Winning, differently

Ruling parties sweep by-elections, but defections mar Tamil Nadu results

The by-election results in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, declared on Friday, held few surprises. Barely five months after the April Assembly elections, the ruling party in each State/UT won all five bypolls. What varied was the scale of victory. In West Bengal, the BJP retained Nandigram and wrested Rejinagar, with strong vote shares of 76% and 63%. In Puducherry, the ruling All India N.R. Congress also registered an emphatic win – 61% of the votes – in Thattanchavady. Nandigram and Thattanchavady were vacated by the Chief Ministers, which partly explains the strong wins. But the contests in Tamil Nadu were closer. Dharapuram and Madurantakam fell vacant after their AIADMK MLAs resigned and defected to the ruling TVK, which renominated them. Both won their seats back with 37% and 40% of the vote, respectively, leading the DMK rival candidates by about eight percentage points. By-elections tend to favour the party in power, as voters prefer representatives with access to government. But the variance between West Bengal and Tamil Nadu reflects the nature of contest in two similarly sized States but with vastly different political cultures.

In West Bengal, Assembly victories have for decades worked as a winner-take-all mandate, which the ruling party extends to panchayat and by-elections. The pattern took shape during the Left Front's long rule, became entrenched during the Trinamool Congress's 15 years in power and is visible in the BJP's tenure so far. In these contests, Opposition parties have performed far worse than in Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. In Tamil Nadu, however, a three-way contest now has kept politics competitive. The wins have helped the TVK improve its tally to 109 in the House with a sanctioned membership of 234, but the narrow margins, despite a no-holds-barred campaign by Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay, suggest that the expected honeymoon effect did not fully materialise. The DMK, now the TVK's principal rival, has shown that it still has a solid base despite its abrupt defeat in May. For the AIADMK, finishing third in the seats it won in May only deepens worries about its decline. Its leadership will now face sharper questions about whether it can hold on to its legislators. Four more AIADMK MLAs had joined the TVK and their seats will go to bypolls. This is a regressive turn in Tamil Nadu. MLAs are resigning barely months, sometimes days, into their terms to share in the loaves and fishes of office and the ruling party re-fields them. This defeats the spirit of the anti-defection law and overrides the Assembly election mandate. That the electorate rewarded these manoeuvres should worry anyone who is concerned about the quality of representation.

Drought report

The Centre must help States once inter-ministerial team gives finding

A substantial drought seems to be inflicting Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh after the crucial southwest monsoon concluded with a significant deficiency in the most-affected regions. The national drought framework combines agricultural and hydrological indicators and ground-truthing studies, including before a distressed State can access additional support from the NDRF. In June-September, Karnataka reportedly suffered a close to 35% rainfall deficit. The government has since declared 217 of 240 taluks to be drought-hit with extensive damage to red gram, maize, cotton, and sugarcane cultivation. Andhra Pradesh experienced a shortfall of 53% in June-August and 388 of 688 mandals have been declared drought-hit. Horticulture crops over nearly 18,000 hectares are now at risk. Karnataka has also petitioned the Centre for ₹11,000 crore from the NDRF along with higher input subsidies. Andhra Pradesh has set aside ₹190 crore to protect horticultural crops and has directed drinking water conservation. The summer monsoon had its poorest showing since 2015 this year. There have been warnings of the effects of the strengthening El Niño, although an attribution study elucidating the strength of causal relationships in the present instance is pending.

In a previous era, drought declarations were beset by subjective claims, sometimes exaggerated to maximise state support. Since 2009, however, the Manual for Drought Management and updates to it and Finance Commission decisions have tightened the process. While States still have some incentives to expand their declarations, the Centre has also resisted releasing NDRF assistance before, including with Karnataka in 2024, while also increasing their own relief obligations. The Centre must desist from frustrating States and release support as soon as the findings of the Inter-Ministerial Central Team have been publicly verified. In addition to mitigating indebtedness among farmers and expanding access to relief beyond land ownership, the States also need more discipline *vis-à-vis* storing water and rationalising consumption. Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka have offered incentives and advisories, including to adopt micro-irrigation and to cultivate less water-intensive crops, but have not imposed binding limits. The Centre may also consider incentives to resist drought, even in the face of a deficient monsoon, because the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has been warning of expanding drought-like conditions in South Asia, and broadening agricultural insurance. It must certainly not use the prospect of the more protracted, more imprudent river-interlinking project as an excuse to overlook pro-resilience aims such as sustainably using groundwater and choosing crops based on local rainfall and aquifers and availability of income support.

At sixes and sevens, the ECI's growing credibility crisis



Ashok Lavasa
A former Election Commissioner of India and a former Union Finance Secretary

Is the Election Commission of India (ECI) at sixes and sevens, idiomatically and otherwise? Will Form 6 be its undoing, and has Form 7 caused it unmanageable discomfiture? The barbs associated with these forms have further damaged the image of the beleaguered constitutional body entrusted with safeguarding the constitutional right to vote of "we, the people".

Disturbing conduct

Never before has the ECI been so severely berated, becoming the object of unprecedented public outcry, adverse media attention and social scrutiny as in recent times. It took the ECI years of toil and transparency to earn public trust; it has taken the temperament of a few individuals to erode it through their disregard for the concerns, genuine or imagined, of those who had earlier sworn by the very same institution.

The institution that was built brick by brick seems to be crumbling in a similar manner. Its record presents a disturbing pattern: a lax, and sometimes overtly partial, approach to alleged violations of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) during the 2019 general election; discriminatory treatment of Opposition parties; the hurried change, in December 2024, to the rules governing the sharing of documents, following an order by the Punjab and Haryana High Court for full disclosure, permitting the ECI to withhold video footage of voting after scheduled polling hours; the issuance of notices to political parties over alleged MCC violations by their leaders during the 2024 general election; the so-called 'fair and equal' treatment of the main political parties by exonerating their star campaigners of MCC violations; the contempt with which civil society organisations have been treated; the cavalier dismissal of complaints by the Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha about flaws in electoral rolls (ERs); the uncharacteristic bombast of asking the LoP to submit an affidavit substantiating his complaints or apologise to the nation; and the abrupt imposition, in June 2025, of the aggressive, ambitious and most unnecessary exercise of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls on nearly a billion electors. This is a deeply disturbing but consistent narrative of institutional decline and growing deformities (pun unintended).

As if the ECI's own actions were not enough to erode its credibility, a 'friendly' government further undermined it by legislating in December 2023 a selection procedure that prejudiced the credibility of the Commissioners *ab initio*. Moreover, the ruling party repeatedly rushed to the ECI's rescue whenever it came under attack, as though it were a weak ally incapable of defending itself.

In the latest public mud fight, the ECI is under attack not merely for allegedly favouring the ruling party through its controversial decisions, but also for committing "illegalities" alleged not by its critics but by fellow Election Commissioners (ECs). These relate to changes to Form 6 and the denial of access to ECINet for Electoral Registration Officers (EROs), allegedly obstructing them from performing their statutory duties.

> The Election Commission of India's actions and questions around Forms 6 and 7 deepen doubts about its impartiality and transparency

There have also been complaints of rampant misuse of Form 7 by unidentified objectors seeking the mass deletion of electors whose names were duly included in the electoral rolls (ERs).

Form 6 attached to the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 (the Rules), is an "application for inclusion of name in the electoral roll (ER) for a first-time voter or on shifting from one constituency to another". It requires applicants to provide mandatory particulars relating to their identity, date of birth and ordinary residence, along with declarations regarding citizenship and place of birth. They must also declare that they have not applied for inclusion of their name in the ER of any other constituency and, in the case of a shift, provide details of their previous registration. Applicants must attest to the veracity of the information furnished and acknowledge that they are aware that providing false information is punishable under Section 31 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 (the Act). Nothing further is required to establish their eligibility.

A declaration beyond the rules

However, the ECI's notification of June 24, 2025, announcing the SIR, included a Declaration Form (Annexure D) to be filled in along with Form 6 or Form 8, as in paragraphs 4 and 15 of the notification. The declaration classified applicants according to their dates of birth, aligning them with the provisions of the Citizenship Act and requiring them to submit documents to establish their eligibility accordingly. This appears to go beyond what is prescribed under the Rules. This is why the ECs termed the changes to Form 6 "illegal and unauthorised", while many suspected that the SIR was an attempt to introduce a "National Register of Citizens (NRC) through the back door".

Section 28 of the Act empowers only the central government to make "rules for carrying out the purpose of this Act". Even if the ECI unanimously decided to change Form 6, it was not competent to amend it unilaterally. In its press note of September 26, the ECI acknowledged that a "declaration" had been "attached to Form 6 for SIR", which was "upheld by the Hon'ble Supreme Court", and that "for non-SIR period, the Forms applicable as per Rules will be used".

The Chief Justice of India has since observed, "No modified Form 6 has been approved by us." In its letter dated October 1, 2026, to all Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs), the ECI stated that "any person not yet enrolled in the ER or whose name has got deleted can apply for enrolment at any point of time". It also asked Booth Level Officers (BLOs) to "compare the current electoral roll with the pre-SIR electoral roll and identify such electors whose names were there in the pre-SIR roll but who are not included in the current electoral roll and prepare a list of such electors". The BLOs were further instructed to undertake house-to-house (H2H) visits to ascertain the present status of these electors and facilitate their enrolment through Form 6 wherever they were found eligible.

While Form 6 with the Declaration will continue to be used in States where the SIR is ongoing, it will be used without the Declaration in States where the SIR has been completed. What has the ECI achieved through these changes, and what is its intent in using two versions of Form 6? Its continued use in States undergoing the SIR suggests an attempt to align an elector's citizenship status with the criteria laid down in the Citizenship Act. The information sought in the Declaration has little to do with an elector's eligibility under Article 326. Does this not amount to the ECI attempting to create a quasi-NRC?

Wider concerns

The issues pertaining to the manner in which the bulk applications to delete existing voters using Form 7 are being submitted in Uttarakhand, Karnataka and other States are equally serious, as they point to efforts to misuse or manipulate the system. By failing to take effective action against those who filed frivolous Form 7 applications, or to initiate criminal proceedings where applications were found to be fake, the ECI is being perceived as lax in safeguarding the integrity of its processes. The centralisation of data by the ECI has further fuelled concerns about the possibility of manipulation. Complaints from BLOs and EROs in West Bengal during the SIR, as well as emails sent by EROs in Goa, point to a centralised data-management system that allegedly obstructed authorised officers from implementing their decisions while allowing others without authorisation to act on their behalf.

