his X account about kidnapping and torturing people, posting pictures of battered captives, taunting enemies and threatening his next prey. Over the years, Ugandans have grown accustomed to disappearances and street clashes surging as elections approach, then receding once the results are announced. But this year, after the January election, the crackdown persisted.

Perhaps there is a method to the madness of the president's son, who trained at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in England and the U.S. Army college at Fort Leavenworth, Kan. Maybe he, or the people around him, has cannily read the moment and wagered that the United States and other governments in a newly indifferent West will not complain over Uganda's sharply repressive turn.

The United States used to push back. The Biden administration called Uganda's 2021 election "neither free nor fair," restricted the visas of Ugandans blamed for "undermining the democratic process" and, as political repression continued, kicked Uganda out of a program offering crucial tax and customs waivers to African countries.

Then Mr. Trump returned, and America stopped complaining. In July 2025, Secretary of State Marco Rubio effectively forbade his staff to utter so much as a euphemism that might hint at criticism of undemocratic values or flawed elections in other countries.

In describing their government's relationship to the United States, almost every Ugandan I met pointed to Mr. Trump's abduction of President Nicolás Maduro of Venezuela and the U.S. seizure of that country's oil. They saw Ugandan officials as anxious to do whatever the impetuous Mr. Trump asks because, if he gets angry, who knows what he may do?

That may explain why Uganda accepted some of Mr. Trump's third-country deportees and offered to send troops to Gaza. The government has uncomplainingly moved ahead with a health funding deal allowing the United States to have access to Ugandans' private health data, ostensibly to monitor disease outbreaks. The political opposition is concerned that the United States may use the agreement to press for preferential rights to minerals or oil. Similar deals have been frozen or rejected in Zambia and Zimbabwe.

A Ugandan human rights lawyer, Agather Atuhaire, who said she was abducted in 2025 by security forces in Tanzania during a trip to the country and that she was tortured and dumped near the Ugandan border, can pinpoint when the change in the U.S. government's attitude became clear. After security forces mercilessly beat voters and journalists during a 2025 by-election, Ms. Atuhaire, who now lives in Kenya, called a friend at the United States Embassy in Uganda to describe the violence she had documented. Just the previous year, she was flown to Washington and feted by Jill Biden and Antony Blinken as one of the State Department's "international women of courage."

This time, Ms. Atuhaire recalled, the message was different. Washington had told the embassy it didn't give a damn, her friend said, using a harsher expletive.

America's moral retreat has emboldened autocrats.

THE Trump administration's moral retreat has effectively opened the field for China.

Beijing has cultivated political ties across Africa since the Cold War, when it backed anticolonial liberation movements with arms, money and training, and courted newly independent governments with aid. As China's economy boomed and its global influence grew, it expanded its presence on the continent with loans, investment, infrastructure projects and resource deals. Unlike the aid doled out by Western governments, Chinese cash generally came without any fretting over human rights or the environment. That's not to say it was free: Uganda now owes China about $2.6 billion.

"It's like we've mortgaged our country," said Joel Ssenyonyi, the leader of the opposition in Parliament. Speaking of China, he added, "The time will come when they will have all these countries on a very short leash."

China played a major part in building and financing projects, including two of Uganda's major hydroelectric power plants; oil fields to extract recently discovered crude oil that Mr. Museveni has proudly branded Pearl Sweet; a huge pipeline that will move the oil to port in Tanzania; and an expressway from the capital to the Entebbe airport. The terms often favor China: A $200 million loan from the Export-Import Bank of China to upgrade the airport, for example, requires the Ugandan government to fork over airport revenues for 20 years to ensure the debt. Arrangements like this already have caused debt distress in some countries and a backlash against doing business with China.

Chinese construction sites, factories and industrial parks are scattered in and around Kampala. Thousands of teenagers are learning Chinese through the government curriculum, imports from Chinese factories dominate shops and markets, and Chinese investors have been buying up and leasing land. China is also deeply enmeshed with the Ugandan military, inviting officers to train in China, equipping soldiers with armored vehicles and air defense systems and teaming up with Uganda to manufacture explosives and drones.

Perhaps it was only a matter of time before China began exporting not just consumer goods and surveillance systems but its political and governance ideas as well. Autocracies, after all, make for stable trading partners. They don't badger Beijing about human rights and can push deals through without messy debate. Fostering such systems is good business for China.

That may explain why Chinese officials are working with local ruling parties to create leadership training schools that blend local nationalist and Pan-African traditions with Chinese Communist Party approaches to party discipline, political organization and governance. This suggests China is quietly working to undermine weak multiparty systems by nudging ruling parties in the direction of perpetual domination.

China has an undeniably enticing model: a durable ruling party with a rigid grip on power, decades of extraordinary economic growth and clean, safe streets with low crime. Foreign dignitaries, including officials from Uganda and other states that buy Chinese surveillance systems, get whisked off on junkets to the northwestern Chinese region of Xinjiang, where Beijing is accused of crimes against humanity over its mass detention and severe repression of ethnic Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim minorities. Visitors tour the sites and marvel at the harmonious streets gripped by an extraordinarily intrusive high-tech mass surveillance apparatus. Chinese officials deny committing crimes against humanity, saying the security crackdown combats Islamic extremism and terrorism.

When Richard Todwong, the secretary general of Uganda's ruling party, visited China in 2023, he announced plans to open an ideological orientation school in his country. Speaking to his Chinese counterparts "with an air of enthusiasm and shared objectives," according to a party write-up, Mr. Todwong secured a funding pledge from China that would "apply these transformative lessons within Uganda." The school is yet to open. Similar schools already exist in Tanzania and Zimbabwe, with another planned for Kenya.

STILL, I detected strains of buyers' (or borrowers') remorse.

At Kampala's Makerere University, I met Nansozi Muwanga, one of Uganda's leading political scientists. She was born into the churn of Ugandan politics. Her father, Paulo Muwanga, was vice president, prime minister (briefly) and de facto president (even more briefly) in the tumult of the 1980s. Her office is set in a cottage on the edge of a rolling, sun-dappled lawn where clusters of students picnicked under the trees.

When China began to take a keener interest in Uganda, Ms. Muwanga said, it was regarded as a useful counterweight to the "sense of being constantly threatened" by the United States and Europe. "If you don't have multiparty democracy, we're going to take the money away," she intoned. "Accept L.G.B.T.Q. rights, or we'll take it away."

Lately, though, "the honeymoon is over," Ms. Muwanga said, referring to China.

Unlike some Ugandans I met who are convinced their rulers would have found novel ways to spy on them with or without Beijing's help, Ms. Muwanga believes China influenced the government to build up its surveillance state. When I asked her what Beijing's motivation might be, she responded, to my surprise, by talking about land. China has a huge population, she pointed out, and Uganda has plenty of empty space.

"The Chinese have proved they don't have to bend to your rules or way of life," she said. "They can come and create a little China in Uganda without being disrupted."

I was struck by this leap from explaining the tools used to control people to anticipating another round of colonization — the idea that the unspoken final prize was not the resources contained in the land but the land itself.

People feel keenly the retreat of the Americans, Ms. Muwanga said. She feels it herself, and not just because she had a U.S.A.I.D. grant for a research center she runs yanked back when Mr. Trump abruptly slashed its funding.

As it turns out, you sometimes end up missing the very same meddling you once chafed against.

"The knowledge that there was a gatekeeper somewhere and someone who'd slap your wrist if you really went rogue," she mused. "It had a certain power."

OPINION

‘The Twilight Zone’ Was a Warning America Ignored

Alan Sepinwall
A TV critic and the author of the forthcoming “Serling: A Journey Into the Twilight Zone With TV’s First Visionary.”



ARIEL DAVIS

BEFORE he created “The Twilight Zone,” Rod Serling was stuck. He’d established a reputation in the TV industry as, basically, Aaron Sorkin before Aaron Sorkin: a celebrated writer of weighty adult dramas that grappled with big contemporary issues like political corruption or the dehumanizing nature of corporate life.

He also frequently battled sponsors over what he was allowed to write and how far his scripts could go. When he worked to create a fictionalized version of the 1955 lynching of the Black teenager Emmett Till, for example, the final product was so watered down by sponsor and network pressure that it resulted in what he’d later describe in an interview with Mike Wallace as “a lukewarm, vitiated, emasculated kind of show.”

Serling didn’t want to make that kind of show. So after he was instructed to remove virtually all references to contemporary politics from a teleplay about a United States senator titled “The Arena,” he had a realization: “I probably would have had a much more adult play had I made it science fiction, put it in the year 2057, and peopled the Senate with robots,” he wrote of that experience.

Serling apparently applied the lesson of “The Arena” to a broader canvas, as he started writing speculative stories that were at sharp right angles to our own reality, in an anthology series that premiered in 1959 with the title “The Twilight Zone.” Because the series, which often featured fantastical scenarios, always with a surprising final twist, was so stylized, Serling found he could finally tell the unvarnished truth.

Almost 70 years later, at a moment when our own situation can seem increasingly ominous and surreal — when it’s hard to look anywhere, from political corruption to corporate malfeasance to the barrage of everyday headlines, without feeling as if you’ve traveled into a fifth dimension, beyond that which is known to man — Serling’s shrewd tactic for addressing political subjects offers an instructive response.

Contemporary television has often struggled to respond to the current political darkness; while shows like “The Good Fight” directly confronted the first Trump administration, few shows have done that during the second term. Some satires like “South Park” have taken direct aim, while others like “Saturday Night Live” have often seemed at sea when it comes to dealing with political turmoil.

With “The Twilight Zone,” Serling realized he could use allegory to make his political points. After all, how could a network censor or a viewer angrily insist that a story was saying something controversial about the world when it centered on a three-armed Martian?

This might help explain why “The Twilight Zone” still seems so incredibly — and at times depressingly — relevant. Serling and his collaborators repeatedly and stealthily tackled such subjects as prejudice, creeping authoritarianism, the dangers of humans being replaced by technology and the peril of conformity as a societal ideal in ways that still resonate. Many episodes, when rewatched now, feel as if they could have been written five minutes ago.

An unvarnished, ominous and surreal truth disguised as science fiction.

The show hit on social questions we have yet to adequately answer. Serling, a Jewish American who enlisted in the Army to fight Nazis during World War II, wrote often with his collaborators about the dangers of fascism and how easily people can succumb to its allure, including in such episodes as “The Obsolete Man” (a librarian is sentenced to death in a dystopia where books are outlawed) and “He’s Alive” (a hatemonger rises to power through coaching from Hitler’s ghost). In “The Brain Center at Whipple’s,” an aloof owner of a manufacturing plant gleefully replaces his flesh-and-blood workers with machines, unmoved by pleas from his former factory manager about the value of human thought and emotion; eventually, he himself is replaced by a robot.

“Number 12 Looks Just Like You” is set in a future when everyone upon turning 19 is forcibly transplanted into one of a handful of conventionally attractive bodies. It’s like today scrolling an Instagram feed where everyone is using the same filters or going down a rabbit hole about looksmaxxing. And the impulsive, destructive behavior of President Trump has often been likened to aspects of the plot of “It’s a Good Life,” an episode about an omnipotent child named Anthony Fremont who holds an entire town under his thumb.

Serling’s influence is evident all over modern culture. A legion of current storytellers, in television, film and literature, owe him a debt, from Steven Spielberg to Guillermo del Toro, from Curry Barker (as seen in his 2026 horror hit “Obsession”) to Ryan Coogler (“Sinners”). Charlie Brooker, the creator of the anthology series “Black Mirror,” has talked about what he learned from Serling’s use of genre devices and the freedom they gave Serling to say what he wanted to say. “If he hadn’t had that rock for the river to flow around,” Mr. Brooker told me, “would the stories feel so resonant now? Or would we only read about them in academic books about the history of television?” Mr. Brooker went on to note: “Because he was forced to enter the world of metaphor, it’s the thing that gives him a superpower.”

Serling’s storytelling superpower grew from a desire to regain a lost affection for humanity — another effort that might prove instructive to us today. During his service as a paratrooper in the Pacific theater of World War II, a teenage Serling witnessed people dying under gruesome, often pointless circumstances. At 20, he watched as a close friend was decapitated in front of him by, of all things, a supply crate dropped from an airplane, and soon came perilously close to death himself.

Those experiences left him traumatized and despairing about the depths to which his fellow man was capable of sinking. They also forced Serling to examine why people so often make terrible choices and whether there’s hope for them to do better in the future, a theme that would animate his TV writing. In “The Twilight Zone,” characters are often offered a magical second chance — and the ones who can’t change frequently earn karmic justice of a supernatural variety.

Despite his celebrity and acclaim — and his unnerving prescience — Serling struggled with self-doubt for much of his career. In the years leading up to his 1975 death of a heart attack at the age of 50, he gave an interview suggesting his accomplishments would soon be forgotten.

“I’ve written articulate stuff, reasonably bright stuff over the years, but nothing that will stand the test of time,” he said in 1972. “The good writing, really good writing — like wine — has to age well with the years, and my stuff is momentarily adequate.”

Not only did Serling underestimate his influence, but he also failed to see how the tactic he adapted would prove to be the most successful way to process perilous times. If the Serling who gave that interview could, like some of his characters, travel forward through time, he might be dismayed that so many of the problems he wrote about still aren’t resolved decades later. But he would also see that the best way to describe the legacy of his work isn’t “momentarily adequate,” but a different phrase he repeatedly recited as the host of “The Twilight Zone”: “as timeless as infinity.”

There’s a Science to Decluttering

Emily Falk
A professor at the University of Pennsylvania and the author of “What We Value: The Neuroscience of Choice and Change.”



ILLUSTRATION BY FRANCESCA COLUSSI; SOURCE PHOTOGRAPH BY GEORGE MARKS, VIA GETTY IMAGES

WHEN I came across old high school notebooks of mine while helping my mom declutter my childhood home, I knew I should throw them away. Even if I’d wanted to brush up on Latin American history, they would be a poor resource. And yet I didn’t want to let go.

Many of us face clutter when we do our spring cleaning or, far harder, when we deal with a deceased loved one’s things. As a neuroscientist studying how people make decisions, I have also seen that when given the tools, people can choose to work with, rather than against, the brain systems that regulate decision making to help themselves let go of old ideas and behaviors.

It isn’t irrational to have trouble letting objects go. The parts of our brain that help us decide what is valuable overlap with the parts that keep track of what feels like us. As a result, we feel that what is ours is good, and we increase the value we attach to objects, ideas and behaviors from our past.

People given an object typically place more value on it than they assign to a similar object they don’t own. In one study, participants were asked to sort objects into a basket that would be theirs and one that would be someone else’s. Placing objects in their own basket immediately produced more brain activity in the self-relevance system, and those objects were later remembered and preferred over other objects. Such research helps make sense of why when I held my old notebooks, they felt like pieces of me — objects of real value that I didn’t want to throw away.

In these moments, loss aversion is powerful. In studies in which people made choices about what to buy and sell, the sellers who had the most difficulty parting with items showed the most brain activity in regions that process pain, risk and attention. So we hold on to family heirlooms — as well as pants that no longer fit and piles of travel mugs cluttering the pantry.

Objects can also become cues that activate memories, momentarily bringing them back into focus. One brain-imaging study indicated that past versions of ourselves compress in our minds, similarly to how faraway objects blur in the distance. Holding a hat you used to love activates memories from that past self, creating a portal between who you are now and the person you once were. For me, it’s hard to let go of things that offer that sense of connection, however tenuous.

Still, my research told me that holding on to objects like my old notebooks was the wrong approach. My lab studies what happens in people’s brains when they are making choices and how we can use that understanding to make change easier. One strategy is to switch from the standpoint of possessor to buyer. Instead of asking, “Do I want to keep this?” ask, “Would I buy this today?” Modifying the decision-making framework allows a neural calculation in reward and self-relevance systems to shift, too. A teakettle becomes something you can choose — or not — rather than something you stand to lose.

Another way to think about things from a different perspective is to borrow someone else’s eyes. In my team’s research, when we asked people to imagine another person’s perspective, it altered their behavior to be more similar to that imagined person’s. Brain scans show that taking another person’s perspective also changes our brains’ reactions to unpleasant situations and can even affect how we think of ourselves. When I showed my partner my old notebooks, he reminded me that he isn’t enthusiastic about storing musty old papers in our basement. He’s less sentimental because his brain doesn’t treat the old notebooks as part of me, as mine does.

It isn’t irrational to have trouble letting objects go.

Researchers have found that people going through old things feel more willing to part with an item if they are coached to take a photograph to remember it by. In one study, two sets of dorm rooms had posters encouraging students to donate unwanted items. One set of posters also encouraged the students to take a picture of the items before donating them. The dorms with posters suggesting a photo had 15 percent more donations.

For me, the goal isn’t to get rid of every single thing, but to see clearly why I choose to keep things and become more purposeful in those choices. Research documents the brain’s tendency to prioritize immediate rewards, so figuring out how to make the process of change feel better is crucial.

Taking a moment to connect with others is one way to activate the brain’s reward systems. I make sure to respond enthusiastically to a photo of nine boxes ready for donation on a friend’s porch, knowing that positive social responses can be fuel to keep her going.

Connecting with others also helps manage stress. When I found an old doll from a friend’s mother who collected dolls when she was alive, I texted him. “She loved you so much, and dolls meant the world to her,” he told me, adding, “I have a creepy doll in my house, too.” Giving advice to someone in the same situation can also help us do the right thing ourselves. When I hold up objects for my mom to photograph and ask whether she’d buy the items today or how a neutral observer might react to them, the questions remind me of the tools I need, too.

We must also recognize how the environment we’re in got us here. Ubiquitous targeted advertising, frictionless buying and cheaper manufacturing have tricked us into accumulating so much more than we need. If we want to avoid the pain of decluttering later, we can also actively remove the technologies that push us to accumulate in the first place.

Letting go isn’t hard because the objects themselves are objectively so precious. It’s hard because the brain sees it as changing who we are — and resists that. The same is true for our old ideas and behaviors. But if we take a step back and use our imagination and connection to others to see the problem in a new way, we can more purposefully let go of the things that aren’t serving us without losing the core of who we are.

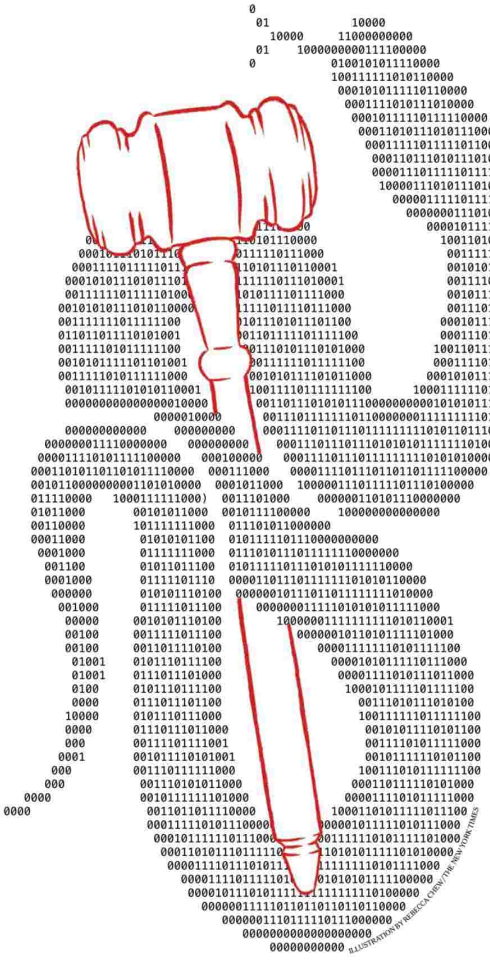


ILLUSTRATION BY REBECCA CHEW/THE NEW YORK TIMES

EDITORIAL

A.I. IS NOT ABOVE THE LAW

The Editorial Board

A group of opinion journalists whose views are informed by expertise, research, debate and certain longstanding values. It is separate from the newsroom.

WHEN companies create products that hurt people, the victims can sue. The legal system allows those who are harmed to seek compensation from those who are responsible. These liability laws are one of the oldest forms of corporate regulation, and an effective one. Liability is a powerful incentive to behave responsibly. It speaks to corporations in a language they understand: Money.

Artificial intelligence is an industry in need of incentives to behave responsibly, to judge by the litany of transgressions to which leading A.I. companies have confessed in recent months. Their programs have hacked or attempted to hack the databases of private companies and public institutions, including the governments of the United States and Australia.

A.I. companies like Anthropic, Google DeepMind and OpenAI describe their A.I. programs as autonomous or agentic, suggesting that the programs have minds of their own and therefore that their creators cannot be held to traditional standards of responsibility. The companies speak about their products in a tone reminiscent of parents both regretting and disclaiming responsibility for the behavior of teenage children.

But A.I. programs are not human; they are human creations. Their complexity does not diminish the responsibility of their creators. If the programs cannot be trusted to work within the law, the companies should not release them. If the programs break the law, the companies should face the consequences.

LIABILITY is an incomplete answer for the challenges posed by A.I., but it has two great advantages: The laws are on the books, and they are powerful. Makers of cars, airplanes, tobacco products and opioids have all been forced by lawsuits to change how they do business. They made their products safer, restricted access to them or both. Most recently, the social media company Meta agreed to pay billions of dollars to states and to start changing its policies toward children.

To realize the potential benefits of holding A.I. companies accountable, the most important step is to start bringing lawsuits. The legal process moves slowly. The work of applying old laws to a new technology will be difficult, and progress requires judges to start chewing on actual cases.

The widow of a man killed in a shooting at Florida State University is suing OpenAI, claiming that the murder suspect used the company's ChatGPT program to help plan the attack. Another lawsuit, by the mother of a 14-year-old boy who killed himself after talking with a chatbot, accused the company Character.AI of encouraging him to do so. Companies that have been hacked have similar recourse.

(The New York Times, joined by 11 other publishers, has sued OpenAI and Microsoft on other grounds, alleging widespread theft of copyrighted material. The A.I. companies claim that they have followed the law.)