Eleven judges heading the Appellate Tribunals in West Bengal pointed out that the technical system impeded their work. The Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) of Maharashtra also highlighted several shortcomings that prevented EROs from exercising their legally mandated judgement, based on their satisfaction, because the system disallowed it. The larger question that remains unanswered, despite several press notes issued by the ECI after it was engulfed by *The Indian Express*'s September 23 revelations, is: who filed the more than 16 lakh objections against electors whose names had been validly included after due process? This raises concerns similar to those surrounding the alleged misuse of Form 7.

The ECI's answers confirm earlier doubts, while its actions raise new and far more serious questions.

Warming Himalayas demand a rethink on development



Archana Vaidya
An advocate and the founder of the Forum for Environment Legal Policy Research (FELPR)

For decades, the fight for sustainable, climate-resilient, hazard-averse development in the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) has gone unheeded, and the region is witnessing frequent and severe climate-induced disasters.

The catastrophic Nepal floods of August 26 are a warning that the 'global natural commons', stretching from the Hindu Kush and Karakoram to the Himalayas, are in an existential crisis. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) have warned that warming in the high mountains of Asia is occurring at 0.3°C per decade, nearly twice the global average, "leading to glacier retreat, decreasing in turn the stability of mountain slopes and the integrity of infrastructure, threatening water security, livelihoods, ecosystems, and increasing disaster risk."

Reports released on March 21, 2026, by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) found that ice-loss rates across the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) have doubled since 2000. "We are trying to navigate a rapidly changing future with an incomplete map," said one of the authors of the report. Warming is not uniform across this 3,500-kilometre range. According to the *Journal of Earth System Science*, the western Himalaya is warming consistently faster than the central and eastern stretches, with night-time minimum and winter temperatures rising at the most extreme rates.

Nepal is paying the price for a crisis it did not create. As it produces roughly 0.1% of global greenhouse gas emissions, it is right to demand compensation for loss and damage.

Rising temperatures, effect on glaciers

Rising atmospheric temperatures shift the balance between winter snow accumulation and summer melt, causing glaciers to retreat and thin steadily. Ice that once had a thermal profile of −6°C to −20°C now has temperatures closer to −2°C, making it far more susceptible to melting.

> The 'cement' is melting — retreating glaciers and thawing permafrost are heightening disaster risks in the Indian Himalayan Region

Meltwater pools atop glaciers in supraglacial lakes and carves vertical shafts called moulins, plunging hundreds of metres through the ice to the bedrock, where it forms a pressurised liquid layer between the rock and ice. This layer lubricates the glacier, allowing it to slide downslope faster, while the resulting subglacial (between the glacier and bedrock) and englacial (within the glacier) water channels generate mechanical forces intense enough to fracture the ice.

In high-altitude environments such as the Himalayas, permafrost – ground or rock that remains at or below 0°C – acts as geological cement, holding steep rock walls together by filling fractures, joints and pores with solid ice. As temperatures rise, permafrost melts into water, triggering rock avalanches, landslides and debris flows that threaten downstream valleys.

In Nepal, a shaking equivalent to a magnitude 5.2 seismic event was recorded by the United States Geological Survey (USGS) on August 26, when a 600-metre-wide section of ice and rock broke away from the northern flank of Langtang Himal at an elevation of 5,600 m and fell 1.2 km into the valley below. Researchers from the British Antarctic Survey recorded unusually high ground temperatures two days before the collapse, using sensors located 10 km from the site.

This mass of ice and rock landed in the Lhende Khola, a tributary of the Bhote Koshi river, damming it. When the dam broke, it unleashed a flash flood of concrete-like mud and debris – "an inland tsunami" travelling 170 km down the Bhote Koshi Valley into central Nepal. This was no isolated event. Such collapses can happen anywhere in these mountains and warming makes them more likely.

What can be done

There is no technology to prevent such collapses. The only real option is to mitigate their impact on downstream communities, which requires regional cooperation and a shared system for real-time data exchange. High-altitude satellite and drone surveillance is urgently needed to detect early signs of cliff fracturing, permafrost thaw and glacial instability. Real-time acoustic and hydrological sensors along glacier-fed rivers could detect sudden subsurface movements or flash surges and alert downstream communities immediately. Glacial lakes need continuous monitoring and, where feasible, engineered drainage.

River flood zoning must account for valley slope. Steeper slopes concentrate damage vertically, requiring infrastructure to be located much higher above the riverbed, while gentler slopes spread destruction horizontally, demanding an entirely different zoning approach.

Hydropower policy needs to be rethought, with a firm ban on construction above a defined elevation. The Avay Shukla Committee (*Court on Its Own Motion vs State of Himachal Pradesh and Others*) and the Ravi Chopra Committee both recommended restricting major hydropower projects or subjecting construction activities above 2,200 metres to detailed expert review.

The proposed Chenab-Beas river-linking project – an 8.7-km tunnel through the steep slopes of the Pir Panjal Range in Lahaul and Spiti district, near Koksar village in Himachal Pradesh, at an elevation of 3,140 metres (10,300 feet) – needs serious rethinking. The rationale for diverting more water from the western rivers of the Indus system may appear logical on paper, but the project is located in a fragile Himalayan ecosystem, and its likely environmental impacts make it eminently avoidable.

Every development activity in the IHR must be evaluated in light of the changing geological realities of the Himalayas. There should be a moratorium on all development projects until each is rigorously reassessed for its environmental impact, hazard-averseness and climate resilience.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The protests and beyond

The protests against the CEC and SIR are taking shape as a people's movement. The feeling one gets from the street is that people are determined to see to it that electoral integrity is restored for democracy to be meaningful in 'the world's largest democracy'. It is the cause — saving democracy — that is drawing crowds to the streets. It is an epic fight to preserve India as we know it. The BJP's staunch defence of Gyanesh Kumar is being seen as evidence of its "special relationship" with him. It is hoped and expected that the Supreme Court will live up to its constitutionally assigned role as the supreme sentinel of democracy when it hears (and rules on) this all-important case.

G. David Milton,
Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

Fearless and impartial

One feels a sense of pride in the Nobel Committee, which makes its awards, particularly the Peace Prize, impartially, transcending boundaries and all forms of discrimination. Today, a superpower such as the United States is pursuing arbitrary policies and imposing its will through war and authoritarian tactics, leaving many nations struggling under the pressure. In such a situation, while U.S. President Donald Trump has actively lobbied for the Peace Prize for the past two years, it is truly admirable that the Committee has remained undeterred by pressure and honoured a truly deserving recipient.

Siddharth Bagul,
Pune

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

Realising Lohia's vision among top posts



Vipul Anekant

DCP, Delhi Police. Views are personal

October 12 marked the beginning of the 60th year since Ram Manohar Lohia's passing. In his essay 'The Meaning of Equality', Lohia writes, "Equality has not been stated comprehensively. Equality is perhaps as high an aim of life as truth or beauty, but the complete meaning of equality has not been adequately investigated in serenity". Channelling that serenity, one should, at this point in history, examine the minuscule presence of marginalised sections in the highest echelons of bureaucracy, for apex posts such as Cabinet Secretary, IB Director, DG of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF), and Director General of Police (DGP)/Chief Secretaries of States, despite entry-level representation through affirmative action.

Entry/exit barriers

Two structural features of the civil services work as barriers to the entry of the marginalised to top posts. First, inter-se seniority within a batch, maintained in the civil list of services, is fixed by the rank officers get in their UPSC (Union Public Service Commission) exam and their performance at the training academy. Officers who enter through reservation typically begin lower on the civil list due to their UPSC rank and the allocation of a higher preferred service. That place on the civil list remains rigid till retirement. Inter-se seniority, disguised as administrative convenience/fairness, functions more as a permanent memory device working silently and punitively to never allow candidates arriving through reservation mobility.

Exceptional service does not erase this initial handicap. Reserved category officers remain ranked as if frozen at birth, forever trailing their colleagues whose starting line was never handicapped in the first place. The result is a lifetime deficit that quietly excludes them from apex posts.

Secondly, the age relaxation granted to reserved categories in the civil services exam, while essential for opening the exam to historically disadvantaged candidates, shortens their total years of service. They enter later, but the retirement age remains uniform for all. Fewer years in service translate to fewer opportunities for promotion to top posts. What begins as a necessary concession at the entry gate becomes a barrier at the exit.

These mechanisms produce a subtler form of ostracism which a mere selection in the exam cannot automatically neutralise. Officers from marginalised sections spend decades knowing that the arithmetic of the civil list places them at a permanent disadvantage within their own batch; top posts/empanelment will find them last in their own batch. This can be called administrative untouchability; not the crude kind, but a paperback version of psychological injury, dressed in an otherwise seemingly neutral language concerning the civil list, inter-se seniority, rank and batch position.

The most educated, articulate and influential intellectuals from these communities are systematically sidelined from top positions, policy making, and informal channels of power causing a persistent deficit in their social capital. The community is thereby deprived of its strongest advocates inside the system, weakening the pace of collective mobility. Lohia had warned that when more than four-fifths of a nation's vital leadership is drawn from only one-fifth of its population, atrophy follows. The same rationale applies to administrative leadership.

Some measures to correct the system can include an equal number of service years regardless of the age of entry, with the retirement rules being aligned with entry relaxations. After training, all batchmates should be treated at par, ending the lifelong shadow of inter-se seniority that resurrects the very birth-based hierarchy the Constitution buried. The UPSC examination should determine entry, not serve as a permanent retrospective judge for someone's entire career. The civil list can be redesigned on more egalitarian lines.

Lohia insisted that the talk of equality in abstraction without concrete results is either hypocrisy or lethargy of the mind, while insistence on a single formula of equality establishes the status quo. India, he said, suffers from a complete divorce between abstract equality as a dream and concrete equality as it exists. Representation at the entry level that evaporates at the top is precisely that kind of divorce.

To realise Lohia's vision, equality should cease to be a distant ideal and instead become an operative reality in the corridors of power.

Lohia had warned that when more than four-fifths of a nation's vital leadership is drawn from only one-fifth of its population, atrophy follows

A common language for justice



Sincy Wilson

Assistant Professor of Law, Vels University (VISTAS), and a legal researcher specialising in constitutional and administrative law, and international environmental law



Vaishali R. Venkat

When a nation speaks in different tongues, how do its courts determine which language serves as its official language? This question was placed before the Supreme Court as a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) on September 25, 2026. The petitioner requested a direction to the Union Government to constitute a commission that would recommend the use of Hindi as the official language of the Supreme Court, with the petitioner's counsel arguing that the plea was firmly grounded in constitutional provisions.

The Bench, comprising Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V. Mohana, however, observed that reforms related to language were already being carried out in a phased manner through administrative measures. Justice V. Mohana clarified that granting such a relief would require a constitutional amendment. Further, the CJI noted that, as part of preserving the country's linguistic diversity and respecting regional languages, the court was already providing brief descriptions of its reports in Hindi, with the initiative to be gradually extended to other regional languages.

In doing so, the court appeared to draw a distinction between changing the language regime of the judiciary and making its work more accessible in Indian languages. The distinction raises a deeper question: if judicial work is made accessible in multiple Indian languages, who has the authority to decide the language in which courts conduct their proceedings?

Who gets to decide?

For justice to be administered fairly, that question must ultimately be answered within the constitutional framework governing judicial language. Under Article 348(1)(a) of the Constitution, until Parliament provides otherwise by law, English is the prescribed language for all proceedings before the Supreme Court and every High Court. To date, Parliament has not enacted any law under this provision to replace English.

However, under Article 348(2), the Governor of a State, with the prior consent of the President, may authorise the use of Hindi or any other regional language used for the State's official purposes in proceedings of the High Court. Yet, the proviso to Article 348(2) makes it clear that such authorisation does not extend to judgments, decrees or orders passed by the High Courts.

Further, Section 7 of the Official Languages Act, 1963, provides an additional mechanism for allowing judgments, decrees or orders in Hindi or any other language used for official purposes of the State concerned, provided an authoritative English translation accompanies them. This provision has enabled Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar to use Hindi in proceedings before their respective High Courts, subject to the previous consent of the President and other constitutional and statutory safeguards.

The next question is who has the constitutional authority to alter it. This question brings into play the doctrine of separation of powers between the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. Generally, the judiciary cannot issue a writ of mandamus compelling Parliament to enact a particular law, amend the Constitution or establish a commission for that purpose. Such matters fall within the Parliament's legislative domain.

Even if the question of constitutional authority is settled, another dilemma remains: must a court speak in one language to speak to a nation of different tongues? How can the Supreme Court retain a common language for its proceedings and at the same time ensure that its work remains accessible?

From a practical standpoint, the Supreme Court has recognised the importance of a common language in judicial proceedings. In *Madhu Limaye & Anr v. Ved Murti & Ors* (1970), the Court observed that "the language of this Court is English" and held that an intervener who insisted on addressing the court in Hindi could not participate as the members of the Bench could not follow his arguments.

Perhaps, the way forward is not to replace one language with another, but to make the work of the court accessible in more Indian languages. For example, the Supreme Court's SUVAS (Supreme Court Vidhik Anuvaad Software), an AI-based translation tool, enables judgments to be translated into 16 languages.

Such an approach can respect linguistic diversity while preserving consistency in justice. To be truly heard, justice must not merely speak; it must also be felt and understood.

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Perhaps, the way forward is not to replace one language with another, but to make the work of the court accessible in more Indian languages

Contextualising WWF's report on wildlife population decline

The Living Planet Index report shows that exactly 50% of populations were in decline, 43% were increasing, and the remaining 7% were stable

DATA POINT

Hannah Ritchie

There has been a 73% decline in wildlife populations since 1970, according to the 2026 Living Planet Index report. As with previous editions, it makes for a concerning read, despite this year's title being about the "Science of Hope".

While these trends are worrying, the numbers presented in the Living Planet Index (LPI) report, released by the Worldwide Wildlife Fund (WWF), are often misunderstood or misreported. The headline figure from the 2026 update of the LPI shows that studied wildlife populations declined by an average of 73% from 1970 through 2022, as shown in **Chart 1**. The data covers mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish; it doesn't yet include invertebrates or plants.

To clarify what this doesn't mean – it doesn't tell us anything about the number of species lost; the number of populations or individuals that have been lost; the number or percentage of species or populations that are declining; or the number of extinctions.

The authors of the LPI go to great lengths to explain this. Yet, there is inevitably a long list of headlines claiming that we've "lost 73% of wildlife", "73% of species have gone extinct", or "73% of species are declining". All of these are incorrect. But then, what does this metric actually tell us?

Across the 35,803 wildlife populations studied, the average decline was 73%. This doesn't mean that 73% of populations are in decline; in fact, around half of the studied populations were in decline, while half were either increasing or stable.

To calculate the LPI, researchers collect data on the change in wildlife numbers across tens of thousands of populations. While the data is measured relative to 1970, very few populations have data stretching back this far. Many populations only have data for much shorter and sparser timelines. For every population, the change in numbers over time is calculated, giving a rate of change. It can be positive, negative, or zero. To obtain the final LPI number, researchers take the geometric mean of the rates of change across all these populations. They also provide different weights to different populations, which affects the final result.

The 2022 Living Planet Index reported an average decline of 69% since 1970. In 2024, it reported a 73% decline. And this latest report finds the same figure. From this, you might assume that wildlife populations dropped by four percentage points between the 2022 and 2024 editions, and nothing has changed since then.

But that's not the case. Almost none of this change has happened in the last few years, and the new LPIs should not be seen as simple extensions of the previous ones.

Instead, the entire trend line for the LPI has shifted as the project has gained access to data from more populations and species, and the types of populations included have changed. Since the last report, the number of populations in the LPI increased by around 1,000 (a 3% increase), and the number of species by about 300 (a 5% increase). An important change from the 2022 to the 2024 report was that both native and non-native species were included in the former, but since then, only native species have been included.

In this particular release, the number of populations and species from Africa increased substantially. The number of populations increased by 14%, and the number of species by 38%. Data coverage of this region, which had been underrepresented in previous reports, has increased.

Chart 2 compares the LPI for 2022, 2024, and 2026 across different regions. Here, one can see that whole lines have shifted, rather than things changing dramatically in just the last four years. Almost as many populations are increasing as decreasing.

Across the entire dataset, exactly 50% of populations were in decline, 43% were increasing, and the remaining 7% were stable.

Chart 3 shows the share of populations in the LPI that have trended in a given direction for different taxonomic groups. Around half of wildlife populations have declined in numbers. The rest were either increasing or stable. So, not all populations are struggling. This is not to dismiss the steep decline many populations are seeing. Instead, it's useful to know this so we can direct resources more efficiently to the areas and populations that need them most. It's more effective to target restorative and protective efforts to populations in serious trouble than to assume that all populations are struggling.

The index also varies from region to region. Latin America and the Caribbean have seen the most severe decline of any region. It experienced an average decline of 95% across its studied populations. In recent decades, it has experienced intense deforestation and expansion of agricultural land: the primary driver of habitat loss. It is also a biodiversity hotspot, being home to many endemic (unique) tropical species. These species are often highly specialised, and don't adapt well to changes in local conditions.

Africa is still rich in biodiversity. It's the only continent with a significant number of large mammals left. Unfortunately, it has dramatically declined in recent decades, with an average decline of 80% since 1970. Asia has also seen a decline of 49%. Europe has seen the smallest decline of all the continents, with an average of 23% since 1970.

Hannah Ritchie is Deputy Editor and Science Outreach Lead at Our World in Data

Is wildlife vanishing?

Data were sourced from the 2026 Living Planet Index (LPI) report by the Worldwide Wildlife Fund (WWF). This analysis was published by OurWorldInData, a non-profit website from the University of Oxford and the Global Change Data Lab



CHART 1 : The LPI measures the average decline in monitored wildlife populations. The index value measures the change in abundance relative to the year 1970 (i.e. 1970 = 1)

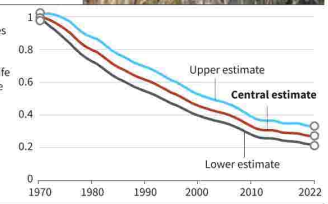


CHART 2: The 2022 Living Planet Index reported an average decline of 69% since 1970. In 2024, it reported a 73% decline. The latest report finds the same

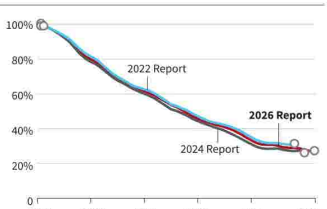
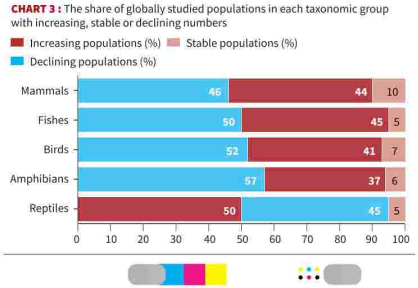


CHART 3 : The share of globally studied populations in each taxonomic group with increasing, stable or declining numbers



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO OCTOBER 13, 1976

Nuclear steam generator from BHEL

Tiruchi, October 12: The first nuclear steam generator manufactured at the BHEL, Tiruchi, for the 235 MW Madras Atomic Power Project II, Kalpakam, rolled out last evening. It was an occasion for joy for the scores of engineers and skilled and unskilled technicians who had put in dedicated work to make this project a success.

As the steam generator cannot be moved by rail because of its huge size, it is being sent by road and is expected to reach Kalpakam on October 16.

The BHEL, Tiruchi, has undertaken the manufacture of eight numbers steam generators for the MAPP II. The eight generators, along with the turbo-generators to be supplied by the BHEL, Bhopal will generate 235 MW.

For completing the first steam generator, the Tiruchi factory had to equip itself with specialised machinery, nuclear clean room and a number of highly trained and qualified welders, supervisors, and engineers. The second, third and fourth generators are in fairly advanced stage of manufacture and will be completed before April 1977. The entire order for the supply of eight steam generators will be honoured by 1977-1978.