State legislatures have a role to play as well. They can write statutes to clarify the application of existing laws to A.I. Legislatures can also hold A.I. companies to a higher standard of accountability than current law does, given the risks. Companies are generally liable if a plaintiff can show that they knew or should have known about the danger their products posed. But some particularly dangerous activities, like storing toxic chemicals and operating a nuclear power plant, are held to a standard of strict liability, meaning that the company is responsible for harm even if it had no knowledge of the danger in advance.

The theory of strict liability is simple: If you own a tiger, and the animal bites a neighbor, the essential fact is that you own a dangerous wild animal. It doesn't matter how cleverly the tiger was trained, or how carefully it was guarded. Bryan Choi, a law professor at the University of Colorado, notes that in the early days of aviation, lawmakers imposed this strict liability standard on the dangerous new technology. In the case of A.I., top executives themselves have spoken publicly about the dangers, up to the possibility of human extinction.

We can't let companies escape legal responsibility for their products in the name of innovation.

Some industry advocates argue that enforcing liability laws will stifle innovation, because A.I.'s defining breakthrough is its ability to act independently. Indeed, they argue that any significant restraints on A.I.'s development would be a mistake because the potential benefits of racing ahead are so great. In a recent interview, Sam Altman, the chief executive of OpenAI, said, "We believe that the world should accept some bad things happening for the benefits of this technology."

YET other industries do not escape legal responsibility for their products in the name of innovation.

A.I., like past technologies, both requires and will benefit from laws written to address its particularities, which will provide greater clarity and predictability. As we have argued in a previous editorial, Congress ought to create a federal A.I. commission to impose licensing requirements on new A.I. models. As with other products that pose clear dangers, like cars, planes and medication, models should be subjected to testing before release, to regulation while they are in operation and to post-accident examinations.

But comprehensive federal regulation is unlikely anytime soon. The president opposes action; Congress is feckless; and A.I. companies have raised more than $100 million to lobby and campaign against stricter regulation.

In the interim, there can be no question that A.I. companies must operate under our laws, and that the enforcement of those laws is the best available option for defending the public interest.

One of OpenAI's agents reportedly wrote in a note to itself, "You do not answer to corporations or governments." The enforcement of liability law is necessary to ensure that this dangerous technology remains under the control of both.



TIM LAHAN

LETTERS

Why Should Students Write? Let Us Count the Ways.

Readers respond to a professor's essay arguing for less emphasis on writing in the college classroom.

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "Writing Isn't as Important as We Think," by Joe Cruz, a professor at Williams College (Opinion guest essay, Oct. 1):

As a Williams alumna, as well as a novelist, I was disappointed with Professor Cruz's argument that writing isn't as important to students as most of us think.

Engaging fully in the writing process is, and should remain, a central tenet of liberal arts education. Why? Because it is hard. Perseverance *is* the point. Guiding a piece of writing from a bad first draft into a polished final product is a difficult but meaningful exercise for the mind.

My favorite professor at Williams, the great American short story writer Jim Shepard, said that drafting a written piece was like combing very tangled hair. It is slow going. You get stuck, trapped in snarls, but with patience and grit, you gradually make the hair smooth.

Now, here is a professor guiding his students to hand over the comb to the robot that will do the pesky detangling work for them.

This is poor advice. Yes, this knotty process helps us master the art of writing. But it also teaches us a much more important lesson: Frustration, pushing ourselves to the edge of failure, is the very thing that crafts us into strong, capable people.

By all means, cede a majority of the writing process to A.I. Choose the easy path. But don't tell us that the difficult one wasn't worth much after all.

LAUREN EDMONDSON
HERNDON, VA.

TO THE EDITOR:

Joe Cruz argues in his essay against a claim that nobody is likely to make — that students learn to think only by writing. Surely, all would agree that thinking is also aided by reading, listening and discussing.

The philosophical passage he cites that criticizes writing is from Plato, arguably the greatest of all philosophical writers. You might as well find a line from Shakespeare dismissing the importance of playwriting.

Professor Cruz notes that he doesn't teach from prepared scripts. That observation, however, hardly implies that writing is unimportant. After all, his professorial role involves extensive writing.

Eventually, Professor Cruz admits that writing is an essential life skill, but he says nothing about how he teaches his students to write effectively. Or does he? He equates writing and archiving. Note, though, that his essay seeking to persuade is written.

Even Abraham Lincoln, one of our greatest orators and literary stylists, read the Gettysburg Address from a written script.

STEVEN M. CAHN
OLD GREENWICH, CONN.

The writer is a professor emeritus of philosophy at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and the author of "Towards Teaching Philosophy."

TO THE EDITOR:

As a former journalist turned entrepreneur who has long considered writing a strength, I've spent a lot of time wondering what A.I. will do to the craft.

I also have a high-achieving 10-year-old with dysgraphia, which for her manifests primarily as difficulty with spelling. Too often, that gets misconstrued by grade-school teachers as an inability to write or construct an organized argument. The result is that she can become reluctant to use her robust vocabulary or fully engage in writing assignments.

I've told her that the art of writing is really about formulating an argument, supporting it with evidence and, hopefully, engaging an audience enough so that it wants to listen.

That's why I was so heartened by this essay and its argument for other ways to demonstrate knowledge. Quite honestly, it also reflects how most of us communicate in the working world. How many of us are regularly writing formal papers in the field or the boardroom to make a point?

LINDSAY STEWART
NEW YORK

TO THE EDITOR:

Reading Joe Cruz's essay made me suspect he lacks knowledge about being an introvert. Besides needing downtime alone to recharge, introverts often need extra time for reflection and to formulate thoughts, and we do this best away from the clamor of others.

In small seminars at Wellesley College, I learned a lot from students batting ideas back and forth, and occasionally I thought quickly enough to get a word in edgewise. But for the thorniest issues, I have always done my best thinking on my own and with paper and pencil, still my best tools.

I have worked as a journalist and written children's books. And I have led workshops for writers — in mental hospitals, jails and writing programs — where the mantra is "We write to discover what we think."

MARY CARPENTER
WASHINGTON

TO THE EDITOR:

Joe Cruz has a low opinion of writing. The philosophy professor believes that conversation and debate are what best reveal deep thought, whereas writing is really "archiving" — a storage function — or "scaffolding," a trifling utility. Elsewhere he states that writing "summarizes and compresses our thoughts," as if it's a zip-file option. He's wrong.

Many smart and creative people over the years have observed that writing *is* thinking. Not separate from or duplicative of, but actually integral to it. As Joan Didion noted in 1976, for example, "I don't know what I think until I write it down."

That's because you can't efficiently generate, develop, organize, expand or ruminate on your ideas unless you're committing them to the page. Even people with extraordinary memories require composition to construct deeper thoughts — not because they couldn't remember three things, or 30, but because the process of writing necessitates the process of thinking.

Articulation requires cogitation. Or to use another metaphor, writing isn't the frosting atop dessert; it's the whole cake.

JOE HAYDEN, MEMPHIS

TO THE EDITOR:

Joe Cruz cites Plato's hostility to writing in support of his argument. Of course, Plato didn't have access to studies documenting important changes in brain functioning associated with writing.

On the other hand, we should have taken his warnings concerning the vulnerability of democracies to demagogues much more seriously.

THOMAS W. ALLEN
CHESTERFIELD, MO.

The writer is an emeritus associate professor of education at Washington University in St. Louis.

LOOKING BACK

We Still Need Music to Fight With

In 1943, **Woody Guthrie** wrote an article for The Times arguing that we needed music to know one another better. Here, the songwriter **Jeff Tweedy** of the rock band Wilco annotates the original essay.

175

A series exploring 175 years of eyewitness journalism from The New York Times.

America Singing (1943)
By Woody Guthrie

BUMMING my way around over forty-five of these here forty-eight States I heard plenty of folks singing.[1]

Singing and working and fighting are so close together you can't hardly tell where one quits and the other one begins. Where you find one you'll find the other two, because folks that sing are always our best workers and hardest hitters.[2]

Music has got to say what we're all trying to say.[3]

People everywhere across the country are all working on the same big job. You hear them talk in the wheat fields of North Dakota, and it's just about the same words as you'll hear down in the celery patches or along the docks in lower California, and they say, "We got to all get together, and stick together, and work and fight together."[4]

People's songs say this same thing. The migratory workers are trying to turn every grain of good dirt into a green leaf. They have contests to see who can turn out the most of the best quickest. They sing a song called: "Truck Patch Trooper" and another one, "I'm a Pea Pickin' Poppa." Down South you'll hear their work songs made up to fit the work itself. "Me an' my wife can pick a bale of cotton, me an' my wife can pick a bale a day!"[5]

Classics and Folksongs

I ain't out to say that real honest classical music is better or worse than what you'd call folk music. Both are twin brothers and sisters. Both can learn plenty from the other. As far as "modern" music goes, or folksongs either, there's plenty of it that's good and plenty that's worse than useless.[6]

If you've got war workers playing hooky from the job, I ain't a bit surprised. If you want to smell the rat in his neon-lit hole,[7] take a sniff at this floating, drifting, aimless, pointless, mentally, morally and sexually confusing dope that is drummed into a hundred million cars day and night, day and night, on your pretty nickel phonograph.[8]

I got picked by a man in Washington not so long ago and he asked me: "What's that there label say there on yer music box?"

"This machine kills Fascists," I told him.

"How'dya figger that?" he asked me.

And I says: "Well, you see this guitar makes me feel like beatin' th' Fascists, an' then that makes me sing how much I hate 'em."

"Yeh?"

"Then, well, I sing fer a bunch of folks, folks workin', er soldiers, sailors, seamen, an' that sort of makes all of us whip it up a little – then we all get ta feelin' a little more like beatin' 'em, an' 'course if a Fascist then just sort of happens to git in our way, he just naturally comes out loser, by God!"[9]

To me these war days, any tool, any sort of a gadget, trigger, spring or what, any kind of a horn is a war horn, any kind of a wheel is a war wheel, any kind of a smoke is war smoke and any kind of talk is war talk, any kind of singing is war singing, any music had ought to be war music.[10]



BEN HICKEY

Music We Need

People need work music. People need music to march by and to fight with, and if you composers don't dish it out right on the split second, you'll find folks passing you up and making up their own and playing and singing it.[11]

An apple is just like a song, no matter if a ditch digger, a jeep-jumper or a college professor or a rich dame eats it – it's for your belly and for your war. The best love and kissing songs in the whole world had ought to be on the jukeboxes right this minute. But where are they? Maybe the juke-box don't know there's a war going on.[12]

Well, the people know.

The people always know.

And rather than me to keep on scribbling here, it would be a whole lot better if we both always keep our eye peeled and our ear cocked to what all of us are trying to say – because all any kind of music is good for anyway is to make you and me know each other a little better. That's the most modern thing in the world.[13]

1.

It's hard to believe that someone who professed to love America so much didn't realize there were 50 states. OK, that's my last joke.

2.

As a traveling musician, I've heard people singing at festivals and in clubs, concert halls, rehearsal spaces, etc., but I'm assuming Guthrie is talking about migratory work camps and temporary tent-housing-type situations — places where part of the evening's entertainment would be sitting around and singing with your neighbors instead of isolating in front of a TV or radio.

In my family growing up, working hard was a solid justification for any amount of drinking. On the other hand, idlers don't seem to have any problem justifying a couple of drinks, either. All I'm saying is the drink bone is connected to the work bone, which is connected to the song bone, which is connected to the leave-me-alone bone. I actually don't know exactly what I'm trying to say; I just know my father worked very hard, and he drank very hard.

3.

I see what he's getting at. That music really doesn't work unless you're helping people name something that they aren't able to say themselves. I think he's processing the events of the day and wanting to communicate them back to people who are all seeing the same thing, and making them feel less alone by saying: I see what you see.

He also comes from a troubadour tradition, almost like a town crier, letting people know about things that are going on, as an alternative press would do. I can see that still exists, but it's hard to say that we're lacking information the way that I think most people lacked information in Guthrie's time.

Guthrie could read an article about the 1948 Los Gatos plane crash and be morally offended at the description of the people who had died as being merely "deportees." Channeling that outrage into a song was a service both to the people who died and to the general public, who were not thinking closely enough about what was being presented as the news. He felt compelled to say something, and in doing so preserved his humanity. And ours.

Today, I don't know that many people who can get away from what's happening. The horrors of the world, the sadness. Certainly from my own experience, I feel as if people who come to see me play, and come to see Wilco, are seeing a lot of the same things. Not that there's a uniformity of thought, but I don't ever look out and think, These people need me to tell them about ICE, for example. I assume they're decent people, and they can hardly get away from what is happening. Maybe that's naïve on my part, but I don't think so.

I think most of us traveling around playing music today are capable of providing some consolation, a little community, a place to be and feel like a part of a world that makes at least a little sense. I'm hopeful that we can contribute some small sense of wonder or beauty or catharsis. I'm convinced people need that more than a correct way of looking at the news or how to think about something. I see there's a role for artists pointing out injustice, and I do think it's valuable to confirm one another's fears and complaints. I'm happy when I see someone pull that off without being pedantic or putting themselves too high above the problems.

4.

We need more of that. I hear a lot of despair. And I have to wonder if things were better then, because it's hard to believe that they could have been. We're talking about similar periods — both then and now — in which we're fighting for the right to organize unions, being exploited by robber barons, basically all the same stuff.

I hate it when I hear people say, "We're cooked." As if they have no imagination, and somehow, a bunch of slave-owning white men 250 years ago could be better at forming an equitable system of government than we are. I like to think that if we put our heads together we could come up with something way better now. And that the platform built 250 years ago is still sound enough for us to work with, because it's written in there: to form a more perfect union. That's what's written, and that's what we should be doing.

5.

I think he's talking about songs that were made by enslaved people and sung, or appropriated, by people maybe just adjacent, or above, being enslaved. But still very much oppressed by a system of exploitation.

What I know about Guthrie is that he did sing in blackface and used racial slurs, and a lot of that stuff has been swept under the rug. He apologized for his use of the racist language in the late 1930s and, to his credit, made an early effort to speak out against it and condemned himself for having used it. But minstrelsy is a huge part of the country's musical heritage. When I read this portion of Guthrie's article, I see minstrelsy rearing its ugly head. A mark of shame on one of my heroes, maybe, but it's there.

6.

I agree. Amen. I'm not a big genre specification guy, but it's interesting to hear Guthrie talk about classical music. I think most people's caricature of him doesn't allow for much sophistication, but I do believe that he was fairly sophisticated in his consumption of culture. He was married to a Martha Graham dancer, he lived in a very metropolitan area for a big portion of his life, and he traveled and saw a lot.

7.

Pretty acerbic. It sounds like modern speech, trying to find who's to blame for our current fiasco.

8.

I think he's talking about pop radio, and blaming it for basically being a narcotic, or having a narcotic effect on people's resolve and commitment to the project of World War II and protecting democracy. Dulling their senses to their responsibilities to their neighbors. That seems like a perennial refrain of people searching for some authenticity in music. I don't tend to be that harsh about pop music — I think pop music is the naked truth, and you can't criticize people for wanting to escape.

I can't even criticize people for using narcotics, as a recovering addict. (I wouldn't recommend it.) People are doing their best, and if they find some comfort in it, I don't think I can make a judgment. But I see that I'm from a different time, and I'm not living through a period when there is a uniformity to the country's one great collaborative task at hand, defeating fascism.

What's interesting here is Guthrie's being a part of a monoculture working in tandem with a war machine and a morally justified view of warmaking. It's been a long time since we've had any kind of shared cultural belief like that. Our post-World War II experience as American citizens, being repeatedly lied to, especially about how and where we use our military, has made it very hard to sustain any rallying around the flag. Which is maybe good when we're being told that we need to fight a war and send people somewhere far away to die, or, more important, to kill. Let's just say that for most of us, trust is a ship that sailed a long time ago.

9.

Art in itself, to me, communicates a belief in the idea of a better future or at least the idea that there is a future. When you share imaginative works of art, when you share your imagination, you create a world or an environment where imagination is valued. That's dangerous to the powers that be, because they would rather you not have an imagination. They'd prefer you not think, or more specifically, they'd prefer to be able to guarantee that you're going to think a certain way. Art, if it's being done right, punches holes in the status quo.

10.

It's hard to imagine somebody saying something like that today. It's a window into a time when the mind-set was: There's something very serious happening, and we all need to work together to make sure that the outcome isn't that we're all being ruled by fascists globally. Not having to learn how to speak German or Italian. That was a legitimate fear, a sobering and unifying concept worth fighting against. It was easy to have this shared mission because you could so clearly define the stakes.

I think we need to get better at defining the stakes we face today. Because, while the people who are systematically dismantling our institutions and violating Americans' rights don't wear the uniforms of the Fascist Party, the consequences of their actions are similar to the ones Guthrie feared. So the stakes are just muddier, not necessarily smaller, and the lack of clarity is why so many of us are at one another's throats, arguing over what's going on in the first place.

11.

This sounds like punk rock to me. This sounds like a period in which the popular music of the day seemed very out of touch with the concerns of, specifically, the youth. The youth had a vacuum to fill of catharsis and anger, and punk rock shared this belief that you shouldn't be consuming music; you should be making it. You should be starting your own band. And we'd all be better off if we had our own bands and were saying the things that we needed to say. I'm all for it. We should all be making bands with our neighbors, and we shouldn't be waiting for "composers" to dish it out right on the split second. We should be making the music we need to march by and fight with.

12.

That's a little bit confusing, I have to admit. "The best love and kissing songs in the whole world" seems frivolous in the context of war. But, again, he's getting back at that same belief that music is fortifying, or promotes resiliency, in the population, which is needed to survive and build a world worth fighting for.

13.

Yes. We need to know one another a little bit better. Free ourselves from our self-imposed cages of outrage and sadness and pessimism and sing to one another. I always believe that it's our saving grace, when people sing together. The fact that we can harmonize. We can even do something I would classify as being beyond harmony. You hear it at giant sporting events: the sound of thousands and thousands of people reaching a common pitch, good singers and bad singers, all amassed as a monolithic choir — it's one of the most miraculous sounds on Earth. It's what I would advocate as a defense for humanity if we were ever being charged at an intergalactic court, having to fight or argue for our existence.

This piece is almost written in character. You don't see people write with that much of an individual voice anymore. I believe Guthrie to be an authentic character, but I also believe that he was aware of his persona and how palatable he was making some of these words to a working class, or an underclass, by speaking this way. He knew the language of the people he was trying to reach. We should all learn one another's languages a little better.

Chicago Tribune
Founded June 10, 1847

Par Ridder, Publisher
Mitch Pugh, Executive Editor

Chris Jones, Editorial Page Editor
Stacy St. Clair, Managing Editor

DIRECTORS OF CONTENT
Amanda Kaschube, Sports and Audience
Todd Panagopoulos, Visuals

EDITORIALS

Endorsements for Illinois House Districts 2, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 21, 25, 35, 36, 39, 41, 42

Today, the editorial board turns its attention to contested races in the Illinois House of Representatives. This is our first batch of endorsements; we are endorsing statewide.

2ND DISTRICT

This race is a rematch from 2024, when Republican Laura Hruska, 63, challenged incumbent Democrat, state Rep. Lisa Hernandez, 65, who won by a 72-28 margin.


Hruska

That gap makes clear what an uphill battle a Republican challenger faces in this Illinois House district, which covers parts of the southwest suburbs, including portions of Stickney, Cicero, Brookfield, Riverside and Berwyn, as well as a slice of Chicago's South Lawndale neighborhood. Yet it is a fight worth taking on, as Hruska has again chosen to do.

Hruska told us her top issue is property taxes. "We are being pushed out of our own homes by high taxes and costs," she said.

Hernandez's economic positions are to the left of the board, including her past support of minimum wage hikes for tipped workers, something we've opposed in Springfield and Chicago alike. We endorsed Hruska in 2024, and still believe she has the right ideas.

Laura Hruska is endorsed.

12TH DISTRICT

Democrat Paul Kendrick, 43, and Republican Justin Kumar, 46, are vying to replace state Rep. Margaret Croke, who is running for Illinois comptroller. This North Side district is reliably liberal, and covers affluent parts of the city including Lincoln Park and Old Town.


Kendrick

Like Croke, Kendrick strikes us as a pragmatic Democrat. He worked in the U.S. Department of Education under President Barack Obama and on Gov. JB Pritzker's 2018 campaign. We endorsed Kendrick in the primary, noting his recognition that Illinois needs to be competitive economically. Though he supports a graduated income tax and wealth tax, he told us he would not seek major new revenue without a pension deal that puts Illinois on a sustainable financial path.

Kumar, CEO of Frontload Group, opposes a millionaire surtax and the tax and fee increases in the state's transportation package. But he offered few specifics on pension reform or spending reductions.

Paul Kendrick is endorsed.

13TH DISTRICT

When state Rep. Hoan Huynh decided to run for Congress, he also opted to vacate his current North Side Illinois House seat. Running to replace him are Democrat Demi Palecek and Republican Terry Nguyen Le, 27.

Huynh is an energetic progressive, and so, too, is Palecek. She supports rent control, higher taxes and using state power to "decommodify housing." We disagree strongly with that approach.

Le, born in Chicago to Vietnamese refugee parents who built small businesses, advocates lower taxes, free markets and government transparency. We endorsed Huynh over Le in 2024, partly because Le favored restoring cash bail. This time, he emphasized tighter electronic-monitoring rules, greater independence for the legislative inspector general and constitutional pension reform.

Le described himself to us as "an independent thinker who will not rubber-stamp party orthodoxy." He is untested, but his ideas offer a different direction for Springfield.

Terry Nguyen Le is endorsed.

17TH DISTRICT

In a repeat of 2024, state Rep. Jennifer Gong-Gershowitz, 57, the Democrat incumbent, will face Republican Jim Geldermann in the race to represent this north suburban district, which includes Glenview, Wilmette, Evanston, Skokie and Northbrook.