For the Rajasthan atomic power station, the steam generators were imported from Canada. In the course of manufacture of the steam generators, the BHEL successfully developed the technique of hot pull-outs required for the heavy water headers which eliminated the welding of the nozzle to the main header pipe. These heavy water headers were earlier imported from Canada. But the BHEL, by using this technique, has developed the heavy water headers indigenously.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO OCTOBER 13, 1926

The Indian currency league

Poona, October 12: The Indian Currency League, recently formed, opened their campaign this evening of educating public opinion in favour of Ish 4d. ratio and against Ish. 6d. per rupee recommended by the Currency Commission. Sir Purshotamdas, Sir Victor Sassoon, Messrs B.F. Madon, Jamnadas Dwarkadas and Professor Kale addressed the first public meeting held under the League's auspices with Mr. N.C. Kelkar in the chair.

Text&Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Decline in Bangalore's office workspace leasing in Jan-Sept

26 in per cent. Bengaluru, India's largest office market, witnessed a 26% year-on-year decline in workspace leasing to 16.7 million sq ft in January-September, according to Knight Frank. Real estate consultant Knight Frank India on Monday released its data, which showed that total office leasing remained flat at 66.7 million square feet across eight major cities. PTI

Fine imposed by Norway on Xandr over Grindr data sharing

9.6 in $ million. Norway's data protection authority has fined Microsoft's adtech unit Xandr 92 million crowns ($9.61 million) for unlawfully relaying Grindr users' sensitive data to advertisers, it said on Monday. Xandr relayed data revealing the sexual orientation of users of Grindr, a dating app for LGBTQIA+ people, to firms in automated ad auctions. REUTERS

Share of 2026 funding received by UN refugee agency

35 in per cent. Deep funding shortfalls are forcing the UN refugee agency to make painful cuts across its humanitarian operations worldwide, its chief said on Monday. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has secured only $3 billion, or 35% of the $8.5 billion in funding it requires for 2026, High Commissioner Barham Salih said in Geneva. REUTERS

Surge in Equity MFs in September despite stock market volatility

31 in per cent. Equity mutual fund schemes saw a net inflow of ₹38,306 crore in September, registering a 31% rise from the preceding month, as investors continued to pour money into mid-cap and small-cap funds despite heightened stock market volatility. The inflow was higher than the ₹29,329 crore recorded in August, as per the data by Association of Mutual Funds in India. PTI

Social media posts taken down by Delhi Police

300 Delhi Police is monitoring various social media platforms to curb the spread of misinformation amid protests in the national capital, with around 300 posts allegedly aimed at spreading rumours or creating public unrest taken down, police sources said on Monday. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Comparing SIR 2002-04 and 2025-26

Unlike previous SIRs, which had elaborate processes for preparing fresh rolls to ensure that no eligible elector would be taken off the rolls, the current SIR exercise adopts a flawed process that has led to the exclusion of lakhs of eligible voters; a point-by-point comparison is provided

EXPLAINER

Rangarajan R.

The story so far:

There have been renewed protests against the special intensive revision (SIR) process. Former Election Commissioners and Supreme Court judges have also questioned the exercise in its current form. As a counter, there have also been former judges and bureaucrats who have supported the current SIR process.

What is SIR?

Section 21(3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 (RP Act) authorises the Election Commission of India (ECI) to carry out a special revision of the electoral roll for 'any' constituency or part of a constituency in such manner as it may think fit.

The ECI had decided in June 2025 to carry out an SIR exercise across the country, starting with Bihar in Phase I. Phase II, held between October 2025 and February 2026, covered nine States and three Union Territories. Phase III, which commenced in May 2026, covered 16 States and three Union Territories. In May 2026, the Supreme Court held that the ECI was well within its constitutional mandate to conduct an SIR for 'many' or 'all' constituencies in a State.

How was the previous SIR done?

The Special Intensive Revision has been conducted on eight different occasions in the past, with the last one taking place between 2002 and 2004. They key guidelines issued in May 2002 for the last SIR, which have a bearing on the issues raised with respect to the current exercise, are summarised here.

First, the SIR required enumerators to conduct door-to-door verification using a preliminary list generated from the then existing roll. Elected Panchayat members could be voluntarily involved for assistance during the process.

Second, detailed guidelines were provided for supervision. Supervisors were required to randomly check at least 25% of the households covered by enumerators. Where an enumerator reported to the supervisor that a particular house had been locked during repeated visits, the supervisor was required to visit the house to verify this. Senior officers – Assistant Electoral Registration Officers (AEROs), EROs and District Election Officers – were required to check a minimum of 12%, 5% and 2% of the households, respectively.

Third, with regard to citizenship, the guidelines specified that the onus of proof of citizenship lay with the applicant who applied for inclusion of his/her name in the electoral roll for the first time. However, they also referred to the guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court in *Lal Babu Hussein and Others* (1995) which require the ERO to attach adequate 'probative value' to an applicant's presence in the existing roll.

Fourth, electors who had shifted residence were treated like a "transfer" rather than a deletion. Their entries in the preliminary list were not erased but struck through and marked "S" and enumerators had to record who reported the shift, besides the constituency or address to which the elector had moved. If an entire family had shifted, supervisors had to personally verify such cases. Since all areas were enumerated at the same time, the shifted electors were enrolled at their new address during the same exercise. The Chief Electoral Officer then acted as a clearing house to ensure that the old entry was deleted from the final roll. Only those missed at their new address had to apply during the claims and objections period.

Finally, the guidelines categorically mentioned that claims and objections presented in bulk by any individual/organisation or political party should be refused and rejected summarily. The final roll was to be prepared only after all claims and objections had been duly disposed of.



On the ground: BLOs verify voter details during the SIR exercise in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh in July 2026. G.N. RAO

What are the key issues with the current SIR?

The key issues in the current SIR process are summarised here. First, the electors who could not be found, or who did not return or fill in the form, were excluded from the draft electoral roll, even if they had voted in previous elections. Unlike in 2002, those recorded as "shifted" were not enrolled at their new address through the same exercise. Under normal course, they would be required to file Form 8 (for shifting residence) at their new place of ordinary residence. Otherwise, if they are missed out, they would be required to apply afresh through Form 6, which is meant for new electors. This goes against the ECI's own Manual on Electoral Rolls (2023) which requires that a shifted elector who can be traced should be served a notice, and in cases where they cannot be traced, a notice must be pasted at their last known address in the presence of adult witnesses and the name should be deleted only after the notice period expires.

Second, the requirements of supervision of the current SIR are not as elaborate as the last SIR. The notification before Bihar's SIR mandates 10% random verification by supervisors and only requires regular monitoring meetings by ERO with AEROs, Supervisors and booth-level officers (BLOs) to ensure that work done is not superficial.

Third, the requirement for electors to trace themselves or a parent to the electoral rolls prepared during the last intensive revision, nearly two decades ago, or to produce documents to establish citizenship, is perceived as shifting the onus of proving their eligibility for inclusion in the rolls onto the common electors.

Fourth, software generated 'logical discrepancies', including spelling differences, more than six voters linked to one ancestor and parent-child age gaps outside the range of 15 to 45 years, among other factors, resulted in the arbitrary exclusion of lakhs of eligible voters.

Finally, there have been reports of filing of Form 7 (objection forms) in bulk by individuals for removing the names of electors from rolls at various places. In order to avoid the filing of such objection forms in bulk on unsubstantiated grounds, the ECI, only on October 9th, had issued instructions setting a cap on the number of objection forms that can be filed by an individual.

Apart from these procedural issues, legal concerns have also been raised regarding the validity of the declaration attached to Form 6 (used for enrolment of new electors), the use of Form 6 for re-enrolment of electors deleted from the draft rolls, and the cumbersome procedure for the disposal of a large number of appeals.

What can be the way forward?

The right to vote is a crucial edifice on which our democracy rests. The SIR process has resulted in the deletion of around 13.3 crore voters across the three phases. Around 2.7 crore (20%) were deleted due to death and 1.01 crore (8%) were flagged as duplicate entries. A significant portion of the 9.5 crore voters (71%) fall under the 'absent, shifted and others' category. Many of these 9.5 crore voters could be eligible for re-enrolment on completion of the SIR process.

Considering the renewed issues that have been raised surrounding the process, there should be a detailed audit of the rolls that have been finalised so far.

Eligible claims for re-enrolment should be expedited, including through home visits, and roll updations. Door-to-door enumeration should be the prescribed procedure for States where SIR is ongoing, and electoral rolls should be finalised only after the disposal of all claims and objections. As per the proviso to Section 21(3) of the RP Act, the existing pre-SIR rolls can continue to remain in force and be used for upcoming State elections, pending the completion of SIR rolls after due process.

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

THE GIST

- The current SIR exercise has resulted in deletion of around 13.3 crore voters across the three phases. Around 2.7 crore (20%) were deleted due to death and 1.01 crore (7.6%) were flagged as duplicate entries. A significant portion of the 9.5 crore voters (71%) fall under the 'absent, shifted and others' category
- In the previous SIR in 2002-04, stringent guidance was provided to enumerators for door-to-door verification, maintenance of rolls and deletions
- Considering the issues raised around the current exercise, there is a need to expedite eligible claims for re-enrolment through home visits and door-to-door enumerations. The pre-SIR rolls can continue to remain in force pending the completion of the current SIR

PULSE CHECK



Unpaid and unseen: India has millions of informal, unpaid family caregivers who need to be recognised and upskilled as trained caregivers. GETTY IMAGES

Why does India need a trained workforce for elderly care?

India's 60-plus population is projected to touch 347 million by 2050, underscoring the need for a robust caregiving ecosystem; a formal training programme, building on existing small-scale initiatives, could promote gender parity in caregiving and recognise informal, unpaid family caregivers

T.C. Suseel Kumar
R. Sudhakar

Every day Sreeni wakes up at 4.30 am and checks on his mother. If she is unsteady on waking up, he will assist her to the raised toilet and wait outside as she independently uses it, assuring her that help is just outside. There is a schedule of medicines, clearly sorted and kept by her bedside. The BP monitor and the glucometer reassure him that everything is in the range for her age. He learnt it all by himself, one emergency visit after another to the hospital. Hip pain was ignored till it became a debilitating fracture, a sudden loss of consciousness detected as low sodium – each crisis was a hard lesson in the trial-and-error reality of informal caregiving. Every day millions like Sreeni wake up and perform their respective self-taught routines to take care of their parents or dependants.

As our country's population ages over the next two decades, the topic of caregiving and the need for formal training for the task will assume larger dimensions, and this is precisely what the Budget 2026-27 has highlighted in a timely manner with the announcement of training of 1.5 lakh caregivers aligned to the National Skills Qualifications Framework.

The NITI Aayog's August 2026 report "Reimagining Care: Strategies for Empowering Caregivers in Viksit Bharat@2047" frames caregiving as an economic activity rather than just welfare work, and this is the first time that such an intention is explicitly articulated by the Government at a national policy level, which indicates that the urgency has been acknowledged by policymakers.

To put it in perspective, India's 60-plus population, estimated at approximately 149 million in 2022, is projected to touch 347 million by 2050, forming roughly 20.8% of the total population. Assuming NITI Aayog's estimate that 10% of the population today is engaged in caregiving while being untrained and unpaid, the current total works out to about 146 million.

The planned 1.5 lakh formally trained workforce is just a drop in the ocean even by today's requirements. The caregiving ecosystem will be at a serious juncture if we don't plan now.

Gender parity in caregiving

For most of its history, India never needed a long-term care system because it had one: the joint family. Three generations under one roof was an insurance contract written in spirit and practised willingly. In the present scenario, with micro family units, most of the time, it is the housewives who take upon themselves the additional task of caregiving, having no formal training, learning by trial and sometimes serious error. Combined with the need to manage their own household chores, such situations increase household stress considerably. The aged who need assistance and the differently abled, about 26.8 million, are surviving, thanks to the love, care and affection of these unpaid, informal care givers.

An NSO survey has worked out that women, on average, spend 299 minutes per day on unpaid domestic work and caregiving, whereas for men it is only 97 minutes. What is required is an appreciation of the situation and the demands of caregiving being shouldered by both genders. A formal training programme, designed exclusively around caregiving, covering the detection of age-related events needing attention in the elderly, assessment of needs, continuous monitoring protocols, emergency care and psychological interventions, ideally attended by at least two family members, would improve the sharing of the duties and responsibilities.

Skilling and upskilling

If we need to have a large number of skilled, formally trained caregivers in a few years' time, we need to start in earnest.

Two structures are functioning in India, albeit on a small scale and untested. Kudumbashree is a State mission based in Kerala that runs a network of self-help groups. It launched the K4 Care training programme in February 2024 under which its members qualify as certified geriatric/patient/disability care executives. Recent data shows that only 838 have completed the course, a rather slow progress. We can incentivise and accelerate the programme.

The other group is the ASHA workers for whom the NHSRC (National Health Systems Resource Centre) has prepared a Training Manual on Elderly Care, with training delivered via Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres. However, granular details as to the number of ASHA workers who have completed this training are not available publicly. A meaningful intervention here can have a positive impact.

Informal caregiving is not always physical, like mobility assistance or medicine management. Age-related cognitive decline – as seen in Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease – involves several emotional challenges as well. Any national curriculum must factor in geriatric mental health and behavioural management along with physical care protocols.

The way forward

There are millions of informal, unpaid family caregivers. We need to validate and upskill them into recognised caregivers.

Kudumbashree and ASHA workers who are formally trained, can serve as trainers to train more people, allowing the chain to continue. The National Caregiver Council (NCC), as envisaged in the NITI Aayog report, can act as an apex body. It can set benchmarks and supervise skill development, update training modules, standardise curricula, come out with useful FAQs and regulate and manage a national caregiver portal with a list of certified caregivers.

Transforming India's care economy is an economic strategy waiting to be unlocked. By creating such a robust ecosystem, India can turn informal dedication into professional expertise with great economic value. For millions like Sreeni, being recognised as a caregiver for the elderly and being trained formally to deal with the associated challenges bring dignity to the relationship.

Just as India is recognised the world over for its healthcare nursing professionals, its approach to managing the challenges of elderly care too could be adopted as the compassionate alternative to the many models being practised globally. The fact that this has been announced as a Budget item is just the seed, and operationalising it at the ground level is where the final success lies.

(T.C. Suseel Kumar a former Managing Director and R. Sudhakar is a former Executive Director, LIC. Views expressed are personal.)

THE DAILY QUIZ

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

As the latest edition of the Indian Super League kicked off this weekend after uncertainties around its future, here's a quiz on football clubs in the country

Vighnesh P. Venkitesh

QUESTION 1
Considered the oldest Indian club in existence, this team made history in 1911, becoming the first Indian club to win the IFA shield. Name the club and the nickname given to the winning squad.

QUESTION 2
Name the first club from south India and the State in which it was set up.

QUESTION 3
The Durand Cup, one of the oldest and most prestigious football competitions in India, established in 1888, was won by a domestic club for the first time in 1940. Name the club that beat the Royal Warwickshire Regiment 2-1 to end the British monopoly and mark a turning point for Indian football.

QUESTION 4
This club was named the best in India by the English FA in 1951 after it won the IFA shield three times in a row. Name the club.

QUESTION 5
Name the team of under-15s who famously defeated its corresponding squad of European powerhouse Liverpool 6-0 this year.



Visual question: While yet to be successful in terms of titles, this ISL club generated a huge fan following and is known for the atmosphere at its home ground. Name the club, which recently went through a management crisis, and the UAE-based group that acquired its ownership last month. H. VIBHU

Questions and answers to the previous day's daily quiz:
1. The Salem witch trials took place in this year. **Ans: 1692–1693**
2. This accused farmer was executed on August 19, 1692, after maintaining his innocence during the trials. **Ans: John Proctor**
3. This 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. **Ans: Giles Corey, who was pressed to death on September 19, 1692**
4. The number of people hanged during the Salem witch trials, and the ones who died in prison. **Ans: 19 people were hanged, while at least five others died in prison. Giles Corey was separately pressed to death**
5. Name of the enslaved woman whose confession played a pivotal role in the early witchcraft accusations. **Ans: Tituba, who was enslaved by the Reverend Samuel Parris**
Visual: This 1953 play by Arthur Miller dramatises the Salem witch trials and uses them as an allegory for political persecution in 20th-century America. **Ans: The Crucible**
Early birds: KN Viswanathan | Sukdev Shet | Mohan Lal Patel | Sunil Madhavan | Tariqa Bali



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

What is the opposite of "tomboy"? (Keshava Rao, Kakinada)
Unfortunately there is no word which is the exact opposite. This is another example of how sexist the English language is. A girl who dresses like a boy and behaves like one is called a "tomboy". When you call a girl a "tomboy" you are not passing any judgment on her. When a boy begins to behave like a girl, he is laughed at. He is universally condemned. A word that is commonly used to describe such a person is "sissy". When you call a boy a "sissy", you are implying he lacks the qualities, which you would associate with the male of the species. The word "sissy", unlike the word "tomboy", has a negative connotation. Most people would say that it is okay for a young girl to behave like a boy, but it's not okay for a boy, no matter how young, to behave like a girl. Here is an example.

What's that sissy Ramu doing over here?

The word "sissified" is being used these days to mean "effeminate".

The words "sissify" and "sissified" are mostly used in informal contexts.

Which is correct? "The inspection was made/done"? (W. Srinivasulu, Alur)
Both are acceptable. One can either "make" an inspection or "do" an inspection. It's also possible to say, "carry out an inspection". Here are a few examples.

We made the inspection last week.

The inspection was done last week.

The inspection was carried out last week.

What is the meaning of "putative"? (S. Barani Dharan, Chennai)
The word "putative" means, generally believed or accepted to be true. You are not really sure if something is true or not, but you, like others, believe that it is. For example, if I say the "putative leader", what it implies is that I believe that he is the leader but I am not really sure. Here are a few examples.

There have been many attempts to capture the putative Abominable Snowman.

The police shot and killed the putative leader of the terrorist organisation.

What is the difference between "in spite of" and "despite"? (Ramakrishna Bhat, Hubli)
There is no difference; the two words can be used interchangeably. The only thing that you have to remember is that you shouldn't use the word "of" with despite. Here are a few examples.

Despite the pain, he continued to work.

In spite of the pain he continued to work.

What is the meaning of "testing the waters"? (D. Shivakumar, Secunderabad)
When you "test the waters" what you are doing is finding out the opinions of people before you actually go ahead and do what you plan to do. This is a term that is normally used in politics and business. Here is an example.

I think we should test the waters before we open a hotel in this part of town.

Published in The Hindu on March 26, 2002

Word of the day

Brash:
offensively bold

Synonyms: cheeky, nervy

Usage: *His brash manner offended several people at the meeting.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/brash

International Phonetic Alphabet: /bɹæʃ/

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

WEB EXCLUSIVE
Countering Houthis should not require turning Mecca's sanctity into a political cause — *Bhopinder Singh*
Log on to www.indianexpress.com

WORDLY WISE
When tillage begins, other arts follow.
—Daniel Webster

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RAMNATH GOENKA
IN 1932
BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Unregulated use of GM: A cautionary tale

A QUARTER or more of India's cultivated area under cotton comprises genetically modified (GM) hybrids incorporating "unapproved" herbicide-tolerant (HT) and *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) traits, according to a seed industry-commissioned study. This isn't surprising. Cotton farmers today face problems of labour scarcity for manual weeding and pink bollworm insect attacks. They would be inclined to plant hybrids that enable them to spray chemical herbicides and provide protection against a broader spectrum of bollworms and sucking pests. The existing "approved" GM Bt hybrids do not contain genes conferring tolerance to weed killers such as glyphosate or control against pink bollworm. The study shows the presence of unapproved HT and next-generation Bt genes in over half of the seed/leaf samples collected from farmers' fields across 16 districts of Maharashtra, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan.

The study's findings are a clear demonstration of farmer acceptance of HT technology. For cotton growers, this isn't about ideology. Manual weeding costs, even when labour is available, come to Rs 12,000-15,000 per acre now, whereas it is only Rs 750-850 for 2-3 rounds of glyphosate application. The same goes for hybrids harbouring the Vip3A Bt gene. While derived from the same soil bacterium as the Cry1Ac and Cry2Ab genes present in the "approved" Bt hybrids, it has a different mode of action that is effective even against the pink bollworm. Neither the glyphosate tolerance nor the Vip3A Bt gene traits have, however, been officially authorised for insertion into cotton plants for commercial cultivation. Farmers are, then, growing their hybrids via sourcing of seeds from illegal channels. That includes traders and breeders who have undertaken introgression of the traits, bypassing the government's biosafety and regulatory approval system.