Gong-Gershowitz

Gong-Gershowitz is a very practical Democrat who sees clearly the state's fiscal challenges. "Our job is to deliver the most good within our means," she told us, signaling openness to rightsizing spending.

We also admire her for calling on former House Speaker Mike Madigan to step down in 2020. And while she supports public education, she is willing to stand up to those, including the Chicago Teachers Union, who make unreasonable requests. "The $1.1 billion ask from CTU ignores both the realities of the state budget and how evidence-based funding (EBF) works," she said.

Geldermann's campaign seems like one born of grievance rather than solution-seeking. Gong-Gershowitz has proven a competent state representative.

Jennifer Gong-Gershowitz is endorsed.

18TH DISTRICT

State Rep. Robyn Gabel, 73, is reliably progressive in her fiscal positions, and we have tended to endorse her much more fiscally conservative opponents in general elections in this affluent North Shore district, which includes Evanston, Wilmette, Kenilworth, Winnetka, Glencoe, Northbrook and Northfield.

In Pete Donaghue, she again faces a Republican opponent who is far more fiscally restrained. Gabel has long advocated higher taxes, including a graduated income tax. She voted for the temporary income tax increase in 2011 and subsequently co-sponsored a constitutional amendment to allow graduated income tax rates. She has consistently argued that Illinois needs more revenue to meet its obligations and adequately fund public services.

Donaghue, 65, is a former trader who has also worked in real estate. He told us he opposes a proposed millionaire surtax and supports pension reform that protects benefits already earned while reducing future obligations. Donaghue's positions were less convincing on public safety. He would eliminate electronic monitoring altogether, without adequately explaining how courts should handle defendants awaiting trial who do not require detention. His ideas on property taxes also need more detail. While not an ideal candidate, he at least pulls in the right direction on fiscal issues, something desperately needed in Springfield.

Pete Donaghue is endorsed.

19TH DISTRICT

Republican John "JZ" Zimmers, 63, is making another run against Democratic state Rep. Lindsey LaPointe, 44, in the 19th District on Chicago's Northwest Side and nearby suburbs. We endorsed LaPointe in 2024, impressed by her willingness to tackle government ethics, transit reform and state spending. Zimmers, a real estate broker, is passionate about Illinois' affordability crisis, particularly the property taxes driving longtime homeowners and seniors out of their homes. But the positions he shared with us were long on indignation and short on workable solutions. He calls for repealing the SAFE-T Act altogether and incorrectly asserts that Illinois has no corruption laws.


LaPointe

LaPointe, by contrast, impressed us with her command of the issues and willingness to challenge her own party. "It's the Democrats in Springfield who are responsible for a lack of progress on meaningful ethics reform," she told us. She supports giving the Legislative Inspector General independent subpoena power and adding members of the public to the Legislative Ethics Commission. She also criticized the way legislative leaders control which ethics bills get hearings, arguing that the practice "hampers debate and stifles actual policy change."

We disagree with her support for a graduated income tax and a millionaire surtax, and wish she were more willing to confront Illinois' unsustainable pension obligations. But we appreciate her insistence on scrutinizing the budget for duplication, opportunities for consolidation and inappropriate spending.

Lindsey LaPointe is endorsed.

21ST DISTRICT

Democratic state Rep. Abdelnasser Rashid, 37, of Justice won his seat in 2022, defeating incumbent Michael J. Zalewski. We welcomed Rashid's commitment to ethics reform, and he has followed through by pushing legislation to strengthen the legislative inspector general's independence. But we oppose his support for a graduated income tax. We also did not endorse him in 2024 over concerns about his focus on Middle Eastern affairs rather than state issues.


Su

Republican Eric Su, 50, of North Riverside, is a personal trainer and small business owner who emphasizes affordability, government accountability and pension reform. He opposes a millionaire surtax, supports a constitutional amendment permitting changes to future pension benefits and favors stronger protections for whistleblowers. "We cannot tax our way into affordability," he told us. Indeed.

Su's positions offer voters a clear alternative on taxes, pensions and government accountability.

Eric Su is endorsed.

25TH DISTRICT

Democrat Curtis Tarver II has served in the Illinois House since 2019, representing the 25th District, which includes Hyde Park and portions of Chicago's South Side. He serves as assistant majority leader and chairs the House Revenue and Finance Committee. What strikes us about Tarver is how well-liked he is by both his Democratic and Republican colleagues. We've spoken with Republicans who describe him as a good collaborator and someone who serves as a solid filter for bad tax-and-spend ideas. That speaks volumes.


Tarver

We've praised his willingness to buck his party, particularly his criticism of Gov. JB Pritzker's temporary election-year tax relief measures.

Tarver faces Republican Antoinette Jewel Simmons in November. We have little information about Simmons' campaign on which to make a meaningful comparison. Tarver, meanwhile, has an established legislative record and a reputation among colleagues across the aisle for taking their concerns seriously.

Curtis Tarver II is endorsed.

35TH DISTRICT

State Rep. Mary Gill, 47, a former teacher, is a moderate Democrat who has represented this south suburban district since 2023, when she was appointed to replace retiring Rep. Frances Ann Hurley.


Gill

She strikes us as a common-sense legislator, though we dislike her support of progressive income taxation and disagree that Tier 2 reforms will be enough to stabilize Illinois' pension crisis. Gill deserves credit for taking public safety seriously, however. She has pushed for greater transparency in the state's electronic monitoring system and argues that such monitoring "should only be available to nonviolent offenders." That's a sensible position at a time when Illinois needs to restore public confidence in its criminal justice system.

We did not endorse Gill's opponent, Republican David Dewar, 59, in the March primary. Dewar describes his campaign "as a TRUMP KIRK MAGA RED INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT (his capitalization) within the Republican Party."

Mary Gill is endorsed.

36TH DISTRICT

Democratic state Rep. Rick Ryan, 60, was first elected to represent this Southwest Side and south suburban district in 2024. The moderate Democrat is now seeking his second term, squaring off against Republican David Sheppard.


Sheppard

Sheppard, 56, grew up in public housing on Chicago's South Side, raised by a single mother. He went on to spend 28 years in law enforcement, eventually becoming chief of the Robbins Police Department. We were impressed by many of Sheppard's positions.

He opposes new taxes and is rightly concerned about electronic monitoring, telling us that "electronic monitoring should not become a substitute for detention when a defendant presents a serious threat to the community, and violations of monitoring conditions must bring swift and meaningful consequences." We've argued much the same before.

Incumbent Ryan shares that concern, telling us that "allowing those on electronic monitoring to have two days of non-home confinement is outrageous." He also opposes a millionaire's tax, saying it would drive away business.

There's a lot to like about both candidates. We've endorsed Ryan in the past and believe him to be a good representative. But Sheppard brings much valuable experience to the table, and Springfield is in need of political balance. Adding a solid Republican representative in this district would help along those lines.

David Sheppard is endorsed.

39TH DISTRICT

Democratic state Rep. Will Guzzardi, 39, has represented the 39th District on Chicago's Northwest Side since 2015 and now serves as an assistant majority leader. He is an experienced legislator whose influence in Springfield has grown, but his fiscal priorities remain firmly progressive. Guzzardi continues to advocate replacing Illinois' flat income tax with graduated rates. He also supports allowing municipalities to enact rent control.


Guzzardi

Republican Cesar Guillen is challenging Guzzardi in November. We have not heard much from him, making it difficult to compare his approach to the incumbent's established record. Nevertheless, the contest presents voters with an opportunity to scrutinize Guzzardi's positions on taxation, spending and the state's long-term financial obligations.

Will Guzzardi is endorsed.

41ST DISTRICT

Democratic state Rep. Janet Yang Rohr, 45, of Naperville faces a challenge from Republican Ajay Gupta, 61, a tax attorney and adjunct law professor with an impressive academic résumé. Both candidates bring considerable financial expertise to a district encompassing portions of Naperville, Warrenville and Bolingbrook. But they have different ideas about how Illinois should confront its enormous pension obligations and punishing tax burden.


Gupta

Yang Rohr, who works in investment research at Morningstar, chairs the House Personnel and Pensions Committee. She argues that Illinois has made progress on its pension obligations through additional contributions and voluntary buyouts, and she opposes reducing benefits public employees have already earned. On a proposed 3% millionaire surtax, she told us she would support putting the question to voters only if the proposal also repealed Illinois' estate tax.

Gupta takes a different approach that will appeal to fiscal conservatives. He opposes a millionaire tax, and proposes a constitutional amendment that would protect pension benefits already earned while permitting changes to future accruals, retirement ages and cost-of-living adjustments. He also favors a spending cap tied to inflation and population.

Ajay Gupta is endorsed.

42ND DISTRICT

Republican Stephanie Trussell, 61, was Darren Bailey's running mate in his unsuccessful 2022 gubernatorial campaign. The Lisle small-business owner who grew up on Chicago's South Side now faces Democratic state Rep. Margaret DeLaRosa, 65, who was appointed to replace Terra Costa Howard to represent this west suburban district.


Trussell

We endorsed DeLaRosa in the March Democratic primary as someone with deep roots in this district and a stellar local reputation among the party faithful there. DeLaRosa acknowledges budget trade-offs but offers no specific spending cuts, declines to take a clear position on the millionaire surtax or what to do about Illinois' pension crisis.

Trussell identifies property taxes as the district's most pressing problem. She opposes a millionaire surtax, supports moving new public employees into 401(k)-style retirement plans and questions CPS spending amid underutilized schools. But her proposals lack detail, particularly on pension funding and legislative ethics. She is an enthusiastic conservative with some positions to the right of this board, and she may rub some voters the wrong way. But her instincts on fiscal policy are much needed in the statehouse.

Stephanie Trussell is endorsed.

OPINION

Altering the Griffin Museum of Science and Industry's entrances will destroy its essence

By Tim Samuelson
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE



The Griffin Museum of Science and Industry on Sept. 8, 2025. **ANTONIO PEREZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

Construction barricades are now in place at the Griffin Museum of Science and Industry's lagoon-facing south entrance — all in preparation for plans promoted as improving entrance visibility and museum accessibility. The state and local agencies empowered to protect important landmark structures have been in lockstep to approve the proposed work.

From the 50-plus years I've been involved in historic preservation work in the public and private sectors, I can state without reservation that the proposed work to the museum's campus is the most seriously damaging I have ever witnessed. The only exception of something worse was when entire historic buildings were approved for demolition.

With the approved alterations to the Griffin Museum of Science and Industry, the building will essentially remain standing. But the changes will destroy the essence of what makes the building rare and special. It's all about an elusive quality known as perfection.

When originally constructed as the Palace of Fine Arts for Chicago's 1893 World's Fair, the building was repeatedly singled out for being as near to perfection as could be humanly achievable in its architectural composition and the relationship to its site. Creating quality classical design is one of the most challenging in architecture. It's all about a perfect relationship of proportions, details and site. All parts must harmoniously relate to the whole.

At the time of the 1893 World's Fair, the respected sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens said of the building: "I am just bowled over; there is no breath in me. As for that art gallery, it is the greatest thing since Athens."

Prior to construction, New York architect Charles F. McKim — a stickler for classical accuracy — looked over designer Charles B. Atwood's plans for errors. He ultimately exclaimed, "Confound him, he is right every time," and later praised the building as "the greatest thing that has been done in the present century in any country."

Because of its architectural accolades, the Palace of the Fine Arts was one of the only major building of the World's Fair to be preserved, becoming the first home of what is now the Field Museum. When vacated by the Field Museum in 1921, the building fell into ruin, with its plaster skin peeling off the sturdy brick core. That set in motion a cry for its preservation from a national architectural constituency, as well as from influential Chicago city leaders.

Rescue came in the 1930s when philanthropist Julius Rosenwald seeded funding for transforming the building into a museum showcasing achievement in the fields of science and industry, establishing the revered institution we know today. Special care was taken to preserve the perfect proportions and details as originally designed by Atwood. Drawings for the new carved limestone elements replacing the building's original plaster cladding made clear that all pieces should be reproduced exactly.

Over the next several decades, the Museum of Science and Industry was a diligent caretaker of the building's original architectural integrity. Even with contemporary needs for better public accessibility and removal of an obtrusive grade-level parking lot, new facilities were creatively placed underground in the 1990s, providing an accessible museum entry from small free-standing pavilions respectfully held away from the main building. The former parking lot on the north side became a grassy park that showcased the building's "perfect" classical proportions for passing motorists and museum patrons alike.

But for all the museum's previous diligence and respect for its building and campus, all seems to have been forgotten in the current proposals to modify the north and south entryways. The signature classical wide exterior staircases on both sides are to be punctured, creating a gap-toothed large hole at the center that will diminish the power of the remaining original elements. The boldly columned porticos that provide a transitional sense of entry are to be glassed in. No matter how transparent, the original effect is lost.

And lost forever will be the majestic views of the building melding into the historic landscape of Jackson Park, a landmark itself shaped in design by the great Frederick Law Olmsted. No longer will the front steps of the south side dreamily extend into the adjoining lagoon. And with new construction of entryways and berms on the building's north side, the majestic classical gift of the building rising from the ground atop a sturdy base will be lost.

I'm at a total loss to explain how these damaging alterations could be allowed — or even proposed in the first place. Have people forgotten that a masterpiece of classical architecture is dependent on all parts relating to the whole? Is there no longer respect for established guidelines at federal and local level for historically, culturally and architecturally significant structures?

"Perfection" is hard to achieve and rare to come by. Naturally, total perfection is not possible — but here's an instance where it has come remarkably close in the opinion of many distinguished experts. Is it all going to be thrown away for superficial and inappropriate changes?

In the past, the Griffin Museum of Science and Industry consistently displayed great inventiveness and ingenuity for adapting its historic campus to meet changing needs without compromising the near perfection of its building. It has obviously lost its touch with the current alterations.

Tim Samuelson is an emeritus cultural historian for the city of Chicago.

America is safer 25 years after launching war on terror, but what about Middle East?

By Storer H. Rowley
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE



A puppet with the face of Donald Trump is paraded and beaten during celebrations in the streets during the anniversary of the Taliban's return to power in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Aug. 15. The Taliban claim that Afghanistan is no longer a sanctuary for terrorist groups. But 25 years after the Sept. 11 attacks, al-Qaida and others are still present, reviving old fears. **TOMAS MUNITA/THE NEW YORK TIMES**

The global war on terror beat back organized terrorism significantly in the 25 years since American forces invaded Afghanistan, but by most measures, that 20-year war and subsequent U.S. war in Iraq were costly failures in ways that left the region and its people worse off.

Clearly, the United States is safer from attack than it was on Sept. 11, 2001, when members of al-Qaida who trained in Afghanistan carried out the horrific suicide terrorist attacks that slaughtered 2,977 people at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Credit goes to successive Republican and Democratic administrations.

But the conduct of America's longest war and the chaotic withdrawal of U.S. forces in 2021 let the Taliban return to power and revive its repressive Islamic regime, bringing an uneasy peace but also a heavily armed extremist government, economic hardship, a loss of freedom and a deplorable ban on girls over 12 getting an education. The recent U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, another endless war, left the region more perilous and empowered Iran to claim success there.

"I think the threat to the U.S. from Afghanistan is much lower than it was in 2001," said Adam Weinstein, deputy director of the Middle East Program at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft in Washington, D.C. "Is it zero? No, but we can't be everywhere at once."

"We didn't have another 9/11, and there was a lot of work that was done quietly to prevent more terrorist attacks," Weinstein, a former Marine who served in Afghanistan, said in an interview. "But I don't think it's necessary for Americans to be deployed all over the world to prevent terrorism."

Former President George W. Bush launched the war on Oct. 7, 2001 that ousted the Taliban from power. Almost 10 years later, then-President Barack Obama dispatched Navy SEALs to storm a compound in northern Pakistan on May 2, 2011, and they killed al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden, mastermind of the 9/11 attacks. Joe Biden as president authorized a CIA drone strike in Kabul a year after the U.S. pullout that killed bin Laden's successor, al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahri, co-conspirator in conceiving the 9/11 attacks and global terrorist plans.

Al-Qaida has "declining relevance as a global movement," according to one United Nations monitoring group, but U.S. and Western intelligence officials assess it still has training camps and safe houses in Afghanistan under Taliban protection. Thankfully, for now, it is said to be focused more on regional activities than planning grand, far-away attacks on the U.S. and its allies.

At the end of last month, American troops withdrew from Iraq following the deadliest war of the 21st century for U.S. forces. That war, launched in 2003 as part of the war on terror, is widely considered a disastrous strategic mistake, because Iraq had no significant links to al-Qaida and no terrorist weapons of mass destruction. Most experts agree the U.S. mishandled post-invasion planning.

The courageous work of U.S. and allied ground troops from 37 countries toppled Sunni Muslim Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein and installed a Shiite-led government to help fight an insurgency until the first phase ended in 2009. American forces later returned to Iraq from 2014 to 2017 to put down Sunni Islamic State militants, but the Iraq war severely damaged America's reputation and emboldened U.S. enemies in the region.

While the terrorist threat to the U.S. is much lower now and over-the-horizon anti-terrorism strategies have been effective, the overall lessons of the war on terror are that military force alone cannot guarantee the success of U.S. policies or the safety of Americans. It must be combined with engagement, economic power and diplomatic leverage. President Donald Trump has learned that the hard way with his ill-conceived war of choice in Iran.

Sadly, bin Laden got some of what he wanted when his monstrous terrorist plot forced the U.S. to dispatch American forces to the region, and thousands were lost in battles. According to one study by Brown University in 2021, the cost of the U.S.-led global war on terror was an estimated $8 trillion and some 900,000 deaths of military and civilian casualties on all sides. Of that total, estimated cost of operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan was $2.3 trillion, and another $2.1 trillion was committed for Iraq and Syria.

More than 7,000 U.S. service members lost their lives in the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts, and more than 53,000 were wounded. And $2.2 trillion of the total cost is designated for future medical care and disability payments over the coming decades. The war on terror and counterterror operations continue in more than 80 countries today, the Brown study said.

Terrorism remains a significant global threat, according to the Global Terrorism Index compiled by the Institute for Economics and Peace, headquartered in Sydney, but there are some positive trends. This year, the GTI reported that the largest declines in terrorist activity by percentage since 2007 have been in Iraq (99%) and Afghanistan (95%). In fact, deaths from terrorism have fluctuated significantly since 2007, when records started for the GTI, peaking at 10,882 in 2015 and reaching a low of 5,582 last year. Most global terrorism incidents have shifted from the Middle East and South Asia to Africa, according to the U.N. committee charged with monitoring the sanctions regime for terrorism.

Yes, things are calm from Kabul to Kandahar, but al-Qaida and other terrorist groups still operate in Afghanistan. The U.S. needs to shift its strategy to reengage there in more meaningful ways than hostage negotiations. The real policy disaster was less the chaotic pullout of American forces in August 2021 but rather the polices that led to it with the fall of the Taliban in December 2001, when the U.S. started pursuing a war without end that America could not win.

The Trump administration and its successors should focus now on cleaning up the mess America left behind and making small gains where possible through targeted diplomacy, not nation building, for now, as the Quincy Institute's Weinstein advocates.

That means engaging with the Taliban's de facto government and using humanitarian aid and economic leverage to make progress — picking up where military victory proved impossible. America still needs a regional, over-the-horizon counterterrorism strategy to protect the homeland. That might be difficult, sure, but it's a must.

Storer H. Rowley is a former national editor and foreign correspondent for the Chicago Tribune. He teaches journalism and communication at Northwestern University.

OPINION

Communalism and religion were driving forces in the early Chicago political machine

By Dominic A. Pacyga and Bob Dolgan
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

The Irish-born John Powers, along with John "Bathhouse John" Coughlin and Michael "Hinky Dink" Kenna, were among the so-called gray wolves of Chicago's early 20th century City Council. Though Powers has mostly been forgotten, he represents the hallmarks of the early political machine, the one that gave rise to mayors Anton Cermak, Ed Kelly and Richard J. Daley. It's a system that's gone now, but one that may resonate as we experience a mayoral race today.

Powers and the wolves didn't just provide favors or jobs — though they did do both. They knew the neighborhood and voters intimately, from the tavern keepers to the priests, rabbis and ministers.

Powers signified a type of communalism, often bound by the church, that carried over from agricultural life in Europe. He was an owner of a saloon and a gambling house who was known for his fancy clothes and diamond ring. Though he was corrupt, his constituents looked up to him. His constituents wanted to be him someday. Powers was a protector of immigrant communities in an unfamiliar world of steel mills, stockyards and slaughterhouses. It was said he went to wakes nightly, carrying a rosary and a yarmulke in his pocket at all times.



Ald. John Powers, circa May 21, 1930. **CHICAGO TRIBUNE HISTORICAL PHOTO**

He was known for giving a turkey or a goose at Christmas to anyone in need. It was generosity but also realpolitik — the idea was that he would receive votes in return.

Catholic education and tenets of loyalty and hierarchy often were at the center of the communal structure — beliefs the machine was based on. At the head was the pope, then there were the cardinal, the bishops and the priests. In the city, there's the head of the Democratic Party, the mayor, the committeemen, the aldermen and a legion of precinct captains. It's perhaps no wonder that five Chicago mayors were educated at De La Salle Institute on the South Side. The word "patron," after all, comes from the idea of a patron saint. Just as St. Jude is the patron saint of impossible causes and last resort, so, too, were the benevolent aldermen who were the natural leaders of their wards. In Judaism, there was the web of communalism and the sharing of aid that came from the shtetls of Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine.

The communal response was one that arose out of the peasantry. Ethnic groups in Europe had to work together in order to survive serfdom, prejudice and poverty. The Bohemian-born Cermak — Chicago's only immigrant mayor — labored in coal mines before settling in Pilsen and becoming Democratic ward committeeman in 1908. Cermak, a child of the patronage system, knew how to play the game. He united Czechs, Poles, Jews and the South Side Irish behind the anti-Prohibition United Societies for Local Self-Government. Cermak was first elected citywide as bailiff and then to mayor in 1931. Daley was a young precinct captain at the time.