The loser is not just the organised seed industry. Sales of "legal" Bt cotton hybrid seeds have fallen from 59.6 million to 46.3 million packets between 2022-23 and 2025-26. This, even as the unauthorised HT-Bt seed market has grown to an estimated 8.2-8.8 million packets. A bigger loser is the farmer, who is being denied the benefits of deployment of the advanced GM traits in the hybrids of genuine research-backed seed companies, as opposed to fly-by-night operators. The blame for this — widespread farmer demand-led, yet unregulated adoption of advanced GM technology — lies solely with the government. By blocking commercialisation and field trials of GM crops, based more on ideological positions than empirical regulatory science, it has turned India from a leading producer and exporter to a net importer of cotton.

Starlink's promises and risks call for a fine balance

LAST WEEK, in a social media post, Elon Musk blamed "certain oligarchs" for blocking the entry of Starlink in India. While the process of regulatory approvals and clearances in satellite communications appears to have moved slowly, the allegation does not hold up. "Security assessment as part of this process is currently underway in respect of all the three licensees," the Union government has said, and currently all three entities, Starlink, Jio Satellite Communications, and Eutelsat OneWeb, "are at broadly the same regulatory stage". Moreover, last year Starlink had entered into agreements with telecom majors Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel in order to offer its internet services in the country, both of whom have themselves been at odds on the issue of spectrum.

There are compelling security issues on satellite communications that need to be assessed carefully. Legitimate concerns over the enforcement of local laws and rules need to be addressed. It is not difficult to imagine scenarios where connectivity can be possibly restricted or denied when required, or allowed when the situation warrants differently. What played out in Ukraine is instructive. During the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Ukraine came to rely on Starlink for communication. There are reports, however, of alleged interference in Starlink's services in the region during the conflict.

There are significant gains to be made from the deployment of satellite internet, especially in far flung areas across the country that have poor connectivity. But there are also issues of affordability, which is perhaps why Musk, in a social media post, has said, "obviously, if Starlink is too expensive in India, no one will buy it, so SpaceX will need to make pricing affordable". For widespread adoption, pricing for equipment and monthly fees will need to be in line with the country's average broadband revenue per user. As India moves ahead, it must be mindful of the risks, strike a balance between safeguarding national interests and ensuring a transparent regulatory process, while enabling technological innovation and spurring competition.

How to keep economy on even keel

ROBERT E Hall of Stanford University and Michael Woodford of Columbia University have shared this year's Nobel Prize in Economics for "microeconomic foundations of macroeconomic stabilisation". Stabilisation, here, refers to policy measures by governments and central banks to reduce fluctuations in an economy. A government's decision to provide a tax break or a central bank choosing to raise or cut interest rates are common examples of such decisions. The contribution of Hall and Woodford is to provide a better understanding of how and when to take decisions for ensuring that an economy does not swing between prolonged periods of slow or stagnant growth and high and persistent inflation.

At the heart of their work is the idea provided by John Maynard Keynes: That governments can intervene and help reduce fluctuations in an economy. Keynes's insight helped economies learn from the Great Depression. For a while, his recipe seemed to work quite well: Whenever an economy started to slow down, policymakers intervened by cutting taxes and interest rates to boost growth, and when an economy experienced high inflation, interest rates were cut. But the repeated oil price shocks during the 1970s saw many economies, especially the US, witness high unemployment and high inflation both at once. The Keynes remedy failed to provide a solution and, in fact, many started seeing government intervention as the problem, not the solution.

Hall and Woodford's work has demonstrated "how economic models could be reconstructed to revitalise stabilisation policy". They studied how individuals made their consumption decisions (Hall) and how businesses fixed prices (Woodford) — covering the demand and supply sides of the puzzle — to provide a more robust understanding. This has helped governments across the world avoid mistakes of the past.

The internet in a sachet — this idea's time has come



R S SHARMA

INDIA HAS done what no other country has: Made digital payments free, instant, and universal, and leads the world in mobile-data use. Yet, in one adjacent field we remain a laggard. Public Wi-Fi — the cheap, shared, last-mile connectivity that lets a citizen buy a little internet wherever she is — has barely taken root. India has around 4 lakh public hotspots. France, with a population a fraction of ours, has more than 13 million; the world has over 600 million. For a nation that prides itself on its digital public infrastructure, this is a gap worth explaining — and closing.

The idea was born in April 2016, in an email from Nandan Nilekani. Any consumer, he wrote, should be able to walk up to any Wi-Fi hotspot and connect with a single click — "like an Uber for hotspots" — and anyone with a spare connection could sell a little of it to a passer-by. At TRAI, we built exactly that: An open, interoperable architecture with no central gatekeeper, in which anyone could set up or aggregate a hotspot, and a single app would discover the nearest one, verify the user, take his few rupees through any wallet, and connect him seamlessly across every provider.

We called the retail outlet a Public Data Office, or PDO, and the analogy we kept returning to was the humble PCO — the public call office that put a telephone within walking distance of nearly every Indian by turning a shopkeeper into its keeper. The PDO was the PCO reborn for the internet: The corner shop or tea stall selling connectivity by the sachet, a rupee's worth at a time. That is why I have always thought of it as the internet in a sachet — for the genius of the Indian market is that the poor do not buy the bottle; they buy the sachet.

TRAI issued a consultation paper in July 2016, submitted formal recommendations in March 2017, and piloted the idea with eight entities running some six hundred hotspots. The pilot worked: One-time registration, interoperability, easy payment — all proven. The Prime Minister himself was shown the system in June 2018 and was greatly taken with it; he wanted it launched within weeks. Yet it was not until December 2020 that the framework was finally approved by the Union cabinet, as PM-WANI — the Prime Minister's Wi-Fi Access Network Interface.

Five years on, the promise remains largely unfulfilled. Why? The single biggest reason is the cost of backhaul: A small PDO is made to pay more for the very same fibre broadband that a household buys cheaply, which destroys the shopkeeper's economics before he has sold a single sachet. Add to this a persistent official tenderness towards incumbent telecom operators, never enthusiastic about a million small competitors selling connectivity outside their control.

The commonest objection now is that mobile data is so cheap that nobody needs Wi-Fi by the sachet. It is plausible, and wrong. Data now comes bundled in fixed monthly plans priced from a couple of hundred rupees, which the poorest cannot always afford, and which are of little help to a student joining an online class when the family's one data plan is on someone else's phone. The sachet has not become unnecessary; it has merely been abolished by the operators' tariff design, even as demand has exploded — online education, telemedicine, government services — precisely where mobile signal serves worst.

> What it requires is resolve — the government's willingness to back a consumer-first, open network against the pull of powerful incumbents

There is a strategic case too. Public Wi-Fi runs on unlicensed spectrum, sparing congested mobile networks the costly spectrum they buy at auction. Leaving a billion-plus people's connectivity entirely to two or three mobile companies, besides, is a dangerous dependence on a duopoly. A dense, open, independent Wi-Fi layer is a strategic de-risking of the nation's digital life — an alternative no single commercial interest can switch off.

What makes the delay especially galling is that the missing piece is already lying in the ground. BharatNet, begun in 2011 to carry optical fibre to every one of India's 2.5 lakh gram panchayats, has absorbed more than Rs 48,000 crore — more than five times what Aadhaar cost — and reached over 2 lakh of them. Yet it returns almost nothing, for a great trunk of bandwidth with no retail distribution is a pipe with no taps. Even a fully monetised BharatNet will leave gaps in hilly, forested terrain fibre may never reach — and that is where Starlink and the other satellite-broadband entrants see a market; Reliance Jio, too, could plausibly carry backhaul, subject to regulatory clearances still being worked through.

The two failures are each other's cure. BharatNet is a big pipe without a last mile; PM-WANI is a last mile starving for a cheap, big pipe. Converge them — let BharatNet act as a common carrier, selling bandwidth on fair, transparent terms to the small PDOs and aggregators, much as a power-transmission company carries electricity to its distributors — and you have, at a stroke, cheap rural broadband, a real alternative to the duopoly, and at last a use for the taxpayer's fibre. It needs two things the state has withheld: A capped, transparent wholesale price, and enforceable service guarantees. TRAI's June 2025 tariff order, capping what a PDO is charged for retail fibre, is a welcome first step that must be followed through.

None of this requires new invention: The architecture was sound from the first, the fibre is in the ground, and the need has only grown. What it requires is resolve — the government's willingness to back a consumer-first, open network against the pull of powerful incumbents. The day a student in a small town, or a labourer far from home, buys a few rupees of the internet from the shop on the corner and thinks nothing of it will have been worth the wait. It is time to bring the internet in a sachet to every Indian.

The writer is a former chairman of TRAI and former secretary, Government of India. Views are personal

Police must protect individual rights, not political interests



YASHOVARDHAN JHA AZAD

DELHI WITNESSED an extraordinary mobilisation of state power on October 10 to prevent a public mobilisation. Over 7,000 people reportedly detained, more than 250 railway services cancelled and closure of 45 Metro stations: These were measures one might associate with a grave public-order emergency. Numbers alone cannot determine risk, but what specific threat justified restrictions affecting the entire Capital? The spectacle handed the Cockroach Janta Party a publicity victory. The state prevented a gathering but magnified its message.

A useful comparison comes from London. In November 2023, Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Mark Rowley resisted political pressure to prohibit a pro-Palestinian march on Armistice Day. He explained that the intelligence did not meet the threshold under Section 13 of the Public Order Act, 1986: Serious public disorder that could not be prevented through lesser measures. The principle was straightforward: Political displeasure cannot substitute for a professional assessment.

Why could Delhi not adopt that approach? A police commissioner brings decades of experience in handling demonstrations. Without disclosure of reasons, sweeping restrictions invite the suspicion that professional judgement has yielded to political wishes conveyed by a compliant bureaucracy.

The police repeatedly become the target of public anger over grievances directed at governments and institutions. Their first responsibility should, therefore, be to open channels of dialogue, assess risks and negotiate workable arrangements. A designated site, limited hours, agreed attendance, volunteer marshals and clear conditions against violence or damage could have provided a practical framework. It would also have placed responsibility on organisers to honour their commitments. Body cameras, videography and liaison officers could document misconduct by protesters and police alike. Identifiable offenders could then face targeted action.

The explanation that the application arrived only three days before the protest is insufficient by itself. Police deployed tens of thousands of personnel. If such extensive preparations were possible, why was a negotiated demonstration impossible?