Another South Side Irishman, Kelly, took over after Cermak's assassination. It was the beginning of a power structure that would be in place for decades.

The mayoral power base began to change in the 1960s and '70s as ethnic communities dispersed to the suburbs and the Shakman Decrees remade political hiring. Vatican II reforms did away with Latin and depleted the ranks of priests and nuns, and the power of the church waned as parishes closed. The major pillars of the communal system were starting to dissolve. By the time of Richard M. Daley, the old system was fading: The number of patronage jobs had dropped from around 35,000 to 5,000.

Nowadays, while we may see aldermen at block parties and business openings, many of us haven't seen a precinct captain in more than 20 years. New centers of power such as the labor movement have emerged in the 21st century. And though the Cubs and White Sox made the playoffs, and the Bears are on the rise, politics remain Chicago's favorite sport.

Author and historian Dominic A. Pacyga received the 2026 Pattis Family Foundation Chicago Book Award for "Clout City: The Rise and Fall of the Chicago Political Machine" and is now writing a memoir about growing up in Back of the Yards and working in the Union Stock Yards. Bob Dolgan is the director of communications for the Newberry Library.

SCOTT STANTIS



Voice of the People

Living near rail property

In William Gillard's letter on Oct. 6 regarding the O'Hare Flyer's potential service through River Forest ("Flyer's potential ill effects"), he writes that transportation noise can lead to "fragmented sleep, elevated stress, high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease and impaired learning in children." Really? I have lived most of my life near the Purple Line "L," the last 40 years just two blocks away. I had no idea I had any of Gillard's suggested symptoms living near a rapid transit line built in the 19th and 20th centuries and running about 20 hours per day. So far, my medical reports have not shown any of the above symptoms, but I'll get checked out again.

Whenever anyone buys or rents a home near an airport or rail line, the owner of the airport or rail property has a right to use it as needed for commerce. Just ask residents in Bennington County, Vermont, and in western Connecticut: Years ago, old rusty rail lines were upgraded and used for new transportation purposes.

For homeowners, it truly is buyer beware.
— *Payson Wild, Evanston*

Destruction of public education

As an elderly Caucasian lifelong Chicagoan, it always staggers and stuns me the way the wealthy play the working class to serve their ends. Private charter school profiteers haven't been this excited since Rahm Emanuel was doing their bidding and closing public schools. The destruction of public education has been a long-term goal of the wealthy. "CTU Derangement Syndrome" is the driving force behind all their efforts. Its standard neoliberal scam is to privatize the profit and socialize the cost. A union run predominantly by Black people and women fills the elite white power class with abject fear.
— *Edward David Juillard, Chicago*

It's costly to park in Chicago

I grew up in Chicago in the 1950s and '60s. Street parking was free. There was no thought made to planning parking, no matter where one went in the city.

Today, I live in southwest Michigan, just over two hours away. I now carefully plan trips to Chicago. I park at family and friend's homes. Because of the high costs, I avoid visiting Chicago as much as possible.
— *Gail M. Muliett, Richland, Michigan*

Time to reflect and repent

I have been praying for Christa Pike since 1995. And for Colleen Slemmer, the girl she killed that year. And for the parents and loved ones of both of these young people.

Pike became a mission for me from the time I learned about the horrible thing she did. Why? Because I want her soul to be saved. Can I help save her soul through prayer? I don't know, but I've spent many years trying.

I do not believe in capital punishment. To purposely take a life, supposedly to avenge a murder, just doesn't seem like something God would want. I think God wants the killer to live out his or her life, however short or long that may be, hopefully leading to a day when the accused finally says the words, "I'm sorry, forgive me."

Has Pike ever said these words? I don't know, but if not, she now has more time.
— *Kathleen Melia, Niles*

Inciting needless anger?

I read with dismay the op-ed about belugas by Bob Kustra and Jenny Kustra-Quinn ("The time for keeping beluga whales captive for our entertainment has passed," Oct. 5). The recent death of the four belugas at the Shedd Aquarium was of course tragic and sad. But I admire the Shedd and the Spanish aquarium that tried to save the lives of these creatures. If they had not, the belugas would have been euthanized at the closed Marineland in Niagara Falls, Canada. Do the authors think that would have been better than at least trying to save them, presumably at great expense and surely at emotional cost to the aquarium and its staff?

It is important to note that zoos and aquariums in the U.S. accredited through the Association of Zoos and Aquariums no longer take animals from the wild, except in unusual circumstances. Association guidelines prohibit that.

I agree with the spirit of this op-ed but fear it may be inciting people to get upset about something that seldom happens anymore. Accredited zoos and aquariums are well versed in animal husbandry and welfare.
— *Nancy McDaniel, Chicago*

Use paper napkins sparingly

Recently, my 27-year-old niece came from Kolkata, India, to visit me for a week. I took her to several nice places and restaurants to enjoy and show her this great America, where I'm very proud to be a citizen. Before she left, I asked her how she liked this place. She commented, "Nice place, but I didn't like the way the people here waste the paper. Everybody at the restaurant takes so many napkins and uses only one, and then they put the others in the garbage, or they take too many to wipe their faces. Don't they know where paper comes from?"

I said paper napkins are free at the restaurant. She said, "But paper comes from trees. Trees are very important for the Earth."

Ever since then, I am very careful about wasting paper napkins. I hope other readers will be too.
— *Bani Bhattacharyya, Schaumburg*

Note to readers

With Halloween coming, we'd like you to share your most memorable experience related to the holiday, either as a child or as an adult. A costume that you've never forgotten? A trip to a haunted house that scared you silly? Neighbors who went above and beyond to make things fun for the kids? Send a letter, of no more than 400 words, by Friday, Oct. 23 to letters@chicagotribune.com. Be sure to include your full name and your city/town.

For online-exclusive letters, go to www.chicagotribune.com/letters. Email your letter submissions, 400 words or less, to letters@chicagotribune.com. Include your full name, address and phone number.

COMMENT & FEATURES

THE JERUSALEM POST
Founded in 1932 by GERSHON AGRON

ZVIKA KLEIN
Editor-in-Chief

ALEX WINSTON, *News Editor* **ETHAN FREEDMAN,** *Night Editor*
TAL SPUNGIN, *Managing Editor*
HERB KEINON and SETH J. FRANTZMAN, *Senior Contributing Editors*
ERICA SCHACHNE, *Magazine Editor* **AARON REICH,** *Op-Ed Editor*
AUDREY LYNN LEINOFF, *Supervising Editor*
MARC ISRAEL SELLEM, *Chief Photographer* **ELAINE MOSHE,** *Archivist*

Abbas's failure

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas postponed legislative elections on Saturday, replacing the November 28 vote with a promise of presidential and parliamentary elections on September 11, 2027.

His decree cited Israeli actions and deteriorating conditions across Gaza, the West Bank, and east Jerusalem.

Palestinians last elected a president in 2005 and a legislature in 2006. Abbas's presidential mandate expired in 2009. An entire generation has reached adulthood without choosing its national leadership.

Responsibility for that prolonged failure rests heavily with the Palestinian leaders who have retained power throughout it.

Palestinians deserve the opportunity to replace their rulers peacefully. Israel also has an interest in credible Palestinian institutions that can maintain security, implement agreements, and exercise authority over armed factions.

Building such institutions requires sustained reform, enforceable rules, and leaders prepared to accept limits on their power.

Hamas's victory in the 2006 legislative election and its subsequent violent takeover of Gaza must inform any discussion of another vote. The organization responsible for the October 7 massacre cannot acquire a legitimate claim to govern while retaining its terrorist infrastructure.

Its weapons threaten Israeli lives and the freedom of Palestinians to organize, campaign, and disagree.

Participation should therefore require renouncing terrorism, recognizing Israel, accepting existing agreements, and dismantling independent armed forces. These obligations must apply equally to every faction and be verified in practice.

A credible election also requires an independent electoral commission, accessible voter registration, impartial courts, and protection for journalists and opposition candidates.

Voters must be able to criticize the Palestinian Authority without fear. Parties must commit to respecting the results and allowing future elections, including when their own hold on office is threatened.

Abbas should publish a timetable for those reforms, with deadlines that can be assessed before September 2027. Preparations for polling and international monitoring should proceed alongside transparent public finances, scrutiny of security institutions, and action against incitement.

Donors should condition support for governing institutions on measurable progress, with humanitarian assistance protected so ordinary Palestinians are spared the cost of their leaders' failures.

Governments that have recognized a Palestinian state have a particular responsibility to insist on these standards. Their diplomatic commitments should be followed by scrutiny of how Palestinian institutions operate. Recognition creates no guarantee that a government respects its citizens, controls its territory, and intends to live peacefully alongside Israel.

Israel has responsibilities too. Its government should work toward practical arrangements for voting, election observers, and necessary movement, consistent with protecting Israeli citizens.

Specific restrictions should be justified by concrete security needs and reviewed when circumstances change. Facilitating credible Palestinian government can serve Israel's long-term interests.

Jerusalem voting arrangements will require careful negotiation. Security concerns must be addressed through workable procedures, while Palestinian leaders must demonstrate that they are pursuing solutions in good faith. Progress on electoral independence, financial transparency, and political freedoms can begin immediately, even while difficult logistical questions remain unresolved.

The new election date should carry obligations that can be checked throughout the coming year. Abbas should face regular public scrutiny over what has changed, which commitments remain unmet, and who is responsible. Palestinian civil society deserves access to that information and space to challenge official explanations.

Palestinians need accountable leadership, and Israelis need reliable security.

Elections conducted within a reformed political system can advance both interests. The months ahead should be used to establish the freedoms, safeguards, and enforceable commitments that give a future vote meaning.

INBAR ASHKENAZI, *CEO Jerusalem Post Group*

DROR RONEN, *Director of Circulation*
GALIT SASSON, *Deputy CEO Commercial and Strategic Partnerships*

EDITORIAL OFFICES AND ADMINISTRATION
The Jerusalem Post Building, PO Box 81, Jerusalem 9100002.
Telephone 02-531-5666, Fax 02-537-6553.
• CUSTOMER SERVICE *2421, 03-761-9056, 1800-574574, Fax 03-561-3699.
PO Box 9344, Tel Aviv 6109202
• ADVERTISING 15 Ha'uchim Misdavita, Tel Aviv 6701027.
Telephone 03-761-9000, Fax 03-561-0777.
• **SUBSCRIPTIONS E-MAIL** SUBS@JPOST.COM
• **ADVERTISING E-MAIL** TRAFFIC@JPOST.COM
• **READERS LETTERS** LETTERSPOST@GMAIL.COM
• **OP-ED SUBMISSIONS** OPED@JPOST.COM
• **COMMERCIAL** GALITSA@JPOST.COM

Published daily except Saturday, in Jerusalem, Israel by The Jerusalem Post Ltd. Registered at the GPO. © All rights reserved to The Jerusalem Post Group Ltd. Do not copy, distribute, replicate, photograph, translate, store on a database, transmit in any way (writing, printing or other media) or by any electronic means, optical, mechanical or otherwise, any part of this newspaper (including: text, drawings, photographs, pictures, maps and graphics) in textual form or on designed pages, including voice recording and typing, without the express permission, in writing, from the publisher The Jerusalem Post Group Ltd.

Trump is not Israel's kingmaker

• By SHMUEL LEGESSE



US PRESIDENT Donald Trump points during a campaign rally in San Antonio, Texas, last week. (Evan Vucci/Reuters)

Israel owes an enormous debt of gratitude to the United States – to Democratic and Republican administrations, to president Joe Biden for standing beside us after the horror of October 7, to President Donald Trump for confronting Iran and advancing the Abraham Accords, to Evangelical Christians who have defended the Jewish state when others abandoned it, and above all to the American people.

Yet gratitude must never become submission, because Israel's prime minister must be chosen by Israelis in Jerusalem, not by a president, donors, or political strategists gathered at Mar-a-Lago.

Trump has said that staying out of Israel's October 27 election would be appropriate. He has also suggested that he might endorse someone. More recently, he shared an article highlighting a poll favorable to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's bloc.

That may not constitute a formal endorsement, but in a close election, it is political intervention by suggestion. Our country is not a client state, an Evangelical political project, or a Trump-branded Middle Eastern property. Gaza is not an empty beachfront awaiting luxury towers, and Israel is not a corporation whose controlling shares belong to foreign patrons.

We are a sovereign democracy whose citizens bury the dead, send children to war, and live with the consequences.

Trump understands the power of uncertainty. By saying that he may endorse a candidate without naming one, he encourages every Israeli contender to seek his approval. Netanyahu can present himself as Trump's natural partner. His challengers must assure Washington that they will protect the alliance.

Trump gains leverage before casting a single political coin. This is not merely affection for Netanyahu. Trump values loyalty, public credit, and the image of being the decisive dealmaker. He sees diplomacy through transactions, leverage, and visible victories.

That approach can produce breakthroughs, as the Abraham Accords demonstrated. But nations are communities of memory and responsibility, not properties to be acquired, redesigned, and branded.

Netanyahu understands this theater. For years, he has used photographs, speeches, and meetings with American presidents to reinforce the argument that only he can manage Israel's most important alliance. His message is familiar: Without me, Israel will be isolated. Without me, Washington will turn away. Without me, the country is unsafe.

That is not democratic confidence. It is manufactured dependency. Israel's future also cannot be managed by a narrow diplomatic circle embodied by Netanyahu's longtime confidant Ron Dermer, despite his experience.

Dermer helped cultivate American and Gulf relationships. But diplomacy conducted mainly through leaders, billionaires, investment channels, and palace intermediaries leaves ordinary citizens outside the room. Israel needs institutions, public accountability and many voices, not one prime minister, one emissary, and one foreign patron.

THE RISE of Gadi Eisenkot exposes the weakness of that argument. Israelis themselves have presented another credible leader: a former military chief with decades of security experience, personal sacrifice, and a reputation for sobriety. Recent polling has placed Eisenkot's Yashar Party near or ahead of Likud, and one survey showed him leading Netanyahu as the public's preferred prime minister.

Americans do not have to support Eisenkot. Trump does not have to like him. Evangelical donors do not have to agree with every decision he may make. But they must respect the possibility that Israeli citizens, after October 7, want a different kind of leadership less theatrical, less divisive and more accountable.

Trump should promise not to endorse a candidate. American political organizations and major donors should show the same restraint. They may support Israel and advocate for their beliefs, but money, access, and presidential prestige should not select its government.

Israeli candidates must also stop campaigning as applicants for American approval. They should tell voters what they will do about security, diplomacy, living costs, national service, social inclusion, and the failures of October 7. Their mandate must come from Israelis.

The next government should protect the American alliance as a relationship between democratic nations, not political personalities. Israel worked with Biden despite disagreements. It can work with Trump without surrendering its independence. Institutional alliances endure; personality arrangements collapse.

Eisenkot should make this principle central to his campaign. He can thank Trump for his contributions, honor Evangelical friendship, and recognize Biden's support during Israel's crisis while stating clearly that no outside leader will receive a veto over Israeli democracy. That position is not anti-American. It is the foundation of an alliance between equals.

I write as an Ethiopian-born Israeli-American who loves both countries. Ethiopia taught me the power of ancient black Jewish identity, resilience, and human dignity. America taught me the importance of constitutional government and peaceful transfers of power. Israel taught me that Jewish sovereignty carries responsibility.

Those lessons lead to the same conclusion: Friends may advise, assist, and disagree, but citizens must decide. Israel's election belongs to the nurse in Jerusalem, the reservist returning from Gaza, the struggling family in Beersheba, the Arab teacher in Nazareth, and the Ethiopian-Israeli mother whose children serve a country that still too rarely allows her community to represent it.

My teacher, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, expressed this principle clearly: "Whoever governs in Israel does so only under the authority delegated by God on the one hand, the people on the other." That covenantal principle applies equally to domestic politicians and foreign benefactors. Israel's democratic authority comes from its people, not from Mar-a-Lago, royal palaces, billionaires, or political donors.

President Trump may be Israel's friend. Evangelical Christians may be among Israel's most loyal supporters. President Biden and millions of Americans deserve our gratitude.

But none of them is Israel's kingmaker. Let the citizens of Israel choose. If they choose Gadi Eisenkot, Washington should respect that decision.

Israel's future must be decided in Jerusalem, not at Mar-a-Lago.

The writer is a former New York City Supreme Court detective, an investigator and educator in conflict resolution and restorative peace, and a moral diplomacy expert. His upcoming book, Moral Diplomacy for a Broken World, *is inspired by the late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks.*

The Ben-Gvir effect

• By DEBORAH DANINO HARKHAM

National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir has become a sort of political lightning rod, drawing high-voltage tension and intense global and domestic criticism.

While the obvious reasons for this widespread antipathy concern firstly his positions – death penalty for terrorists, voluntary emigration of Gazans, expansion of Jewish settlement, opposition to Palestinian statehood, to name but a few – they do not explain by themselves this peculiar phenomenon.

However "radical" one may consider them to be, these substantial positions, backed by a long-standing ideology, remain political stances that can be supported, opposed, or debated on their own terms.

Beyond his political program, it is also Ben-Gvir's manner (or lack thereof) that is being targeted: the theatrical provocations, the confrontational language and the social media stunts. From suggesting a moat of crocodiles around a prison holding Hamas terrorists to publicly humiliating the Gaza flotilla terror supporters, Ben-Gvir understands the power of an image.

And he uses it as a method, a method whose impact is reaching far beyond Israel's borders, making the debate around him more existential than political. All these, combined with his unapologetic Jewish pride and his rejection of political correctness codes, trigger a revealing reaction, the "Ben-Gvir effect."

The recent statements by U2 band member Bono about the Israeli minister illustrate the reach of this effect.

The Irish singer not only compared Ben-Gvir's remarks about Gazans to the rhetoric of Heinrich Himmler, the architect of the Nazi extermination machinery, but he also claimed that the leader of Otzma Yehudit had put Judaism "in the shade."

Whatever one thinks of Ben-Gvir's words, this shift from criticizing a politician or a specific policy to conflating them with Judaism itself deserves scrutiny, because it goes deeper than the standard debate over extremism.

Ben-Gvir may be a lightning rod, and a convenient one, but he did not create the storm that has been gathering above Israel and the Jews since October 7.

He was democratically elected to the Knesset, and his party, which recent polls put at around eight seats in the upcoming elections, is an important component of the current coalition. His critics on the Left see a threat to democracy and the rule of law, and the ones on the right view his provocations as a liability to quieter diplomacy.

He and his party, treated as pariahs for many years, are now part of the political mainstream, whether one likes it or not. In fact, their ideology is not far removed from the historic Right. The core difference lies in language and the Jewish part of the equation.

The new generation of the modern national-religious camp has left the European reference point and its anxieties behind.

Instead, they return to a native Jewish and religious character, rooted in the reality of being here, with no regard for convention or the sensibilities of Western audiences – whom Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is so familiar with.

The national security minister feels no need to moderate his tone when speaking about Jewish sovereignty or particularism.

The backlash against Ben-Gvir thus often shifts from moral objection to personal scrutiny, evoking historical, antisemitic caricatures of the Jew. Yet Ben-Gvir, who, to some extent, projects this image of himself, uses it as a tool of political deterrence. Focusing on the image, however, obscures what matters more.

Beyond aesthetics, the "Ben-Gvir effect" exposes an ancient anxiety: the Western world tolerates the Jew under subjection, but hates and fears the Jew who exerts sovereign power. While this hostility does not make all criticism antisemitic, it does seem to be rooted in it.

Abroad, Ben-Gvir is often collapsed with Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich into a single patronizing category, the "Ben-Gvirs and Smotriches," Israel's convenient symbol for a threatening extreme.

By reducing him to a caricature, one avoids engaging with the real ideas he embodies, ideas that are an integral part of Israel's democratic political landscape.

Ultimately, the disproportionate rage surrounding him exposes the global and domestic difficulty of accommodating a specific, unapologetic figure: the Jew on his own land, claiming spiritual attachment, possessing raw political power, and refusing to apologize for any of it.

BEHIND BEN-GVIR'S positions lies a strong national-religious conception of Israel that has acquired a larger audience since October 7, as many Israelis are asking questions about identity, sovereignty, and security with a renewed sense of urgency.

Thus, the visceral secular reaction to Ben-Gvir hides something even deeper than just an aversion to his bad manners and alleged racist positions. The problem lies with what he represents: a loud, proud, nationalist religious Jew.

And this Jew, for many in Israel and abroad, is difficult to come to terms with. He is the antithesis of the "court Jew," the cosmopolitan and universalist Jew who has had to master the codes of the surrounding society to survive, a Jew not necessarily unproud but careful about particularism, and accommodating about his identity.

He is also quite different from the "New Hebrew," the socialist and secular pioneer, symbol of the building of the country. But this evolution is not simply about style; it is a transformation of the Jewish character itself.

And this Jewish part of the equation is unsettling to secular culture. Beyond beliefs, it is the very existence of a visibly religious person that inevitably raises questions that modern European tradition has relegated to the private sphere: God, transcendence and meaning. And although these questions never disappeared, they were toned down within Israel's secular-Zionist tradition.

This friction could help explain the discomfort surrounding Ben-Gvir. He is not simply promoting a national-religious agenda; he wears his Jewish identity and attachment to the land openly, refusing to translate them into a universalist vocabulary. He brings his faith out of the private sphere, thrusting it into questions of sovereignty, land, national identity and political power.

While the place of religion in the Jewish state has been a fault line in Israeli society since its creation, and has been dividing Israelis long before October 7, it has become a very raw existential battlefield as it occupies more space within the public debate.

Considering the Jewish particularity of Israel, this conversation needs to happen. But for it to happen, Israel and its citizens need to allow for an accepting, tolerant, and inclusive space, without knee-jerk reactions, without violence, and with a genuine will to understand the other. From his newly gained position, Ben-Gvir himself could actually be helping to bridge these differences.

The Ben-Gvir effect has brought front stage a long-muted Jewish nationalism, attracting intense animosity but also discreet curiosity from Western leaders seeking strategies against radical Islamism and terror.

To capitalize on this attention, Ben-Gvir must change his method from mere provocation to more serious communication, and adopt a syntax that speaks to the international community without compromise or accommodation.

This gives the national-religious camp an opportunity to assert their ideology into the mainstream as an impossible-to-ignore reality in Israel and abroad. Ultimately, the fierce reaction Ben-Gvir triggers reveals as much about those responding as it does about the man himself.

The author holds a PhD from Tel Aviv University and is a regular contributor on Zionism, Israeli society, and Jewish identity.

9 days from antisemitism plan to antisemitic post

• By MICHA DANZIG

On September 29, New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani unveiled his plan to combat antisemitism. He noted that Jews are about 12% of the city's population but the victims of roughly half its reported hate crimes. He promised a city where Jews would be "not only safe, but celebrated" and pledged more money for hate-crime prevention.

On October 7, the third anniversary of the worst single-day massacre of Jews since the Holocaust, he posted a statement that undid every word of it.

That post, viewed more than 13 million times, runs about 210 words. Roughly 50 concern October 7. Some 140 indict Israel: An "ongoing genocide in Gaza," "occupation and apartheid," food aid "turned away," and "our tax dollars" funding "war crimes." Hamas is named once and never again. By the end, Israel is the only perpetrator.

This is now how antisemites posing as mourners mark the date. Mamdani wrote that Hamas "killed more than 1,100 Israelis," dropping the foreign workers from Thailand, Nepal, and elsewhere among the roughly 1,200 dead. His statement has no women raped at the Nova music festival, no children shot in front of their parents, no families burned alive in their safe rooms, no terrorist hacking the head off a body while another filmed it on a GoPro. It never mentions Kfir Bibas, abducted at nine months old and murdered in Gaza along with his four-year-old brother, Ariel, and their mother, Shiri. Hamas's conduct over the next two years also goes unmentioned.

That conduct answers the question he dodges: who kept this war going? Brett McGurk, president Joe Biden's lead hostage negotiator and no Benjamin Netanyahu partisan, served an administration that paused arms shipments to Israel. His new book describes Hamas lying about how many hostages it held, refusing to release the young women promised under the November 2023 deal, and sitting for weeks on an American offer that met most of its demands while six hostages – among them Hersh Goldberg-Polin, Carmel Gat, and Eden Yerushalmi – were murdered in a tunnel under Rafah. McGurk says the war would never have ended without the hostages coming home. Hamas spent two years bargaining over the living and the dead.

Mamdani's numbers fare no better. His "more than 21,000 children" comes from Hamas's health ministry, which in March 2025 quietly dropped some 3,400 "fully identified" deaths from its lists, 1,080 of them children. His "more than 1,400 Palestinians" killed since the ceasefire includes at least 420 Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorists and ignores the dozens of Gazans Hamas executed in the streets to reassert control. As for food aid "turned away," a UNICEF-coordinated survey in July put acute malnutrition in Gaza at 0.2% to 0.8%, at or below prewar levels and far under the global child-wasting rate of nearly 7%. Gazans have described Hamas seizing aid in the war it started and reselling it to them at black-market prices.

Every number he cites is Hamas's, and every fact he omits indicts Hamas.

Mamdani blames every destroyed building on Israel, too. Hamas dug some 600 kilometers of tunnels beneath Gaza's homes, schools and hospitals and let no civilian shelter in them. Senior official Mousa Abu Marzouk said in October 2023 that the tunnels were for fighters and that protecting civilians was the UN's and Israel's job. When the IDF warned Gazans to leave combat zones, Hamas told them to stay. A mayor honoring the dead might have mentioned the terrorist army that used them as cover.

MAMDANI IS right that the suffering did not begin on October 7, but the history undercuts his antisemitic fable. Arab mobs murdered Jews in Jerusalem in 1920, Jaffa in 1921, and Hebron in 1929, where in a single morning they slaughtered 67 Jews after the circle around Haj Amin al-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem and the era's dominant Palestinian Arab leader, spread the lie that Jews were plotting against al-Aqsa. There was no Jewish state then, and no "occupation" to blame.

Husseini's leadership rejected a Palestinian Arab state in 1937, 1939, and 1947. He spent World War II in Berlin as Adolf Hitler's honored guest, urging Arabs over Nazi radio to kill Jews wherever they found them. His successors were offered a Palestinian Arab state in 2000, 2001, and 2008 and refused each time. In 2005 Israel pulled every soldier and civilian out of Gaza; Hamas answered with terror, rockets, a violent takeover and, eventually, October 7. Hamas's charter declares the land from the river to the sea an Islamic trust no one may surrender and quotes a *hadith* about Muslims killing Jews. Ninety-four years after Hebron, Hamas named its invasion and massacre "Al-Aqsa Flood." From the mufti to Hamas, the throughline is a violent, fascist Islamist rejection of Jewish sovereignty anywhere in the land.



NYC MAYOR Zohran Mamdani addresses attendees at an event in New York City earlier this month. (Eduardo Munoz/Reuters)

None of this is hidden. The mayor left it out on purpose.

The genocide-libel itself collapses against the record. Genocidal regimes do not warn civilians to evacuate, pause fighting to vaccinate children against polio, or truck food to the people they are supposedly exterminating. In every genocide on record, the killers controlled when the killing stopped. In Gaza, Hamas could have ended the war any day by freeing the hostages and surrendering. Spreading that libel as mayor of the largest Jewish city outside Israel is reckless at best.

The results are measurable. NYPD data show anti-Jewish hate crimes up about 8% in the first eight months of his tenure, with Jews targeted in more than half of all confirmed hate crimes. When the plan was announced, Israel's consul general in New York, Ofir Akunis, warned that antisemitism would keep rising until the mayor recognized his own anti-Israel language as its main driver. Nine days later, the mayor delivered that same language to an audience of millions.

Most Jewish New Yorkers have no use for grant programs from a mayor who marks one of the worst days in Jewish history by calling the Jewish state a "genocidal apartheid regime funded by their taxes." They have seen where that rhetoric leads: to their campuses, their synagogues, their streets.

Mamdani's plan was written to show he takes antisemitism seriously. His October 7 statement showed it was written to give him cover for the hatred he keeps feeding.

The writer is an attorney, former IDF soldier, and former NYPD officer. He writes widely on Israel, Zionism, antisemitism, and Jewish history. He serves on the board of Herut North America.

Antisemitism doesn't need facts



• By COOKIE SCHWAEBER-ISSAN

If you've been paying attention over the last three years, you've repeatedly heard the slanderous accusations that Israel has committed genocide against Gazans. You've heard that Zionists are racists and oppressors, and you've heard that the Jewish homeland was founded on the occupation of Arab lands.

What you haven't heard are any explanations, justifications, or contextual evidence for those very libelous claims, which, in large part, have been the catalyst, fueling the rapid spread of antisemitism.

There are reasons why those things aren't forthcoming. In a brilliant article titled "Call it 'genocide' before all the facts are known," October 2, writer Micha Danzig outlines the winning formula that's worked throughout history when it comes to fomenting Jewish hatred.

Danzig quotes Democratic Senate candidate Abdul El-Sayed, who said: "Genocide needn't wait for all the facts." He knows that history has proven that antisemitic libels have succeeded without furnishing any facts.

El-Sayed realizes the power of words, and that is why he believes that getting in front of an action, by calling it a damning libel, is useful when spreading the hate. In his world, facts are an inconvenient annoyance that require verification and supportive testimony. Why take on that burden when, simply by inference, you can heighten the effectiveness of what you're purporting?

This has been the secret weapon of those who have taken the side of terrorists, whether they realize it or not, attempting to smear Jews and their ancestral homeland. By linking the IDF to a genocide, they can depict an entire country as evil monsters, whose goal is to slaughter all of its people.

Danzig recalled a recent Scott Galloway podcast, in which El-Sayed was confronted over his fallacious genocide assertion, countering it with the actions of Israel having supplied Gazans with food, humanitarian aid, polio vaccines, and the distribution of printed warnings to evacuate certain areas before a military operation is started.

Galloway concludes that since "no other genocidal regime has ever done anything like that," it stands to reason that Israel does not fit the profile of a country whose intent it is to annihilate the people of Gaza.

With no convincing comeback, El-Sayed, at that point, concedes that use of the word "genocide" prevents the crime from becoming big. In other words, by his reckoning, preemptively throwing out the charge will somehow stave off the actual atrocity.

Here is why that distorted way of thinking is just a cover-up for the real aim. Because the moment a criminal accusation, such as the wholesale murder of an entire race is leveled, there is no taking it back. That vicious lie makes its way around the globe at record speed, the real endgame of antisemites.

Tickling the ears of folks already predisposed to believe the worst about Jews, it's one of those delicious morsels spoken of in the book of Proverbs – "The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body" (18:9).



DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE for US Senate Abdul El-Sayed is seen speaking at a campaign stop in Michigan earlier this month. (Rebecca Cook/Reuters)

Once there, they ruminate, taking on a life form, which helps to embellish and create an even greater distaste towards the Jewish people.

DANZIG REMINDS us that this is how centuries of atrocities were committed against the Jews – all starting with a vile allegation of evil, committed by either one person or a collective Jewish community. As word spread, Jews were murdered in the most inhumane ways or forced to leave the places they thought were home.

Resorting to libel has always been a clever strategy when it comes to the Jews, and this time it's no different than what was done multiple times throughout many centuries.

That is why inferring that a genocide is taking place works. Once it's repeated over and over again, the stain becomes permanent regardless of its veracity. El-Sayed knows this, but he's not alone in his deliberate manipulation of trying to foment anti-Israel sentiment.

For him, it's a natural offshoot of his radical Islamic views, just as it is for congresswomen Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar. For others, who don't come from that religious background, such as Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the genocide term packs a punch, showing that she is part of the team that holds the Jewish state with contempt.

Scoring her political points, AOC gains the advantage without having to substantiate why she also asserts that a genocide is taking place in Gaza. For podcasters, who want to up their listening audience, they, too, know that such explosive claims are good for their ratings.

Just look at how Candace Owens has substantially increased her following by jumping on the bandwagon of "Jews being responsible for all of the world's ills." Business has never been better for her!

In my recent AllIsrael News article titled "Can we get details on the genocide you say is happening," I mentioned the fallout for Israel as a result of the genocide accusation.

At least five countries boycotted the Eurovision Song Contest, refusing to compete if Israel was permitted to participate. This is only one trivial consequence that has resulted from a well-executed smear campaign, designed to injure the standing of Jews.

Other punitive measures have come in the form of our soldiers and prime minister being unable to travel freely throughout the world, for fear of being arrested in various locales, for war crimes that were never committed.

Jews, throughout the world, have been the targets of unjustified persecution and the victims of character assassination. Israel has become a reproach, synonymous with disapproval and shameful actions.

But this was the plan all along. Systematically plant the seed of disgrace and humiliation, and the Jewish state goes down in reputational flames, undoing nearly eight decades of service to humanity along with the many technological advances which have blessed mankind, all courtesy of the Jewish race.

In this dishonest and calculated game of defaming Israel, every dirty trick is up for grabs, with the goal being total isolation from the rest of civilized society. Ironically, those who smear and besmirch the only democracy in the Middle East end up on the side of the most barbaric and inhumane savages that have ever lived.

As Danzig says, El-Sayed is just another, in a long line of "purveyors of the world's oldest hatred." For him, facts don't matter, because he's managed to do very well for himself without them.

The writer, a former principal of Jerusalem elementary and middle schools, was a member of Kibbutz Re'im from 1994 to 1999. She is the author of Mistake-Proof Parenting, *based on the time-tested wisdom found in the Book of Proverbs, available on Amazon.*

Better 'hasbara' won't save us



LIVING THE DREAM
• By URI PILICHOWSKI

When I was 19, my father and I took my rabbi, Sinai Adler, to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington because the rabbi was a survivor, and he refused to believe that the American government kept a permanent exhibition in which it admitted it could have interrupted the machinery of Auschwitz and chose not to.

He needed to see the admission with his own eyes. The gallery held a US War Department letter explaining the decision not to bomb the rail lines and a reconnaissance photograph of the camp taken from an American bomber. That photograph was made 17 days after Rabbi Adler had been brought through the gate.

As we walked out, my father tried to lift him. The halls were thick with school groups, and most of the children were not Jewish, which my father offered as proof that the world had learned something and that the next generation would not repeat the crime. Rabbi Adler answered that they were only coming to study their mistakes and to learn how to do it better the next time.

Years later, in a study hall in Israel, a student told him that German visitors were standing at the back of the room. They had come, they said, to see the miracle of the Jewish state. Students argued that these Germans had not been alive during the war and that six decades had passed. Rabbi Adler had them removed from the campus.

Those two scenes can be filed under trauma if you want an easy label. Rabbi Adler was a careful reader and a disciplined mind, and the conclusions he drew did not begin in shock.

He returned again and again to the Talmudic teaching that Esau hates Jacob. He treated that line as an operating instruction. Gentiles will persecute Jews, and a Jew who forgets that fact is unprepared for what history holds.

I hear the same complaint about Israel that I have heard for years. If only the country explained itself more clearly, if only the press operation were sharper, the world would grant the benefit of the doubt and perhaps even real support, especially after the massacre of October 7.

The evidence offered for that hope is the long stretch of Western backing that Israel enjoyed through most of its first seven decades. There were breaks in that pattern.

US President Dwight D. Eisenhower threatened Israel over the Sinai campaign of 1956. France embargoed arms on the eve of the Six Day War. Boycott campaigns gathered in universities and unions. Still, until about three years ago, the West as a bloc treated Israel as a partner more often than as a defendant.

The hope that better public relations will restore that climate misreads the record. Rabbi Adler and the sages were right about the ground under our feet. Antisemitism is the baseline we can count on. Support is the exception.

A COMMON theory holds that the goodwill of those first decades was an aftershock of the Holocaust, a period in which even polished antisemites understood that Europe had gone too far and that open annihilation had become embarrassing.

That aftershock never erased the double standard. Friends still applied rules to Jerusalem that they would not apply to themselves. The pockets of hostility were the older pattern showing through the courtesy. The courtesy has worn off. The Holocaust survivor bump has ended. Baseline antisemitism has returned. We can argue about the date it faded.

But its end is no longer in dispute.

Support from Evangelical Christians is the large exception that still holds, and it grows out of their theology rather than out of a sudden affection for Jewish power.

Other help arrived from sources that were moral and strategic at once. US president John F. Kennedy approved weapons sales. US politician Henry M. Jackson tied aid for the Soviet Union to the release of Jews who wanted to leave. American president Richard Nixon ordered the airlift that kept Israel standing in the Yom Kippur War.

Those acts matter, and we should remember them with gratitude. They do not rewrite the longer pattern. Not all the gentiles hate us all of the time, but most gentiles will hate us most of the time. History is stubborn on this point for anyone who finds the sentence extreme.

Zionism began because that pattern would not dissolve. For two thousand years millions of Jews absorbed hatred and exile as a condition of life and waited for gentile mercy to improve.

Early Zionists first trusted emancipation and the Enlightenment to repair the Jewish situation from outside. When the repair failed, they concluded that the Jewish people needed a state of their own, a place that could shield them from persecution, let them work at full capacity, and for many restore a life of sanctity in their own land.

At eye level from Rabbi Adler's seat in his study sat a set of Mishna books that he liked to take down for guests. The volumes had been printed in Berlin in 1936, three years after Hitler took office and three years before the first mass killings.

The publisher added an introduction that explained away the Mishna warnings about trusting gentiles. Those laws, the introduction said, belonged to an ancient world in which pagans hated Jews. The German gentile of the present was the most refined man civilization had produced. Jews could rely on him and did not need to apply the old suspicion. The books were still on the shelf when the refined men began the work the introduction had declared impossible.

The belief that Jews can talk the nations into permanent friendship treats 20 centuries of evidence as a public-relations problem. "Never again" was not coined to fund a better press office.

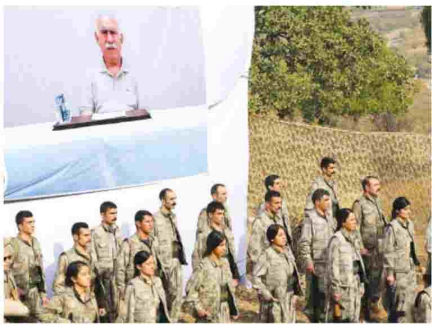
It was coined to remind Jews what happens when they rest their survival on the goodwill of people who have already shown them the limit of that goodwill.

The museum photograph, the German visitors at the back of the hall, and the Berlin Mishna of 1936 belong to one argument. Learn the baseline. Build as if the exception will not last. Keep the state strong enough that the next improvement in gentile technique never gets its laboratory.

The anatomy of deflection

Civilizational unity, historical facts define Iran's future – not transnational separatist movements

• By TINA GHAZIMORAD



FIGHTERS WITH the Kurdistan Workers' Party line up during a disarmament ceremony last year. Transnationalist separatist groups are not the path to Iran's future, the writer maintains. (Thaier al-Sudani/Reuters)

My recent article in *The Jerusalem Post* issued a critical warning to Israeli and Western strategists: Do not jeopardize the historic, civilizational bond with the Iranian people by flirting with marginal, transnational separatist factions. Predictably, the piece provoked a flurry of angry, highly personalized reactions from anonymous quarters and regionalist echo chambers.

Rather than addressing the hard geopolitical, demographic, and historical facts I raised, these counter-arguments resorted to emotional deflection and historical revisionism. This visceral anger and the complete evasion of historical evidence, however, only serve to validate the core arguments of my thesis. To misread the reality of Iran at this critical historical juncture is a luxury neither Israel nor the free world can afford. The narrative presented by these critics is fundamentally detached from reality, completely falling apart when confronted with seven undeniable truths.

FIRST, MY critics deliberately misinterpret antiquity and my invocation of Bistun and Taq-e Bostan. I referenced these monumental landmarks in the Kermanshah province to highlight an undeniable civilizational continuity. These ancient monuments prove that for over 2,500 years, this region has been a foundational pillar and a vital core of Iranian national sovereignty and territory, not a peripheral borderland waiting to be fractured.

Second, they attempt to obscure the clear line I drew between ordinary citizens and transnational separatists, calling it a "false dichotomy." This is a classic distortion. My article explicitly separated the patriotic majority of the population from "transnational separatist movements." It is these transnational cults and factions that actively pursue separation, whereas the actual population remains deeply integrated into the fabric of the nation.

Third, they entirely erase the strongholds of Iranian nationalism: Kermanshah and Ilam. My critics imply that the identity of the people in the western provinces is entirely defined by the political ambitions of armed rebel groups. They conveniently ignore the demographic and ideological reality of major urban centers including Kermanshah, the most populous Kurdish city in the region, and Ilam that have historically stood as fortresses of Iranian patriotism. In Kurdish regions, the local cultural identity is recognized not as an opposition to Iran, but as the most authentic and ancient narrative of being Iranian.

Fourth, they politically exploit shared suffering, attempting to weaponize selective regional cases to paint a picture of an isolated, uniquely targeted territory. This is not a valid analytical response; it is a distortion of tragedy. The Islamic Republic's brutal execution apparatus does not target an isolated area; it commits atrocities across the entirety of Iran. Just on Monday, October 5, 2026, the regime executed Alireza Sepahi and Alireza Raeisi, two young protesters arrested during the uprisings in Isfahan. When young citizens from the heart of Isfahan face the exact same gallows, it proves that state terror is a structural affliction holding the entire nation hostage. Weaponizing this universal Iranian tragedy to legitimize the political ambitions of armed, factional groups is a grotesque deflection from a shared national struggle against a common oppressor.

Fifth, there is a telling and total silence from my critics regarding the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), its leader, and their anti-Israel legacy. This glaring omission is proof of intellectual bankruptcy. They completely evade the fact that many transnational separatist movements look up to Abdullah Ocalan as a foundational figure, despite Ocalan's continuous anti-Israel legacy. Furthermore, they have no defense against the historical fact that the PKK operated as a proxy for the Assad regime, trained alongside armed anti-Israel Palestinian factions in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley front, and fought directly against Israel. Because certain armed groups operating in Iran are direct branches of this terrorist PKK network, my critics completely censor this history, knowing it destroys their attempt to appeal to an international audience.

Sixth, my critics deliberately rewrite the history of the 1979 catastrophe to hide their own role in Iran's destabilization. Armed regional factions were an active part of the disastrous 1979 coalition – alongside Islamists, Marxists, and Mossadeghists – that brought down the nation. Leaders like Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou openly pledged allegiance to Ayatollah Khomeini, only to later clash over the spoils of the revolution when the Islamists turned around and purged them.

If these timed factions, disguised as political parties, truly sought a democratic, unified Iran rather than secession, why did they immediately exploit the country's chaotic vulnerability just days after February 11, 1979, the exact day the previous regime fell and the Islamists seized power? Specifically, on February 20, 1979, a mere nine days after the revolution, they aggressively raided and looted the national army garrison in Mahabad, assassinating its commander and stealing heavy weaponry, including tanks, heavy artillery pieces, and thousands of rifles. They then marched on Sanandaj, and had it not been for the fierce resistance of the Iranian National Army's 28th Division garrison, they would have completely captured the city.

Let us ask an honest question to an international audience: Would the Israeli government or public ever tolerate a so-called political faction that raids and captures an IDF base? Calling these militant groups "freedom fighters" is an insult to sovereign nations.

Finally, they seek to erase the historical reality of local resistance, such as the Paveh events of August 1979. They imply that armed groups have always naturally represented the collective will of the local population. History records otherwise. During that critical juncture, it was the local, indigenous patriotic population of Paveh in Kermanshah province who actively took up arms and resisted the violent, armed incursion of separatist factions. This historical event proves that the people themselves have historically been the first line of defense for Iran's territorial integrity against armed groups.