Protests in India are an age-old tradition. Jumping over barricades, marching in human chains or lying on the ground to resist arrest should not be condemned but celebrated as the ritual dance of democracy. Stone-pelting, assault and destruction are different: They demand lawful action. Professional policing must distinguish between the two. Its public face should be that of a facilitator protecting rights while enforcing reasonable limits, and not the face of the ruling party.

Unfortunately, political parties discover police accountability when they are in the Opposition. Few press for implementation of the Supreme Court's police-reform directions or for institutions that protect professional decision-making.

A credible State Security Commission would help establish policy, evaluate performance and curb unwarranted interference. Operational autonomy must come with accountability in the form of recorded reasons, independent scrutiny of excessive force and transparent review of restrictions.

Training matters equally. Negotiation, de-escalation, behavioural skills and proportionate use of force cannot be improvised at a barricade. Constant deployment leaves too little time to develop these capabilities.

The Home Ministry's bureaucratic layer also deserves scrutiny. Its task should be to support professional policing, test the necessity of extraordinary restrictions and advise ministers candidly. When it merely transmits political messages, it adds hierarchy without adding judgement. There is a strong case for an experienced internal-security professional as home secretary, capable of articulating operational realities and constitutional obligations to the executive.

October 10 has again shifted attention from the original grievance to police conduct. That is an avoidable failure. But ultimately the ruling establishment will have to take a call on the cost of allowing a Chief Election Commissioner to continue against continuing opposition and a massive deployment of state resources. The government must explain why restrictions of this scale were necessary and consider whether dialogue would have served the public better.

Another protest lurks around the corner. Hopefully the lesson is learnt that a capital kept quiet by closing all its gates is no proof of a democracy kept secure.

> Negotiation, de-escalation, behavioural skills and proportionate use of force cannot be improvised at a barricade

Azad, a retired IPS officer, is the author of Policing The Republic *and has served as special director, Intelligence Bureau*

India's science problem is not talent, but priorities



KAMINI WALIA

EVERY OCTOBER, the Nobel announcements trigger a familiar conversation in India: Why does India, with its enormous pool of scientific talent, rarely feature among them? Perhaps the more useful question is: What are the countries that produce transformative science doing differently and what holds our scientists back?

The answer is not simply money, though money matters. The US spends about 3.4 per cent of GDP on research and development, Germany over 3 per cent, Japan more than 3.5 per cent and South Korea over 5 per cent. China is approaching 2.7 per cent. India's gross expenditure on R&D is only about 0.64 per cent.

But the more revealing statistic is who funds research. In India, business contributes around 40 per cent of R&D expenditure, compared with roughly three-quarters in the US and China. Our research ecosystem therefore has both a scale and a private-sector participation gap. There is also increasing pressure on scientists to "develop technologies", "build products", "commercialise research" and "deliver solutions". These are legitimate national priorities but technology cannot be produced on demand. We are emphasising the last few stages while underinvesting in the first.

A diagnostic platform, for example, may require years of work on disease biology, pathogen behaviour, host response, biomarkers and molecular mechanisms before a product becomes possible. Basic science is the landscape from which innovation emerges. This is where India needs a rethink. First, government and research agencies should create a protected basic-science funding window. A defined proportion of competitive funding should support investigator-driven, curiosity-led research, without requiring every project to promise a patent, product or technology. Second, research funding should be explicitly divided into discovery, translation and deployment portfolios, with different timelines and success metrics. Third, India needs long-duration funding, with rigorous scientific review but considerably less administrative micromanagement. Fourth, we need a national shared research infrastructure. Genomics, proteomics, advanced imaging, biobanks, structural biology, AI and computational platforms should be accessible across institutions.

Finally, we must change how we see research and evaluate scientists. Publication counts, journal impact factors, patents and grant utilisation are convenient metrics, but they do not necessarily measure discovery. Scientific assessment should reward originality, reproducibility, important questions, new knowledge, datasets, platforms, technologies and influence on science or health policy. This means building the pipeline properly.

China offers an instructive example. As its overall R&D investment has grown, it has become a major global supplier of affordable technology. China produced around 80 per cent of the world's solar PV modules and battery cells in 2024, while its share of global electric-car production reached about 70 per cent in 2025. The lesson is to recognise the importance of connecting discovery to engineering, manufacturing and markets.

India has an extraordinary natural advantage. Our population provides a vast and diverse setting for research. The ambition should therefore be to create an ecosystem which attracts young scientists who can pursue an unconventional question for 10 or 15 years, fail, change direction and try again without being penalised for not producing an immediate product. If India wants the technologies of tomorrow, it must fund the science of today. The Nobel Prize should not be the target. Building a research system capable of producing Nobel-level discoveries should be.

> Basic science is the landscape from which innovation emerges. This is where India needs a rethink

The writer is senior scientist and programme officer, AMR, ICMR

40 YEARS AGO

October 13, 1986


INDIAN EXPRESS
Big-Two summit ends without any accord

Big Two summit ends

US SECRETARY of State George Shultz said the two-day US-Soviet talks in Iceland had ended with no new agreement on arms control and no date had been set for a new formal summit. Speaking at a news conference, he said the mini-summit had stalled over the issue of Reagan's "Star Wars" space defence programme.

11 killed in Sri Lanka

EIGHT TAMIL militants and three security men were killed in a battle in Sri Lanka's northwestern Mannar district, a military spokesman said. He told Reuters the fighting started when a foot patrol was ambushed and two soldiers were killed and four others wounded. Reinforcements arrived to help the patrol and eight of the militants were killed.

San Salvador death toll

AT LEAST 1,800 people are believed to have been killed in six large buildings that collapsed in San Salvador in the earthquake, a rescue chief said. "There are six large buildings which collapsed and reckoning an average of 300 people in each of them, that makes 1800 dead, not including casualties in other parts of the city," Mano Rodolfo Lopez, leader of a Guatemalan team of rescue workers, said.

Major cabinet shake-up looms

A MAJOR shake-up in the administration, including changes in the cabinet, is expected after the return of the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, from his visit to Australia and three other countries. Gandhi has decided not to accept any foreign visits for the next six months and give greater attention to pressing problems at home.

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY
In a world turned upside down, Mr Trump blames Volodymyr Zelenskyy for failing to cut a peace deal. — *The Guardian*

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Crackdown on Jantar Mantar 2.0, amid other closures, calls for redemocratisation



SUHAS PALSHIKAR

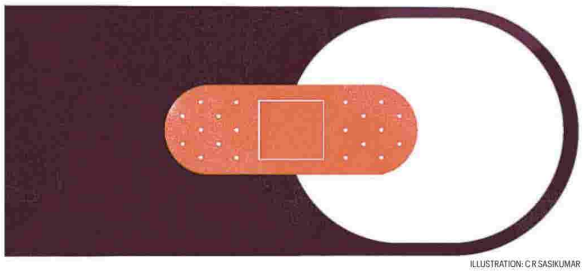


ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

DELHI CONTINUES to be the battleground between protestors and the police. The government seems determined that there cannot be a Jantar Mantar 2.0. That has produced a closure — literally. But let us not forget where it all began. After months of persistent complaints over the exclusionary character of the SIR, the opposition parties, and now the CJP, are demanding the removal of the Chief Election Commissioner. This demand follows the insensitive response to complaints about the SIR and an equally unresponsive Supreme Court judgment on the issue. The judiciary and the ECI have, thus, produced a key closure over the issue of disenfranchisement. More closures stare us in the face.

Election outcomes become suspect; parties lose and elected representatives of the party are easily exported elsewhere. A closure. Maharashtra has witnessed that a party gets split and the party symbol easily goes to the breakaway faction. A closure. You challenge a law about the appointment of Election Commissioners and that faces many a curious closure.

If you are a woman protester or a woman journalist, you will be physically abused in public. Closure. You may be an MP; you will still be manhandled. You may be the leader of the Opposition; you will be denied permission to protest. You may be a group of opposition MPs — the President may give you an audience — the CEC will shoo you away. Closure.

It is in the backdrop of this barricading of practically all opposing views, ideas and actions that the closure at Jantar Mantar 2.0 has been unfolding. What has happened over the last weekend, therefore, symbolically represents the nature of the politics India is experiencing today. No space for opposing voices, no remedy for disenfranchisement, no permission to express independent views.

Isn't this a serious and clear instance of non-democracy, a case of authoritarianism, an example of miscarriage of the electoral process and an abuse of state power? Terms like electoral autocracy or competitive authoritarianism are employed to capture the moment. Both these terms assume an element of competition and a possible electoral majority. But when protests are banned, popular mobilisations are made impossible, voters are removed from electoral rolls, reported instances of *mala fide* applications for voter deletions go unpunished and unchecked — all accompanied by repeated judicial abdication, complicit civil services and a compliant media — the vestige of competition vanishes.

Systemic suppression drowns the democratic urge, diminishes people's easy access to democracy and generally disincentivises fair competition. This is where the strength of closures matters. But it is doubtful whether such suppression actually destroys citizens' urge for a free political order. That is where the limits of closures may get exposed.

As more and more closures are introduced by the regime, India finds itself at the crossroads — public opinion caving in to the closures or the public craving for fresh political air. The farmers' agitation, the quiet electoral setback of 2024, and the more recent explosion of youth energy in the Jantar Mantar protests have exemplified this tug of war between the regime-imposed closures and the more-than-a-century-old habit of being a democracy.

Systemic suppression drowns the democratic urge, diminishes people's access to democracy and disincentivises fair competition. This is where the strength of closures matters

The modern state and modern authoritarian regimes keep finding new weapons for stabilising the closures and turning them into citizen habits. A lifestyle of a docile, obedient but conveniently aroused "national citizen" is continuously injected through the loud political discourse of artificial divisions and false unity; of imagined enemies and mythical glory. The system-imposed closures and the politics-imposed rhetoric of the obedient citizen pose a peculiar challenge for pro-democracy forces in India. While the formal frameworks of competition (elections) and institutional remedies (approaching the judiciary) will continue to be explored, moments of acute closures may also produce moments of re-democratisation.

The former — within-system push-backs — refer to democratic resilience while the latter is an unexplored territory left to the creativity of political actors. This creativity is not merely a matter of catchy slogans and flashy wars on social media. Jantar Mantar in July was an important rupture in the midst of closures because it tapped the energies born out of frustration. A few years before that, the Bharat Jodo Yatra was an early rupture because it sought to go beyond electoral appeals. These two moments, different in their composition and drivers, have had one thing in common — they sought to bypass the closures and yet irritate the architects of those closures.