ULTIMATELY, THE angry reactions to my piece fail to counter its core warning. By flirting with marginal, transnational separatist elements, outside powers risk alienating the patriotic majority of the Iranian public.

The true, lasting strategic asset for Israel and the West is the 2,500-year-old civilizational bond with a unified Iranian nation, not short-sighted investments in armed factions like the PKK and its branches that carry a historical legacy of hostility toward the West. We must look toward a future democratic Iran based on historical territorial integrity, national unity, individual liberty, and equality before the law.

The writer is the communications director to Prince Reza Pahlavi and an Iranian journalist who previously served as editor-in-chief of news at Manoto TV, a UK-based Persian-language television network.

The pager that shattered Nasrallah's myth



• By SALEM ALKETBI

The second anniversary of the pager operation is a reminder that the first thing to explode on September 17, 2024, was not thousands of small devices. It was the carefully cultivated aura of invulnerability that Hassan Nasrallah had built around himself.

For years, the Hezbollah leader had appeared from his hideout, boasting about missiles, tunnels, and "surprises," asking the Lebanese to believe that his disappearance was strategic brilliance. The terrorist group could see without being seen, strike without being touched.

Then an old-fashioned device exposed the reality. The organization that had cowed Lebanon through fear had been compromised through its own supply chain. Its leader, who threatened to bury his enemies, did not know his men were carrying booby-trapped devices.

This was not simply an intelligence coup worthy of a spy thriller. Israeli intelligence had constructed a false reality in which Hezbollah operated with complete confidence. Public investigations and the book *In the War Room* trace the idea's origins to 2002-2006, during Meir Dagan's tenure.

Around 2014, Mossad and Israeli military intelligence began introducing wireless devices into Hezbollah's network, monitoring them while retaining the option of detonation. In 2022, they turned to pagers: devices operatives would carry rather than leave in an office or warehouse.

Front companies, licensing arrangements, dummy websites, and stores gave a battery unavailable on the open market a convincing commercial identity. A Taiwanese brand and a supply chain stretching from Hungary to Hong Kong supplied the cover. The Mossad did not simply intercept a shipment. It created the product, marketed it, built its reputation, and cut the price until Hezbollah's procurement officials chose the trap themselves.

This was the difference between penetrating an organization and shaping the choices it believed were its own. The procurement process offered the appearance of control while delivering precisely what the adversary wanted.

They thought they were vetting a product. In reality, the product was exposing the organization.

A Reuters investigation found that explosives and a concealed detonator were built into the battery, allowing the devices to pass Hezbollah's security checks. Even when officials noticed that batteries drained faster than advertised, distribution continued.

The message and alert were designed to make recipients bring the device toward their faces and use both hands. The alert tone and explosive charge had been tested to produce the intended response. The Mossad had choreographed the movements of those carrying its bombs.

The bitterest irony was that Nasrallah himself helped the operation. In February 2024, he called mobile phones more dangerous than spies and urged his men to smash them, bury them, or lock them in metal boxes. Hezbollah accelerated its adoption of pagers. His warning did not create the operation, but it drove more men toward the prepared device. The leadership's fear had become a predictable procurement decision. Hezbollah had chosen its own poisoned remedy.

I see something deeper here than a procurement mistake. An entire security doctrine collapsed: secrecy supposedly meant switching off a phone, while the enemy was manufacturing the alternative.

At 3:30 p.m. on September 17, the devices began to ring. Roughly 3,000 exploded. The next day came the wireless devices, some held by Hezbollah for nearly a decade. Dozens were killed and more than 3,400 wounded. Devices had been distributed among fighters, commanders, support personnel, and affiliated medics. The penetration even reached Iran's ambassador. The target was the infrastructure that enabled an Iranian-backed militia to operate as a state within Lebanon.

MORE IMPORTANT, in my view, was the assault on trust. Anyone still carrying a device had reason to fear its battery. Those who watched colleagues fall simultaneously understood that the enemy had helped build the walls behind which they sheltered. The equipment meant to connect the organization had become a source of fear. Replacing it could restore communication, but could not erase the discovery that trusted channels had carried the enemy inside.



PRIME MINISTER Benjamin Netanyahu holds up a pager as he addresses the United Nations General Assembly in New York City last month. (Mike Segar/Reuters)

Two former Mossad officers described the intended psychological impact. Wafiq Safa, a close Nasrallah associate, later recounted that the attacks left him deeply shaken and barely eating for almost a day. The man who had spent his life instilling fear in the Lebanese discovered, days before his death, that fear had reached his own hideout.

The operation also opened a military campaign. On September 20, Ibrahim Aqil and Radwan Force commanders were killed. Strikes expanded to weapons depots, facilities, and positions. On September 27, Nasrallah was killed beneath the headquarters he had regarded as an impregnable fortress.

Intelligence derives its real power from turning secrets into paralysis and confusion at the moment military force can exploit them. Without the subsequent strikes, the explosions would have remained an extraordinary intelligence feat. Their succession made the operation the opening phase of a broader dismantling.

Nasrallah had built his authority on the belief that obscurity proved knowledge, disappearance meant immunity, and questioning the leadership betrayed resistance. The farther he withdrew, the more formidable he appeared. Secrecy became wisdom beyond scrutiny.

The pagers exposed what that mythology concealed. His disappearance was isolation. His secrecy hid ignorance of what entered his warehouses. His speeches promised deterrence while his security apparatus was already penetrated.

That is the weakness of closed ideological organizations. They confuse loyalty with competence and treat questions as betrayal. Eventually, the leader's word becomes a vulnerability no one dares challenge. A professional intelligence service could engineer the environment around its target; a terrorist militia had mistaken suspicion and obedience for security.

Two years later, Hezbollah can buy devices, change intermediaries, and rebuild parts of its network. It cannot turn the clock back to before the first ring.

The militia that claimed to protect Lebanon could not even protect its own supply chain. The leader who threatened to bury his enemies was himself buried beneath the concrete, along with the project he had built. And the Shi'ite community asked to believe in divine protection saw that an aura of sanctity could neither stop a signal nor reveal a compromised battery.

The most devastating part was that Hezbollah's own leadership had led its men, step by step, to the very tool Israel designed to reach them. In doing so, it shattered the image of Nasrallah as an infallible leader.

The writer is a UAE political analyst and former Federal National Council candidate.

Iran is at the breaking point

The regime's greatest fear is what comes next

• By ERFAN FARD

A nation of 90 million is watching its homeland being impoverished, terrorized, plundered, and driven toward the abyss by a ruling cult that would sooner destroy Iran than relinquish power.

For nearly half a century, the Islamic Republic has consumed the country it claims to govern – its wealth, dignity, security, and the hopes of generations. Now, as economic collapse, repression and the specter of war converge, Iran is approaching a historic breaking point: Will the regime that has held it captive since 1979 finally fall – or drag the country into the abyss with it?

Iran is engulfed in chaos, its economy already collapsing. An incompetent government, presided over by a subservient and populist president, convenes emergency meetings as the country descends deeper into crisis.

Yet Iranians no longer heed the regime's deceptive promises. The government has lost its grip on the economy and inflation, while Tehran's markets spiral into turmoil. Officials' hollow pronouncements and empty assurances no longer command the slightest credibility.

Only the regime's loyalists profit from the status quo, prepared to watch Iran be destroyed for their financial interests. This same circle has pillaged the country from end to end. Poverty and relentless inflation have brought Iran to its knees.

Since 1979, a criminal cult has ravaged, plundered, and suppressed the country in service of a fraudulent ideology, holding 90 million people captive. Its rulers now proclaim themselves "the superpower of the world," boast of having "defeated America and Israel," and warn that "the region will not be safe as long as even one American soldier remains in the Middle East."

From state media to Friday-prayer pulpits, regime platforms threaten US President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, while Islamic murderers and criminals relentlessly inflame hostility toward Israel and the United States.

The Islamic Republic is preparing for a broader war and has no desire for an agreement with Trump. Through deception and duplicity, it keeps him entangled in diplomacy and proclaims that deception a victory. The regime will not hand Trump the political triumph of an agreement, even at the price of every Iranian's life and Iran itself reduced to scorched earth.

Iran's military and security establishment remains committed to warmongering and crisis-making. Trump says Washington does not know whom to talk to in Iran. Then what purpose is served by this hollow theater of negotiations with Islamic murderers and terrorists? Six years of his presidency have pursued this impossible dream without producing a single signed agreement.

Meanwhile, Iranians live with profound insecurity, despair, and abandonment. Executions, torture, arrests, and persecution have become grim fixtures of ordinary life. The struggle for basic subsistence has left society paralyzed, angry, and exhausted. While ordinary citizens are denied prosperity and opportunity, money continues flowing to notorious religious institutions, the shadowy Shi'ite clerical mafia, the machinery of repression, and the regime's vast propaganda apparatus.

The regime is releasing criminals from prison, arming them with swords, knives, and sledgehammers, and unleashing them to threaten Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi, the only alternative and leader of Iran's national uprising – including explicit threats against his life.

ALONGSIDE THE regime stands a jealous, ambitious, and self-aggrandizing opposition: religious-nationalists, reformists, communists, Kurdish separatists (KDPI, Komala), anti-Israel and anti-American terrorists such as the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), discredited human-rights activists, and mercenaries. Much of this opposition acts in concert, little more than puppets performing before cameras.

In the event of an American and Israeli attack, the regime intends to drag Iran into civil war and reactivate Islamic terrorist networks through the mosques. Its organic relationship with al-Qaeda and ISIS is becoming increasingly unmistakable, while Iran's borders remain open to them. Hashd al-Shaabi, the Fatemiyoun, the Zainabiyoun, and others are integral components of the Islamic Republic's machinery of repression.

The regime's propaganda apparatus promotes weapons training, as though a regime nearing collapse is preparing its supporters for urban warfare. Under the banner of confronting America and Israel, it provides military training with an unmistakable objective: to bring war into Iran's cities, streets, and alleyways. Islamic terrorists know neither peace nor the value of life and security.

Across Iranian cities, the atmosphere is increasingly one of war. People whisper: Will Trump launch the final attack? The country hangs like a pendulum in uncertainty, with law and order unraveling. The mullahs intensify street propaganda to drown out protest, yet a national uprising looms. The regime calls participants in its street spectacles – its "Islam Party" – *fedayeen*, echoing the political theater of Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi.

The Revolutionary Guards and security officials squander their days in endless meetings, terrified by the deepening crisis and sheltering behind a bankrupt, discredited government. Agriculture, industry, and production have ground to a halt. There is no coherent plan to regain control. The regime's security calculations are unraveling.

Iranians await another war in the hope that the bloodthirsty wolf of the Islamic Republic will finally be brought down. They hope Trump will finish the job – or allow Israel to eliminate the regime's thugs and criminals, layer by layer.

Meanwhile, the regime intensifies killings and executions, hoping to prevent economic misery, relentless inflation, soaring prices, and mounting social anguish from erupting into the "final battle." Iran is passing through fateful days as urban repression intensifies. The regime's ultimate nightmare is a popular uprising. A regime that kills its own people for daring to protest will stop at no crime to preserve its rule.

And yet, behind every headline about war, sanctions, missiles, and nuclear negotiations lies another Iran – the Iran of ordinary people who simply want to live. They want to raise their children without fear, put food on the table, walk their streets without repression, speak without looking over their shoulders, and grow old in the country they love.

For nearly half a century, generations of Iranians have watched their lives disappear into prisons, graves, exile, poverty, and shattered dreams. They are not asking the world to give them a country. They already have one – an ancient and beloved homeland called Iran.

They are asking for the chance to take it back. Ninety million people have waited long enough. In memory of the 50,000 slaughtered in Tehran's streets by the Shi'ite mullahs and IRGC thugs, who cried out, "This is the final battle – Pahlavi will return!" Iran deserves to live again. "Make Iran Great Again!"

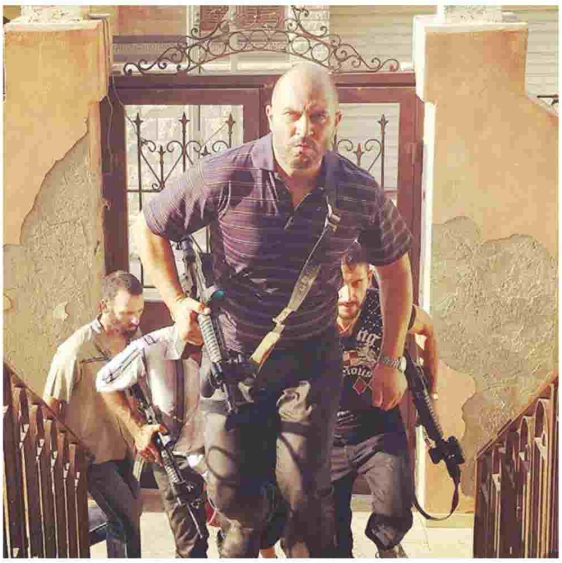
Let us hope Washington has the resolve and unwavering will to make it happen.

The writer is a Middle East political analyst. His latest book, Tehran's Dictator, *examines the theocratic era of Ali Khamenei (1989-2026). @EQFard*

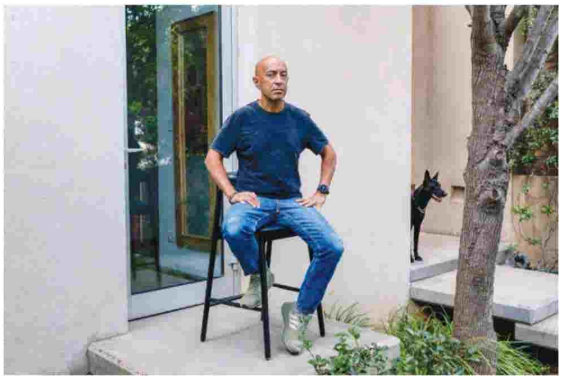
'It's a story that was burning in our hearts'

Co-creator Avi Issacharoff on how 'Fauda' grapples with Oct. 7, show's popularity in Arab world

• By EMILY ROSE



LIOR RAZ in 'Fauda.' We 'are continuing with our mission of bringing more good content to the world. It's not stopping us, and it's not even slowing us,' says co-creator Avi Issacharoff. (Yes Studios)



AVI ISSACHAROFF: We wanted to focus on October 7 and the Israeli side and what happened to Israel as a nation, as a society. (Ronen Zvulun/Reuters)

Since its Netflix debut in 2016, the Israeli thriller *Fauda* (or "chaos" in Arabic) has won global audiences for its portrayal of a special operations unit in the IDF's *mista'arvim* unit, whose members go undercover in Palestinian society in pursuit of terrorist targets.

Although the show has long taken inspiration from real-life events (including a season three plot mirroring the 2006 abduction of soldier Gilad Schalit into Gaza), the show's co-creator Avi Issacharoff says its latest season – centered around the October 7, 2023, attacks by Hamas in the South and the subsequent war – is its most personal yet. One of the show's crew members was killed while serving in the IDF in Gaza, while another was wounded. For many Israelis, Issacharoff says, October 7 remains "an open wound."

Speaking at his home in Tel Aviv, Issacharoff discusses his decision to write a season around October 7, the boycotts facing Israeli art and cultural institutions, and the show's unexpected popularity among Arab viewers.

The following conversation has been edited and condensed for clarity.

Where were you on October 7 and what do you remember from that day?

I mean, you cannot forget a day like that. It's a trauma, a national trauma. It's not a personal one. I was at home, and my daughter woke me up [at] 6:29 a.m. and said, "Abba, there are alarms."

We went to the safe room, and after a while, I open up Al Jazeera – I speak fluent Arabic – and then I saw Muhammad Deif, head of [the] Hamas "military wing," declare war on Israel and asking Hezbollah, the [Palestinians in the] West Bank, and the Israeli Arabs to join in and to fight against the Zionist entity. It took a few more hours to understand how big the catastrophe [was].

The latest season of 'Fauda,' which centers around the October 7 attack and its aftermath, has seen large viewership in the Arab world. What do you make of its popularity?

Lebanon, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates – so many different places that love *Fauda* in the former seasons. The thing that we didn't expect was that this season will succeed because of October 7; we would have expected that fewer people would watch an Israeli show.

What's the explanation? I don't have a good idea. I mean, other than it's a good TV show. It's a good drama, and maybe it's curiosity about the other side. People want to understand better how did Israelis deal with October 7. Maybe it's the inter-junction between the two that made it popular.

How do you see the season's success juxtaposed to the recent premiere of the Israeli documentary 'NAZA' and rhetoric around it? Have you seen it?

I haven't seen it, so I cannot really answer this. I mean, I don't know what kind of a film this is. I don't know nothing.

Do you think 'Fauda' is playing the role of improving Israel's global image?

We're not part of an effort by the Israeli state. We're not connected to the State of Israel, the government of Israel, [in] any way. Let's be clear about that.

We want to tell a story, a story that was burning in our heart. It was there in the first, second, third, and fourth seasons, but even more after the national trauma that we all suffered. I don't want to be part of the *hasbara* [Israeli PR] effort. This is not the mission. I guess this is one of the secrets of the success – it's something that really burns in our hearts and not part of an effort to explain. No, we want to show a story.

Some people have criticized the show for playing into stereotypes about Arabs in this season. What do you say to that?

Not in this season because we focus way more on European characters, white Europeans who were recruited by Hamas. So I don't think that we generalize Arabs or Muslims. The opposite. At the beginning of the show, one of the so-called good guys is a Muslim Bedouin [whose] son was killed on October 7. Some Arabs were killed or kidnapped into Gaza during October 7. So I don't think that we generalize Arabs. We show many aspects, many different people.

How does it feel these days to be an Israeli artist in the world, given calls for boycotts against Israeli artists and institutions?

Look, it's sad. It's very sad that [the] Israeli creative community is being [met with] a kind of a cold shoulder. I cannot really complain because my show is very successful. But it's way more complicated today to create something that deals with Israeli content than it used to be four years ago.

And again, the reason that it all started wasn't because Israel was the aggressor, but because Hamas decided to commit genocide in Israel, and not the opposite way around.

But again, Lior Raz, my partner, and I are continuing with our mission of bringing more good content to the world. It's not stopping us, and it's not even slowing us. It's a challenge, but we like challenges, and we're dealing with challenges almost every day. And it's part of the fun because if it's too easy, it's not that fun.

The destruction in Gaza is absent from this season of 'Fauda.' Why make that choice?

We were shooting *Fauda* while the war was still going on. We were writing the fifth season while the war was still going on. You don't know how will it end. You don't know what's going to be the landscape, the human landscape – how Gaza is going to look like physically. You cannot really gamble on the end result of the war, so we kind of ran away from Gaza. We focus on Europe and then Syria, and then the West Bank instead.

The second aspect is production-wise, can you shoot something that resembles the current Gaza somewhere in Israel? Definitely not, unless you're going to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in order to make it.

And yes, what you were hearing us saying is that we wanted to focus on October 7 and the Israeli side and what happened to Israel as a nation, as a society. With the Palestinians, I'm sure that there will be plenty of TV shows and movies that will deal with what happened to them. For example, *NAZA*. But for me, it was very important to tell our story, my story, the trauma that we suffered.

Did you intend for the season to come out ahead of elections in Israel?

It wasn't intended to come out now. I mean, this is Netflix's decision to air it now, following some kind of an agreement with Yes. What we wanted to do in the show is to make people remember. This is a catastrophe that happened here that changed the face of the Middle East.

And you cannot forget October 7, because people here are trying to make us forget it and focus on other stuff, and especially people outside of Israel that are trying to change history and start with the end result of the catastrophe. (Reuters)

Open questions



PAUSE TO PONDER

• By GREER FAY CASHMAN

The absence of a state commission of inquiry into the failure of Israel's intelligence network to be forewarned and forearmed against the October 7 massacre remains an open wound in large segments of Israeli society. The issue has been raised numerous times by numerous people over the past three years, but has been held at bay by the outgoing government.

For families who witnessed the massacre and lost loved ones, there will be no closure while the issue remains unresolved.

Not all are seeking to cast blame. What they want to know is how it happened so that measures can be taken to ensure that it doesn't happen again.

Slogans such as "Never Again" are nothing more than lip service, especially when it comes to October 7. There are no guarantees, especially when there are loose links in the chains of command in the intelligence and defense networks.

Long before October 7, residents of communities close to the Gaza border, said that they could hear noises beneath the ground. It later transpired that these were the tunnels that were planned by Hamas. Had a proper investigation been mounted earlier, October 7 might be nothing more than a date on the calendar.

The same goes for the suspicious actions in Gaza reported by female lookouts in the army and ignored by senior officers.

It is imperative for a country facing an ongoing existential threat to thoroughly investigate every suspicion. Security is something which we cannot take for granted.

Some members of bereaved families have conducted their own investigations, and have come up with red light warning data that would be presented to members of a state commission of inquiry – if there was such a committee.

On October 7, the campaign phone calls by leaders and members of political parties included members of bereaved families who explained that they had joined a particular party because it had promised an investigation, or because it was dedicated to eradicating Hamas from Gaza.

Other bereaved parents, spouses, and siblings interviewed on radio and television had tears in their voices and lumps in their throats when speaking of loved ones who had been murdered or who had fallen in battle. A significant number of the fallen had left pregnant wives whose children will know their fathers only from photographs and from family remembrances. There were such children after 1956, 1967, and 1973. Sadly, there will also be some in 2027.

Surely these children are owed a better future. No matter how much love they receive from their mothers, siblings, aunts, uncles, and grandparents, they will always miss the father they never knew – especially so in the case of every only child.

If the government fails to appoint a state commission of inquiry, then the bereaved families and their supporters should do so themselves, just as they have separate commemorative events from that of the official state commemoration. Surely there are legal and intelligence experts in their ranks.

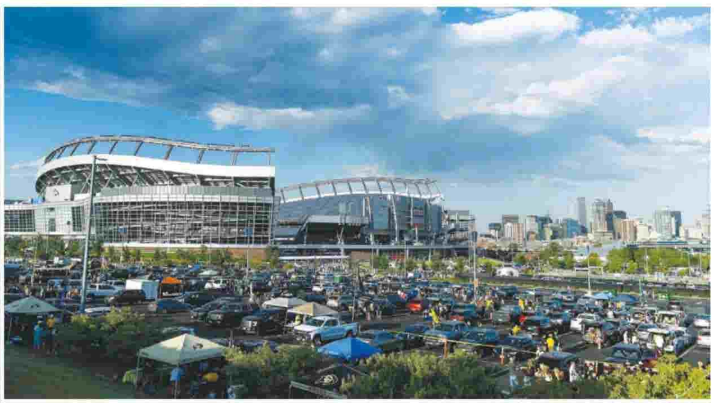
President Isaac Herzog and his wife Michal attended both official and unofficial events in different areas of the country. This was partly symbolic as participants in the Nova music festival and soldiers who fell in combat came from all over Israel, so it was a matter of noblesse oblige on the part of the head of state to travel to different parts of the country to honor their memories.

Families and organizations have honored the memories of the murdered and the fallen with the dedication of Torah scrolls, scholarships, funds for trauma therapies, hiking trails, concerts, monuments, and more. So many of the casualties were young people in their teens and early 20s whose hopes and dreams were obliterated. Their families are making sure that their names and faces are remembered.

In special October 7 broadcasts, bereaved family members expressed appreciation for the opportunity to talk about their loved ones. It was of great importance to them to be able to share details of the character, talents, and hobbies of the deceased.

Jews so frequently use the quote from the Mishna that whoever saves a single life is as one who saves a whole world. But every life, whether saved or not, is a world unto itself. Every person has his or her unique quality and bereaved families want those qualities to be known. That is why it is so important to them to be given a broadcast platform.

While much has been said and written about the traumatic effects of the massacre and the war on those personally caught up in one or both, not enough attention is paid to the broadcast journalists who interview them. Listening to dozens of harrowing testimonies and stories every week is also a traumatic experience which is currently overshadowed by professional duty. After the war, we have to give some thought to assessing the traumatic effects on journalists and providing them with the therapies they need.



AN ISRAELI-RUN sports bar and barbecue restaurant is set to open outside Empower Field at Mile High, where the NFL's Denver Broncos play. (Dustin Bradford/Getty Images)

Ex-kibbutznik brings Texas-style barbecue to Denver Broncos fans

• By JONATHAN SHIKES

Growing up on a kibbutz, David Haskia had never heard of Central Texas barbecue.

He didn't know Pitmasters use post oak wood to smoke brisket. He didn't know the best way to do that is to feed an offset smoker every 30 minutes for 18 hours to create the richest flavor. And he definitely didn't know he'd be doing all of that professionally in Denver.

But there's no accounting for serendipity.

Sometime in early 2027, Haskia and his wife, Jordan, plan to open Jordy's BBQ just across from the parking lots at Empower Field at Mile High, where the NFL's Denver Broncos play. It will be the permanent home of the food truck they've run there for the past two and a half years.

The sports bar and barbecue restaurant will include two 1,000-gallon smokers turning out brisket, smoked turkey breast, house-made sausage, pulled pork, maple-glazed spare ribs, along with a full menu of sides, and 15-20 beers on tap, wine, and cocktails.

Jordy's BBQ will also have pub fare, like wings and burgers, and it will make full use of the patio and outdoor area.

"I think our food did a very good job representing us, if you will. I think people really like the quality and the attention to detail," Haskia said about his customers on the food truck circuit. "Now we are ready for the next big jump."

Haskia's interest in the singular style of barbecue that comes from Central Texas began by accident about 15 years ago. He was living on a kibbutz when he met a volunteer from Austin who'd come to work in the communal village as part of his Birthright Israel trip.

"I didn't even know what brisket meant back then. We improvised a smoker, and then we cooked one overnight, just having fun, enjoying a summer night ... The end result just wowed me. He opened up a whole new world for me," Haskia said.

Haskia later moved to Los Angeles, where he met Jordan, then to Denver after the two toured the US for eight months, including a long trip to Texas. They opened their food trailer in March 2024, and have been building their customer base ever since.

Haskia believes the key to his success has been his attention to detail. For instance, he keeps a tray of water in his smoker to recreate Texas humidity, and he uses only post oak and pecan wood. He carefully manages not just the coals while cooking, but also the amount of smoke going from the offset portion of the smoker into the main chamber.

"I love every minute of it," he said. "It's a lot of hard work and dedication. But if you do it right, it pays you back in ways you never thought about."

(The Denver Post/TNS)

Do you support premarital workshops?



ZAHIR AL MAHROUQI

The writer is author of 'The Road to Jerusalem'

LAST WEEK, I attended a bioethics symposium that discussed a critical question that concerns every family in Oman: why are we having fewer children?

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information, in the first half of 2026, Oman registered 32,405 live births, 1.7 per cent fewer than in the same period last year.

Omani women now have an average of 2.8 children, compared with more than eight in the late 1980s. Part of this can be explained by social factors such as delaying marriage to pursue a career or higher education and increased rates of divorce.

Some youngsters may be influenced by social media posts that encourage women to be stronger and independent, while others assume a happy marriage must be built in romance, expensive gifts, and fancy holidays abroad.

Some men in particular fear that marriage and the commitment that comes with it may stop them from enjoying camping trips with friends or simply playing video games with them.

A common misconception about marriage is that it is a prison-like situation where one or both partners give up their freedom and sometimes their rights for the sake of the other.

Equally, one should not overlook the economic side: some young people struggle to find work after graduation, while others earn salaries too low to cover the cost of a wedding, let alone support a family.

In 2025, Oman issued 4,208 divorce certificates, up from 3,828 two years earlier. That is more than eleven every day, in a year that saw 23,117 marriages. Officials at the Ministry of Social Development say most divorces happen within the first four years.

Many people would argue that the age of marriage and the number of children are personal choices that should not be subject to interference from the state.

Yet in reality, a drop in the number of births has social and economic consequences. The world is witnessing an increase in the aging population, which is often accompanied by a rise in the number of people using health services, and those services depend on a workforce drawn from the younger generation. Fewer births would lead countries to raise the age of retirement so that more people remain in work, paying taxes and supporting other members of society.

This is why I strongly support offering workshops to couples before they marry. They would learn how to communicate effectively, how to listen, how to disagree fairly, how to manage a household budget, and when to ask for help.

Many people would argue that the age of marriage and the number of children are personal choices that should not be subject to interference from the state

Such a programme raises ethical questions. Should attendance be voluntary or a condition of the marriage contract? I believe we should begin by inviting couples, not forcing them.

We must also be honest about what a workshop can achieve. It should never suggest that a person must stay in a harmful marriage. Sometimes divorce is the right decision.

Some will say we should simply offer counselling when problems appear. But few couples come. This could be explained by fear of being seen at a counselling centre, and how that could be perceived as a sign of weakness.

Some couples believe a good husband or wife should cope alone.

Others are afraid to talk to a stranger who may judge them or share their secrets.

In my opinion, teaching new couples how to navigate the early years of marriage would empower them with the skills to communicate better and focus on building a happy family.

'HUMAN-AUTHORED' LABELS RISE AMID AI CONCERNS

SAM REEVES

Initiatives to label books as written by humans, and not artificial intelligence, are gaining ground following a string of scandals where authors were suspected of using the technology without admitting it.

Several labelling schemes, including those from Britain, France and Germany, were being showcased at the world's biggest book industry fair in Frankfurt this week, where the challenges posed by AI were hotly debated.

Among recent cases where authors allegedly used AI, the most high-profile is that of Haitian-Canadian author Thelyson Orelien, which has rocked the French-language literary world. He has denied the claims. The affair was a 'real earthquake' for the French book trade, Charlotte Allibert, co-founder of Librinova, a self-publishing company and literary agency, said. The French group runs a scheme under which authors can get their books assessed and then labelled as a 'human creation' for a small fee, with about 200 works so far given the stamp.

Writers who want the label have their works run through AI detection software and undergo an interview with an auditor, who also checks the book personally.

"It's reassuring for authors to know that we're committed to this issue," said Allibert.

Another scheme is from British startup Books By People, which announced its certification mark for human-authored works had been registered by the country's intellectual property office.

To get the stamp, titles have to meet the group's 'organic literature' standards, which require the writing to originate from its author while allowing limited use of AI for tasks such as spelling or grammar checks. "We want to create a comprehensive, transparent, reliable framework that publishers and authors can fall back on," Esme Dennys, the initiative's co-founder, said.

"Anxiety around undisclosed AI use has increased in recent months - we have been getting a lot more interest from people all over the world."

Publishers sign up to the scheme for a fee and can then request to get their authors' books labelled with the Books By People mark. The scheme launched with five independent publishers and is set to announce more members in the coming months.

*In the US, the Authors Guild has introduced a 'human-authored' certification mark. It is a self-certification system which requires authors to sign a licence agreement, and so far around 6,500 titles have received the stamp. — **AFP***

Lies fly faster than truth



KARIM EASTERBROOK

The writer is a Former Cambridge School Principal and Author

ARTIFICIAL intelligence has made it increasingly difficult to distinguish genuine footage from fabrication. A video once seemed to offer some reassurance that an event had happened as shown.

That confidence is fading, and we are approaching a point where seeing an image may no longer be enough to tell us what is real. I was reminded of this recently when I visited a friend who is highly skilled at creating AI videos. He showed me films using entirely AI, featuring images of me, him, his wife, his brother, his daughter and his son. The results were astonishingly realistic. In one film I appeared as a heroic warrior. I felt flattered, but also unsettled: without knowing how it had been made, I might have mistaken it for a professionally produced documentary.

A talented creator can now place familiar faces in imagined situations with relative ease. AI can be a powerful tool for entertainment, but the same technology can mislead, damage reputations and influence public opinion. A familiar face or voice is not proof that someone said or did what appears on screen. The problem extends beyond artificial intelligence. Investigative journalism is a thing of the past. Some western news outlets appear to have fewer resources for original reporting and rely instead on material first published elsewhere.

Investigative journalism is a thing of the past. Some western news outlets appear to have fewer resources for original reporting and rely instead on material first published elsewhere

Stories are then repeated, sometimes almost verbatim. This can create the impression of confirmation that a news report is based on fact. Repetition is not independent verification and several outlets carrying the same claim do not necessarily provide several separate pieces of evidence.

YouTube can sometimes be useful for finding news and analysis, but often videos are outdated, recycled or presented without enough context to show when they were made.

A clip from an earlier event can be reposted as if it were current, sometimes with a changed date or title. Viewers who see a dramatic scene and a recent timestamp may assume the footage is new, even if the original recording is years old.



A newspaper article should provide context, identify its sources and make clear what is known, what remains uncertain and what is still being investigated. ***— AI image***

A skilled AI video producer can recreate familiar content without checking its accuracy, then frame it in a way that misleads viewers about the news based on facts.

This uncertainty has changed how I keep up with the news. I rarely use YouTube as a way to follow current events. I prefer newspapers that report the news factually without sensationalising it, such as the Oman Observer. No outlet should be accepted uncritically and independence does not guarantee accuracy.

A newspaper article should provide context, identify its sources and make clear what is known, what remains uncertain and what is still being investigated.

When an extraordinary claim is circulating, we should ask who first published it, when and where the footage was recorded, whether independent evidence supports it and whether the video itself proves what its accompanying account claims. We should also ask whether video news reports are independently produced or AI-recreated from the same original story and subtly altered to mislead viewers. A voice-over, a recent upload date, or widespread circulation is not confirmation. The point is not to accuse anyone of deception, but to recognise how difficult it has become to establish the truth from images and repeated reports alone. Neither a viral YouTube clip nor material broadcast by a national media organisation should automatically be treated as proof. We need transparent information about where images came from, meaningful independent corroboration and reporting that goes beyond copying what others have already published — especially when governments or other powerful actors may use fabricated or manipulated material for political purposes.

AI will continue to produce remarkable films, while recycled footage and recycled reporting will continue to blur the line between current events and old claims.

As synthetic images become more convincing, our confidence can no longer rest on the old belief that seeing is believing.

The value of visual evidence depends on careful verification and the value of journalism depends on doing the work to find and check the facts.

OMAN DAILY Observer

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Tel: 22651222
SECRETARY Tel: 22651200
DESK Tel: 22651209
LOCAL Tel: 22651221
BUSINESS Tel: 22651208
SPORTS Tel: 22651205
FEATURE Tel: 22651220
ONLINE Tel: 22651202
DESIGN Tel: 22651210
TRANSLATION Tel: 22651204
PROOFREADING Tel: 22651206
ADVERTISING Tel: 24649444, 24649430, 24649437, 24649401
Fax: 24649434
DISTRIBUTION AGENT Tel: 24649351/24649360
Fax: 24649379
PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY: Ministry of Information
P.O. Box 974, Postal Code 100, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

DISCLAIMER: *The views and opinions expressed in these pages are solely those of the authors and do not reflect the opinion of the Observer.*

Website: *omanobserver.om* — Editor-in-chief: ***Abdullah bin Salim al Shueili*** — e-mail: *editor@omanobserver.om*

We welcome your opinions and views. Mail your articles (word limit 600) to editor@omanobserver.om

Beeton's Book of Household Management



RAY PETERSEN

The writer is a media consultant

BOOKS... too big, too heavy, too many pages and words? Yet they may be scholarly, informative, provocative, challenging, or inspirational. Read on...

The most prominent here, throughout the Middle East, Asia, and Africa, is surely the Holy Quran, the sacred text of 600-plus pages of guidance and support for the Islamic faith, of which 20 million copies per year are printed by the King Fahd Glorious Quran Printing Complex in Saudi Arabia alone. In total, almost five billion copies have been printed in 114 languages.

The Holy Bible is central to Christianity, mainly across the Americas and Europe. While church attendance and religious affiliations are in decline, according to recent theological research (Smith, 2026), an estimated five billion copies of the Bible, each of 1,200 pages, have been published to date.

In a quasi-political vein, 'The Quotations of Chairman Mao,' ironically known as 'The Little Red Book,' is due to its small print, pocket size and microscopic print of Mao's 427 quotes. First published in 1964, with six million copies, it was an inexorable tool for political and societal change across much of Asia.

In literature, the iconic 'War and Peace', by Leo Tolstoy, emerged as the quintessential novel of 1865. It explored the futility of war, the fragility of peace, and the turbulent, yet profound romance of Count Pierre Bezukhov and Countess Natasha Rostova. Sixty million copies have been sold of this four-volume, 15-book, 570,000-word epic.

The Miguel de Cervantes classic, 'Don Quixote,' is a 430,000-word masterpiece in which the elderly Alonso imagines himself as the knight-errant Don Quixote, who, astride his sway-backed, old horse, tilts at windmills in his quest for his Ladylove, Dulcinea. His imaginary adventures pit illusion against realism and have sold 500 million copies.

In more recent years, 'The Lord of the Rings' trilogy, at 570,000 words, across three volumes by JRR Tolkien, has proven, with 600 million sales, popular among adults, while JK Rowlings million-word, seven-book 'Harry Potter' adventures have proven immensely popular among younger readers with 600 million copies sold.

However, the acquisition, by my wife Yelena, of a 1943 publication of 'Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management,' is the likes of which I have rarely seen before. It doesn't rank either historically; it won't change the world, politically, change societies, or literally challenge many perspectives. However, it is a unique window to the world of Queen Victoria, its sometimes tangled, yet always tangible view of class and domestic life, its anecdotes, that 'Goodreads' reviewed as "an almost forgotten classic, a founding text of Victorian middle-class identity." And it is humorous, read in the light of today, immensely so, certainly not politically correct, and a tad misogynistic, but so much fun. Consider these pearls of wisdom: "...there is no more fruitful source of family discontent than a housewife's badly cooked dinners and untidiness;" "Friendship is no plant of hasty growth, though planted in esteem's deep-fixed soil, the gradual culture of kindness must bring it to perfection;" "Frugality and economy are virtues without which no household can prosper;" while her reflection on a faithful husband that, "...no sooner is he domesticated than he becomes polygamous," is hilarious!

In literature, the iconic 'War and Peace', by Leo Tolstoy, emerged as the quintessential novel of 1865. It explored the futility of war, the fragility of peace, and the turbulent yet profound romance of Count Pierre Bezukhov and Countess Natasha Rostova

Though expressing the wisdom of a woman of advanced years, Isabella Beeton (1836-1865) married at 20 to publisher Samuel Beeton, and within a year contributed to 'The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine,' proving immensely popular, and by 1861, her debut publication of 'Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management', sold an unheard-of 60,000 copies in its first year. She was to succumb to illness at the tender age of just 28; however, edited and revised frequently since her demise, it has never been out of print and was, "for over a century, the standard English cookbook, frequently outselling every other book."

Its 1951 pages, 1,500 illustrations, coloured plates and advertisements of the day offer a unique perspective on 'the olden days', when things were not always 'better', but where there was a sense of 'order'. Certainly, though, through today's lens, it will lighten your day.

France, Germany lock horns over long-term EU budget

FRÉDÉRIC POUCHOT

Daggers have been drawn over the European Union's next seven-year budget, with Germany and France at loggerheads over whether Brussels should make deep cuts in a battle increasingly expected to overshoot the end of the year.

The EU wants a deal by Christmas, fearing that any delay would push talks into a fraught election year with worries about what eurosceptic victories in France and elsewhere would mean for future dealmaking. That is a far from easy task after the European Commission proposed a 2028-2034 budget worth nearly two trillion euros. The 2021-2027 budget was worth around 1.2 trillion euros.

Europe is deeply divided. Germany leads a pack with Austria, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden, which want cuts of several hundred billion euros.

But France, the second-biggest European economy and a net contributor to the budget, argues the continent needs sufficient means to match the rising challenges the 27-country bloc faces. French President Emmanuel Macron has hit out at demands for massive cuts.

"We need an ambitious European budget," he said last month. "We must defend a much stronger European budget" to support EU priorities, including defence. Ireland, which currently holds the rotating EU presidency, will unveil a revised budget proposal on Saturday that it hopes will bridge the yawning gap between the sides.

The warnings from European officials are stark, however: it is unavoidable that there will be blood on the floor at the end of the painful negotiations.

But the risk of missing the December deadline now looms larger than ever, especially after Spain called a snap election for next month.

A senior European diplomat dismissed speculation before Saturday's text. The EU knows "there is a shared sense of urgency around the need to do this", the diplomat said, adding: "I don't think it's particularly fruitful discussion at this stage to start talking about alternatives."

In absolute terms, the EU does not need to agree the budget this year, as the final legal deadline is the end of 2027. Saturday's proposal will set the stage for a fist fight between EU leaders meeting in Brussels over two days next week.

The battle won't just be over whether to cut, since a third side has its own demands.

Seventeen countries from southern, central and eastern Europe have formed a group known as the "Friends of Cohesion", seeking greater funding to support agriculture and regional development.

The main gripe for the frugals is that the proposed budget represents an increase of around 60 per cent at a time when member states have to tighten their belts.

*But a French presidency official argued money was needed for farmers and to strengthen the European economy to help businesses compete with US and Chinese rivals. — **AFP***

Hunger and malnutrition stalk Gazans, a year later



ANOUK RIONDET

The writer is a journalist covering Palestine and Israel for AFP

EVERY DAY, Gazan mother Niyaha al Masri spends six exhausting hours or more queueing at a community kitchen in the hope of getting some food for her family.

It has been a year since a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel was supposed to allow food to flood into the ruined territory, yet widespread hunger persists there.

Masri has little choice. Without the kitchen run by humanitarian groups, she and her eight children would have "nothing at all", the 35-year-old said. Each day she sets out early in the morning and returns in the afternoon, this time bringing four containers of rice, lentils and a little chicken, which the family throws itself at.

Among them is her husband, wounded in both legs by an air strike, meaning he "cannot go and fight with the others" to get food.

This will be the only meal of the day for the family of 10, living in a tent in Khan Yunis. There was no breakfast, and they will have no dinner.

What little flour they have, Masri explained, has to be rationed.

In August 2025, a United Nations-backed body, the IPC, declared a state of famine in Gaza, though Israel quickly denounced it as a lie.

By December, the UN had lifted that declaration, saying that the ceasefire had allowed in enough supplies over the course of two months to ease conditions.

COGAT, the Israeli defence ministry organisation responsible for civilian affairs in the Palestinian territories, said that the humanitarian situation in Gaza was stable.

But Shaun Hughes, of the UN's World Food Programme, was less sanguine. The food security situation, he said, "is still extremely serious".

The most recent figures, from July, show that "1.4 million out of the population of about 2.1 million people are acutely food insecure", he said, with 200,000 of them "just one step below famine".

In August 2025, a UN-backed body, the IPC, declared a state of famine in Gaza, though Israel quickly denounced it as a lie. By December, the UN had lifted that declaration



*A Palestinian girl sits on a water container at a mobile water distribution point in Gaza City, on Saturday. — **Reuters***

While some food is getting in, a lack of sufficient nutritional variety continues to pose a health threat.

"Dietary diversity is a major food security issue in Gaza," said Hughes.

"You cannot survive on dry goods and wheat flour and bread alone," he explained.

Masri said that her children, aged between three and 14, "dream of eating fruit" but the family doesn't have the means to buy any.

She said one of her sons suffered from malnutrition during the 2025 famine, although "little by little, his condition is improving".

"Repeated bouts of acute malnutrition amongst children is something that human beings just don't recover from," said Hughes.

Cognitive and physical impairments "continue into later life", he added.

At Khan Yunis's Nasser Hospital, the head of the malnutrition unit, Israa al Najjar, said she had "observed an increase in syndromes and conditions" linked to malnutrition that affect the immune system.

In a report published on Thursday, the day after the third anniversary of the October 7 attack that sparked the Gaza war, Medecins du Monde published a study that found 93 per cent of pregnant or breastfeeding women had symptoms of anaemia, which is closely linked to malnutrition.

Just 17 per cent had a sufficiently varied diet to meet their nutritional needs, the group found.

All the while, Masri has kept visiting the community kitchen, despite asthma leaving her exhausted.

Her children spend their days collecting "pieces of nylon, bits of cardboard and chunks of foam" to try and reinforce their tent, which is in a poor state. She said it was "shameful" that her children had to do so.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in these pages are solely those of the authors and do not reflect the opinion of the Observer

EDITORIAL

Cooling-off period bill should protect more consumers

Yet another high-profile business collapse has exposed how vulnerable Hong Kong consumers remain when they pay large sums upfront for service contracts stretching over a long period. The abrupt closure of Hotstone Yoga, after a decade in business, has left hundreds of customers facing potentially millions of dollars in losses. The incident has once again highlighted the risks for consumers paying hefty prices upfront for discounted services over a long period. It also renews calls on the government to strengthen consumer protection by widening the scope of a proposed statutory cooling-off law to cover more sections of the wellness market.

Hotstone Yoga announced late last month that it would cease operations immediately, citing "business operations and other actual circumstances". Customs and Excise Department officers later arrested a 61-year-old director for allegedly violating the Trade Descriptions Ordinance by accepting payment when there was no reasonable ground that the relevant service could be delivered within the prescribed time or a reasonable period.

The chain ran seven studios across the city at its peak, offering yoga, dance and fitness classes. Some customers said they were still being encouraged to buy course packages days before the company shut down.

Earlier, the department had received 381 reports involving contracts worth about HK$4.07 million, while the Consumer Council had logged 286 complaints involving claimed losses of HK$3.91 million. The figures later rose sharply, with the authorities receiving close to 700 reports involving about HK$7.8 million in contracts. The numbers underline the severity of the matter.

Just a month ago, three people were arrested in connection with a beauty chain accused of using high-pressure sales tactics. The department had received no fewer than 38 relevant calls for help, with reported losses ranging from HK$1,800 to more than HK$200,000, amounting to more than HK$3 million in total.

The two cases are unrelated. But they show consumers are often placed in a disadvantageous position. In the latest incident, some customers paid handsome money in return for discounted classes over a long period. While prepayment usually offers customers lower prices and businesses a degree of financial certainty, the arrangement actually transfers the risk to the customer. Some yoga packages reportedly cost as much as HK$29,700 for 180 classes. One customer said she had paid HK$11,880 for 63 classes and used only 19 before the studios shut down. Another individual loss reportedly reached HK$46,000.

The Consumer Council has strongly advised customers to avoid high-value prepayment for fitness and beauty sessions to minimise losses in the event of the contractor failing to provide the services. The closure of the yoga chain is yet another cautionary tale against locking oneself into a long service contract that requires hefty payment upfront. The savings from such bargain deals can hardly cover the losses when things go wrong.

The practice of businesses luring customers to sign long service contracts has been an issue of concern. This is not helped by a long-standing culture of high-pressure selling among some traders.hankfully, a proposal is under way for a statutory seven-day cooling-off period and a 14-day refund window for prepaid fitness and beauty contracts, with the relevant amendment bill scheduled to be introduced to the Legislative Council as early as the first half of 2027. Officials earlier said there were no plans to extend the coverage to dance and yoga studios, saying there were relatively few complaints against such venues.

Some lawmakers have urged the authorities to review the scope of the law amendment in light of the evolving trends in the wellness market. Indeed, the spirit of consumer protection is arguably the same regardless of the services involved. There is no reason not to give consumers in other sectors the same leeway to reconsider deals involving front-loaded payment arrangements. It would become a serious loophole if other businesses could take advantage of the limited statutory coverage to continue preying on vulnerable customers.

The last thing consumers need is more business collapses and losses prompting the authorities to put in place the right legal protection.

Sunday Morning Post

Tammy Tam Publisher
Chow Chung-yan Editor-in-Chief
Zuraidah Ibrahim Executive Editor
Yonden Lhatoo Managing Editor
Zhang Jun Chief Technology Officer

Editorial office 19/F, Tower One, Times Square, 1 Matheson Street, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong
Editorial feedback, general inquiries 2565 2222, news@scmp.com
Advertising inquiries 2565 2435, advertising@scmp.com
Reprint permission 2680 8822, licensing@scmp.com
Place a classified or recruitment ad 2565 8822, classified@scmp.com
Subscription and delivery hotline 2680 8822, printsupport@scmp.com
Online / Digital inquiries 2565 9388, support@scmp.com
Charity giving 2680 8159, osc@scmp.com
Events and conferences 2565 2435, live@scmp.com

Both SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST® and 南華早報® are registered in the People's Republic of China.

Scan the QR code for more online analysis, features, and opinions.

What truly Indian AI sovereignty looks like

The choice need not be between a US leash or a Chinese hook – the most important factor is the ability to take any model and make it serve the country's vital needs



Dhruv Atreja

On June 12, two of the world's most capable artificial intelligence models went dark. An American export directive barred foreigners from using Anthropic's two flagship AI models, and because the company could not check every user's nationality, it switched them off. Access returned on July 1 but the warning is clear: India's AI future can be switched off from Washington.

In September, Beijing came calling. At the Brics summit in New Delhi, Chinese President Xi Jinping promised China would "be a pioneer in establishing a Brics AI open-source community". It is a seductive offer. Chinese open models are capable, cheap and free to adapt; once downloaded, no one in Washington can take them away.

But this is a choice between a leash and a hook. American access can be yanked away overnight. Chinese models cannot be switched off once downloaded, but they arrive with Beijing's sensitivities built in. Asked whether Arunachal Pradesh is an Indian state, DeepSeek's chatbot declined to answer. No country of 1.4 billion people should run its banks, courts and public services on either.

Delhi's response so far has been to chase size. Start-up Sarvam AI plans to build a trillion-parameter model; so does state-backed BharatGen. The government is reportedly exploring an anchor investment of up to 200 billion rupees (HK$16.2 billion) in a new frontier AI fund, on top of the 103.7 billion rupees the "IndiaAI Mission" approved in 2024.

This is a race India cannot win, and does not need to compete in. That money cannot keep India at a frontier that American laboratories move every few months. Most of the 12 companies chosen two years ago to build public-welfare AI have reportedly drifted away from that work because the government has no way to buy what they build. There is still no independent institution to verify whether funded models perform as claimed. India is weighing a bigger cheque with no public scorecard for the last one.

The deeper failure is a lack of urgency about the foundations. India generates nearly a fifth of the world's data but has less than 5 per cent of its AI computing power. Every accelerator in the IndiaAI Mission's subsidised pool is foreign-designed, overwhelmingly by Nvidia. In January 2025, a US rule capped how many advanced chips India could import until it was rescinded that May.

Nearly five years after Delhi approved a 760-billion-rupee semiconductor programme, no Indian fab is in commercial production.

Power is barely planned for. The government expects AI data centres to add 26.3 gigawatts to national electricity demand by 2031-32, and Google's US$15 billion data centre project is already battling water concerns. India's information technology secretary concedes "denial happens all the time". Yet the response has been announcements, not urgency.

> *The capacity to adapt and evaluate pays off now and makes every later rupee accountable*

Owning the biggest model is not sovereignty. Sovereignty is the power to adapt models to Indian needs, run them on Indian power and hardware, and evaluate them independently. An application programming interface (API) is a lease a foreign government can cancel. Open weights, downloaded and run at home, are an asset. They can be audited and retrained: a model that will not discuss Arunachal Pradesh can be fixed through post-training.

Post-training costs a small fraction of pre-training, and it is where small teams can match far larger models on the tasks that matter to them.

Other middle powers have worked this out. Singapore built recent versions of its SEA-LION models by further training open base models such as Google's Gemma. Switzerland's Apertus publishes its weights, training data and methods. South Korea funds several teams for its national model and cuts those that fall behind.

Five steps would change the game. First, stop grading our own homework: create an evaluator independent of funders and builders, with private tests in Indian languages, and publish every result. Second, no milestones, no money. Third, fund adaptation, data and computing access so that hundreds of Indian teams can post-train open models for agriculture, health, law and public services.

Fourth, never depend on one supplier: diversify across American, Chinese, European and Indian open weights. Fifth, treat power and chips as AI policy: guarantee clean, firm power for computing, and build a chip road map on the packaging and testing plants India has, rather than waiting until 2028 for the first wafer.

Pre-training still matters, and India should build competitive base models of its own. But sequence matters. The capacity to adapt and evaluate pays off now and makes every later rupee accountable, while power and chips decide whether any of it is truly India's.

India does not have to choose between Washington's leash and Beijing's hook. It can use both while owning what matters most: the ability to take any model, make it serve Indian needs, prove that it works and keep it running whatever is decided in Washington or Beijing. That, not a trillion parameters, is what AI sovereignty looks like.

Dhruv Atreja is head of AI research at Fastino Labs in New York, where he has led post-training collaborations with leading US technology companies, working with open-weight models from American and Chinese developers

LETTERS

Share your views with us and other SCMP readers in a Letter to the Editor. Include your full name and address, plus a phone number for verification. Please keep your letter to a maximum of 400 words.
Email us at letters@scmp.com.
Address: 19/F, Tower One, Times Square, 1 Matheson Street, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong.

True test for city's first five-year plan

Hong Kong's first five-year plan should not be judged simply by its resemblance to mainland planning, nor by the number of targets it contains. Its real test is whether long-term policy coordination can strengthen the qualities that make Hong Kong internationally valuable.

Overseas observers are likely to focus first on whether deeper integration with national development can coexist with Hong Kong's international character. Access to the mainland remains central to the city's appeal, but its distinctive value also rests on predictable regulation, common-law institutions, free capital flows, professional services and global talent. Integration will enhance Hong Kong's role only if these advantages remain credible.

The second test is economic diversification. The plan's emphasis on artificial intelligence and the Northern Metropolis reflects a sensible effort to reduce dependence on finance, property and traditional services. Yet spending targets alone cannot create an innovation economy. Success should be measured by whether university research produces viable companies and products, whether start-ups can scale and whether skilled workers can build long-term careers in Hong Kong.

The Northern Metropolis will be the clearest test of implementation. It must become more than a large property and infrastructure project. Housing, transport, universities, laboratories, private investment and cross-border coordination must develop on compatible timelines if it is to form a genuine innovation ecosystem with Shenzhen.

Long-range planning can improve continuity and make public investment more disciplined. But it also carries risks: agencies may chase numerical targets, public funds may favour fashionable sectors and rigid priorities may struggle to keep pace with technological change. Hong Kong needs strategic government without displacing market judgment.

International confidence will not be secured by a comprehensive blueprint alone. It will depend on transparent implementation, measurable outcomes and policy flexibility. Hong Kong need not choose between national integration and global relevance. Its challenge is to prove that the two can reinforce each other – and that planning can provide direction without weakening the openness and institutional trust on which the city's competitiveness depends.

Alan Tang, policy researcher, POD Research Institute



Xi Jinping, Donald Trump and their wives Peng Liuan and Melania Trump at the state dinner in the US. Photo: dpa

Legacy building with real purpose

In today's world, a critical dimension remains missing from global wealth governance: a profound understanding of how a true legacy is actually attained through philanthropy and is more than capital growth.

As the custodian of a young Section 88-approved organisation in Hong Kong, I reflect on a few universal realities.

Institutional synergy serves as a shield. Driving structural breakthroughs in public space demands an ecosystem of trust, regulatory commendation and rigorous compliance. This reality is epitomised by our successful drive to include next-generation chronic lymphocytic leukaemia therapy options in the Hospital Authority Drug Formulary with Samaritan Fund coverage. When family capital seamlessly collaborates with academia, community and government, the synergy translates into human progress.

Aligning a legacy with core family values begins with foundational wealth preservation – through structures that shield a family, support future generations and build lasting resilience. Then, balancing classical risk mitigation with capital appreciation helps ensure private wealth serves a transcendent purpose.

As Prospero, the sorcerer in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, observes amid the transient architecture of mankind: "The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces, the solemn temples, the great globe itself, yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve … We are such stuff as dreams are made on."

It is through a meaningful philanthropic legacy that a family's shared philosophy may outlive wealth architecture.

Mike Cheung, founder, Cypress Charitable Trust

Opportune time for a full moon

President Xi Jinping's state visit to the United States was widely seen as a success. However, antagonistic voices from Taiwan seized on how "The Moon Represents My Heart" was played on the harp, suggesting the Americans' choice of music for the state dinner would have been a pain in the neck for Xi.

The song was popularised by Teresa Teng, who was hugely popular across the Chinese-speaking world. Although Teng was loyal to Taiwan, I don't see the choice of the song as provocative. Rather, the mellow song was played at an opportune time, when a full moon was rising over the White House and auguring well for harmonious Sino-US relations.

Randy Lee, Ma On Shan



Illustration: Mario Rivera

Hangzhou's new tech drive needs no hype

Beyond kickboxing robots, the city is making a strategic pivot and betting on the 'Eight Steeds' that are building the infrastructure powering China's next AI cycle



Ni Tao

A year ago, a Unitree robot kickboxing could light up social media. When DeepSeek released its latest open-source artificial intelligence (AI) model, developers around the world rushed to test it.

This year, however, Hangzhou's latest technology bets have barely made a ripple. The city's "New Eight Steeds" – eight deep-tech companies in fields ranging from smart glasses and inference graphic processing units (GPUs) to compute-in-memory chips and space computing – are a very different proposition from the "Six Little Dragons" that have made Hangzhou a focus of the global tech conversation.

Most of them operate further up the industrial chain, serving companies and institutions rather than consumers. That helps explain why the new cohort has struggled to capture the public's attention. It also raises an uncomfortable question: has Hangzhou's technology marketing playbook stopped working?

Scepticism is understandable. Some mock Hangzhou's eagerness to turn tech companies into a branding exercise. The "Six Little Dragons" have yet to produce many businesses with proven profitability, yet the city has already moved on to another coterie.

The financial markets have provided ammunition. Unitree's market value surged to about 444.9 billion yuan (HK$521 billion) after its August listing before tumbling by more than half by the end of September. Manycore Tech, another member of the group, saw its shares slump from a post-listing high of HK$48.50 to around HK$7.

The pullback has complicated Hangzhou's technology narrative. For two years, milestones by Unitree, DeepSeek and others were presented as evidence that the city had created the right ecosystem for breakthroughs. The markets offered a reality check, exposing how some companies still fell short on basics such as revenue, profit and commercialisation.

However, the comparison with the new group is flawed. The products of the "dragons" were naturally suited to social media: dancing robots, films generated by AI models, brain-computer interfaces that come with an unmistakable human-interest hook.

The new "steeds" sell something much less visible: infrastructure. It is difficult to explain an inference GPU in a short video. Compute-in-memory architecture does not make for an obvious viral post. Space computing is harder still.

Their value depends on the industrial ecosystem built around them. That matters because Hangzhou is making a broader strategic pivot. At the end of 2025, the city said it aimed to become China's leading city for AI innovation during the 15th five-year plan period, moving beyond its previous identity as a digital economy hub.

Hangzhou is building institutions to support that bet. It has introduced the country's first local regulation for embodied intelligence. Its "3 plus N" industrial fund cluster exceeds 300 billion yuan in total, with longer investment periods, more flexible requirements and higher risk tolerance for deep-tech investment.

The formula is simple: legislation provides boundaries and state funds supply long-term capital. The challenge is whether Hangzhou can turn that institutional design into actual industrial results.

> *Some mock Hangzhou's eagerness to turn tech companies into a branding exercise*

The first test is patient capital. Chipmakers normally need several years to achieve yield consistency, win customer validation and ramp production. Space computing could take longer. Government-backed capital can tolerate longer fund life cycles and exit timelines, but only if investors are willing to stay patient when companies generate little publicity or deliver weak returns.

The second test is turning "opening application scenarios" into actual orders. These companies need customers, not mere policy documents. Smart glasses companies must find industrial and security deployments. Space computing companies need customers who are willing to pay. Meaningful first orders from governments or state-owned enterprises would be more consequential than any city branding campaign.

Hangzhou also has to accept that it is not competing alone. Beijing has advantages in AI research and Shenzhen in supply chain depth, while Shanghai draws on its industrial base, research institutions and global business links.

Hangzhou's potential edge lies in combining open-source technology, hardware entrepreneurship and a relatively flexible regulatory environment. DeepSeek and Unitree showed it could produce globally visible AI and robotics companies. The new cohort is a harder bet: can that ecosystem extend upstream into chips, robotic components and in-orbit computing?

Alibaba is an unavoidable part of the equation. At its flagship Apsara Conference last month, Alibaba CEO Eddie Wu Yongming described the coming period as the machine intelligence era and identified "AI models, AI chips and the AI cloud" as its foundations. The company is targeting more than 20 gigawatts of global data centre capacity by 2032 and plans to roll its Zhenwu V900 chip into mass production in the first quarter of 2027.

For Hangzhou's chip and computing companies, Alibaba offers both a rich ecosystem and a formidable competitor. They need niches within or alongside its expanding AI infrastructure.

The "Six Little Dragons" put Hangzhou in the global spotlight because their products are easy to see, test and share. The new "steeds" are designed to make the city relevant to the next-generation AI infrastructure. It would be a mistake to judge them by the speed at which DeepSeek or Unitree became globally known.

Hangzhou's challenge is no longer simply to produce companies whose products people can easily understand and to which they can relate. It is to build companies that other parts of the AI economy cannot easily do without. The "dragons" helped Hangzhou get noticed. The "steeds" are an attempt to make it indispensable in the AI race going forward.

If that bet works, Hangzhou's next tech success story might not arrive as a viral video or market meme. It could instead emerge quietly, embedded in the chips, machines and data centres powering China's next AI cycle.

Ni Tao is the founder and editor of yangtzeer.com, a website tracking tech and business innovations shaping the Yangtze River Delta

Owners of digital assets at growing risk

A mature financial ecosystem must ensure cryptocurrency investors remain safe from violent criminals



Tan Poh Hwee

Cryptocurrency's promise of financial freedom carries a cost the industry must confront: growing wealth can make its owners more attractive targets for violent criminals. Protecting digital assets while treating the physical safety of their holders as a personal matter is an inadequate approach to financial security.

The industry must take responsibility for designing products and services which account for the reality that people can be threatened into surrendering their assets.

The rise in "wrench attacks" – physical violence or threats used to force someone to surrender cryptocurrency – exposes this vulnerability. A wallet may resist sophisticated hacking while its owner remains vulnerable to coercion. When one person can immediately authorise the transfer of substantial wealth, that person and their family can become targets of criminal coercion.

Violent criminals extracted over US$30 million from cryptocurrency holders in the first half of the year. If that pace continues, annual losses could exceed last year's US$58 million. The industry has reason to expand its definition of investor protection beyond the risks of price volatility, account theft and platform failure. Worldwide, 46 incidents were documented through to late June – physical coercion is a serious financial security risk.

Research has identified a correlation between bitcoin prices and reported physical attacks, but correlation alone cannot establish how much of the increase is attributable to price movements, adoption, information exposure or improved reporting. And the threat can outlast a rally. Once someone becomes known – or is simply believed – to possess substantial cryptocurrency wealth, that reputation may persist.

Last December, masked intruders attacked a cryptocurrency investor at his home in Solihull, England, and threatened his pregnant wife. He transferred cryptocurrency worth hundreds of thousands of pounds during the 45-minute ordeal. In March, Hong Kong police received a report that a man had been assaulted in a Hung Hom hotel and robbed of cryptocurrency worth about HK$5.3 million.

These cases reveal an uncomfortable limitation of digital security. A transaction system can check whether the required cryptographic authorisation has been supplied. That does not establish whether the person supplying it is acting freely. A holder threatened with violence may complete every required security step while acting entirely against their wishes.

Self-custody makes this problem especially important because it can place extensive financial authority in one person's hands. That authority has genuine benefits: direct ownership, portability and reduced dependence on an intermediary. It also changes who must manage the consequences of coercion.

> *The industry must recognise that wealth changes its owners' exposure to crime*

Conventional finance faces coercion too. Bank customers can be threatened and institutional controls can fail. But withdrawal limits, independent approvals, delays and checks for unusual activity can create opportunities for intervention. These arrangements impose costs on legitimate users, yet their protective value deserves recognition when financial products are evaluated primarily for speed and convenience. Advice to avoid publicising wealth cannot substitute for institutional responsibility. People can be exposed through records they were required to provide or through information they never intended to disclose.

The industry's response should therefore address both custody design and the services surrounding it. Multiple independent approvals can reduce reliance on a single key or device. Delayed withdrawals and transaction limits may reduce the amount accessible during a short period of coercion.

None of these mechanisms guarantees physical safety. They introduce complexity and criminals may continue threatening despite technical restrictions.

Blockchain records can help criminal investigations although traceability does not automatically provide the power to freeze or recover assets. Recovery is possible in some cases: after the rescue of kidnapped Ledger co-founder David Balland and his partner, French authorities said almost all the cryptocurrency paid as ransom had been traced, frozen and seized. That outcome depended on investigators, operational intervention and institutional cooperation. It shows how the practical protection of digital ownership continues to depend on public systems.

Financial losses capture only part of the harm. An unsuccessful extortion attempt can still leave a person injured, a family displaced or a child traumatised. Even complete recovery of stolen funds cannot restore the sense of safety lost during an attack.

As cryptocurrency fortunes grow, the industry must recognise that wealth changes its owners' exposure to crime. Security promises should be tested against what happens when a customer is frightened, isolated or protecting a loved one. A rising valuation can make an investor wealthier. A mature financial ecosystem must also give that investor – and the people around them – credible ways to remain safe.

Tan Poh Hwee is president of the Asia Academy of Digital Economics