Two factors constitute the glorious moment of modern India's democratisation: The long and tortuous awakening over questions of rights (originally argued by Jyotirao Phule in late 19th century) and the institutionalisation of elections and the politics of hope (through the Constitution). If today's closures push us toward re-democratisation, we can borrow from India's first moment of democratisation.

Various dimensions of that early democratisation, such as the combination of individual dignity and equality, the determination to annihilate caste, the formal establishment of political equality and the innate hope of fraternity — all need to be re-energised. At the same time, more urgent and more contemporary concerns about social harmony and better livelihoods will need to be integrated into the project of re-democratisation. For the moment, the two central themes in this project are bound to be citizen inclusion and citizen assertion — both of which speak about the culture of democracy vis-à-vis today's unresponsive institutions.

But even as this project remains hazy today, it must handle a central paradox: Jantar Mantar has created great hopes from civil society actors, but modern authoritarian regimes depend on election victories and once they lose, their institutional collaborators are only too willing to cower. Therefore, it will be critical for re-democratisation that the mainstream opposition manifests the imagination to conceptualise re-democratisation and the maturity to work together. Today's closures, thus, throw up a challenge: Is India willing to explore the path of re-democratisation?

The writer, based in Pune, taught political science

A decade of placing research and innovation at the centre



ABHAY KARANDIKAR

ON JANUARY 3, 2019, at the Indian Science Congress, Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave the call for "*Jai jawan, Jai kisan, jai vigyan, jai anusandhan*". With these words, he articulated a vision placing research and innovation as the primary agenda for economic growth, strategic security, industrial development, entrepreneurship, and citizen-centric service delivery.

The facts and figures since 2014 reflect the breadth of this transformation. India rose from 81st in the Global Innovation Index in 2015 to 38th in 2025. It ranks third globally in the volume of scientific and engineering publications. The Gross Expenditure on Research and Development (GERD) has more than tripled from Rs 79,355.89 crore in 2013-14 to Rs 2,44,767.81 crore in 2023-24, reaching about 0.84 per cent of GDP. The private sector's share of GERD increased from 32.2 to 43.2 per cent over this period.

During the last decade, a total transformation of the institutional architecture of India's research base has been initiated. The Anusandhan National Research Foundation funds new research across universities, colleges and R&D labs while encouraging collaboration amongst academia, industry and government.

The Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) Fund, on the other hand, addresses a more difficult problem — the "valley of death", where technologies need pilot-scale demonstration and productisation just as risk and capital requirements rise sharply. The Rs 1 lakh crore RDI Fund represents a significant step towards addressing this financing gap and providing the patient, risk-tolerant capital that cutting-edge innovation requires.

In his 2023 Independence Day address, PM Modi recalled that when asked during a foreign visit whether Indian girls pursued science and engineering, he responded: "Today in my country more daughters than boys are taking up STEM." Initiatives such as Women in Science and Engineering (WISE)–KIRAN, Gender Advancement for Transforming Institutions (GATI) and Vigyan Jyoti have sought to create greater opportunities for women across the scientific and technological ecosystem.

Another pivotal step has been the transition towards building mission-mode capabilities around specific sectoral priorities for the country. The National Quantum Mission spans the full quantum stack, ranging from computing and communication to sensing, metrology, materials and devices, and supports research groups and start-up spin-offs. The IndiaAI Mission applies the same ecosystem logic to artificial intelligence, covering compute, datasets, skilling, foundational models and responsible AI. The Indian Semiconductor Mission has approved 10 projects across six states, including two fabs and eight packaging units, with Semicon 2.0 now pushing further into equipment and materials, indigenous IP, industry-led R&D and talent development.

Biotechnology is following a similar trajectory. The BioE3 Policy provides a broad foundation spanning bio-based chemicals and enzymes to precision biotherapeutics and space biotech. The bio-economy grew from about $10 billion in 2014 to roughly $195.3 billion in 2025 and is projected to reach $300 billion by 2030. The Deep Ocean Mission and Mission Mausam extend the integrated-ecosystem approach into resource and climate security.

The Indian Space Policy, 2023 and the establishment of IN-SPACe have opened the space sector to private participation across launch services, satellite manufacturing and downstream applications, with more than 400 space start-ups now operating in the ecosystem. Nuclear energy has also seen an opening, with the SHANTI Act providing a legal framework for private participation, subject to licensing, safety and regulatory requirements.

India's digital public infrastructure has been built over the decade around the JAM trinity of Jan Dhan accounts, Aadhaar, and mobile connectivity, and expanded through UPI, DigiLocker, Account Aggregator, and the Ayushman Bharat Digital Health Mission. In agriculture, satellites, drones, remote sensing, GIS, and AI are increasingly used to monitor crops, enable precision farming, estimate yields, and provide farmer advisories.

India's start-up ecosystem has also expanded rapidly during the last few years. Startup India, launched in 2016, put entrepreneurship at the core of the national development agenda. India is now the world's third-largest start-up ecosystem, with more than 2 lakh registered start-ups and over 130 unicorns. A wide range of schemes, such as the Seed Fund, Fund of Funds, Credit Guarantee Scheme, Atal Innovation Mission, NIDHI, BioNEST, iDEX, etc. launched since 2016 have strengthened access to incubation, mentoring, finance and markets. Under Modi 3.0, the focus has now sharpened towards emerging technologies.

As PM Modi stated, "The arms of science, technology and innovation must reach the poorest, the remotest and the most vulnerable person." The vision of science serving society lays a stronger foundation for India's aspirations, and as India moves towards Viksit Bharat 2047, the spirit of "*Jai vigyan, jai anusandhan*" captures this continuing commitment to scientific progress and innovation.

The writer is member, NITI Aayog and former secretary, Department of Science & Technology, Government of India

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Delhi lockdown

THE ELECTION Commission's credibility depends on public confidence, not merely on its legal authority ("Barricades, detentions do not fortify the ECI', *IE*, October 12). While maintaining law and order during protests is necessary, excessive restrictions and preventive detentions can create doubts about institutional neutrality. The ECI must be open to legitimate criticism and address genuine grievances transparently. Equally, protesters should act responsibly and avoid disrupting public life.

A Myilsami, Coimbatore

Arm-twisting

THE SUSPENSION OF Indian tech firms from the PERM programme reveals calculated economic arm-twisting ('US IT salvo opens new front for India', *IE*, October 12). Coupled with tariff threats over Russian crude purchases, Washington is blatantly leveraging vulnerabilities to extract trade concessions. Throttling skilled mobility imperils a $221-billion commercial engine and corrodes goodwill. India cannot treat these actions as routine regulatory shifts or compromise sovereignty under coercion. Policymakers must contest arbitrary visa barriers at multilateral forums, link talent mobility to Indo-Pacific pacts, and accelerate service diversification.

Ishita Vaghela, Jharsuguda

Wars and elections

MILITARY ACTION may temporarily rally public support, but it cannot guarantee electoral success or lasting peace ('America, Israel & an unsettled question: Can war win elections?', *IE*, October 12). Voters ultimately judge governments by economic security, public welfare and responsible leadership. Wars also impose heavy financial costs and cause immense civilian suffering. Democratic leaders must explain the objectives, likely consequences and exit strategy before committing their countries to prolonged conflicts. Diplomacy should take precedence over treating military strength as an electoral instrument.

Pon Arunkumar, Namakkal

On women's safety, move from reaction to prevention



MAYANK MAKHIJA AND NAMAN SHARMA

THE 2012 Delhi gang-rape case was supposed to redefine women's safety in India. It led to unprecedented protests, sweeping legal reforms and the constitution of the Justice J S Verma Committee, which produced one of the most significant reports on criminal justice in independent India. Many of its recommendations were implemented through the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013. New offences such as stalking and voyeurism were introduced, the definition of rape was expanded and punishments became more stringent. Yet the Committee had cautioned that legal reform without institutional reform would remain incomplete.

Recent incidents in Delhi prove the warning was justified. A 17-year-old girl was allegedly gang-raped inside a sleeper bus that travelled nearly 47 km before she was abandoned. Days later, a 16-year-old girl was allegedly raped at knifepoint in a Delhi park by three men posing as police officers. Both incidents exposed grave failures in the safety of public spaces. The problem persists beyond individual offenders. Roads, parks, buses, metro stations, subways and footbridges cannot be permitted to become dangerous spaces due to preventable administrative failures. The debate is no longer confined to punishment; it is about the state's duty to make public spaces safe.

Modern criminology offers a useful explanation through routine activity theory. A crime becomes more likely when three conditions exist simultaneously: A motivated offender, a vulnerable target and the absence of effective guardianship. Poorly illuminated parks, non-functional CCTV cameras, unverified buses and inadequate police patrols reduce that guardianship. They do not create criminals, but they create opportunities for crime. According to the NCRB 2024, Delhi registered 1,058 rape cases with a rape rate of 14 per lakh women. More disturbing is the fact that these are only the reported cases; the countless crimes buried under fear, stigma and silence never find a place in official statistics. Media reports also indicate that at least 13 cases of sexual assault were reported in Delhi during September alone. The Supreme Court's decision to take *suo motu* cognisance reflects the seriousness of the institutional breakdown.

The problem persists beyond individual offenders. Roads, parks, buses, metro stations, subways and footbridges cannot be permitted to become dangerous spaces because of preventable administrative failures

Why do severe punishments not prevent these crimes? The answer lies in the classical theory of penology developed by Cesare Beccaria. Beccaria argued that the certainty of punishment, rather than its severity, is the real deterrent. India today has stringent rape laws, including life imprisonment and capital punishment in specified circumstances. Yet offenders often believe they can evade immediate detection because surveillance is weak, policing is inadequate and investigations are delayed. A harsh law that is rarely enforced is a weaker deterrent than a moderate law that is enforced with certainty.

The conversation on women's safety must now move from reaction to prevention. First, every identified vulnerable public space in Delhi should undergo an independent safety audit covering lighting, CCTV functionality, emergency response systems and police visibility. Second, all commercial buses must have compulsory GPS tracking and live surveillance linked to transport authorities. Third, departmental accountability should accompany criminal prosecution whenever serious offences expose failures in surveillance, licensing or patrolling.

The Justice J S Verma Committee had identified "failure of governance" as the root cause of sexual crime. It recommended the creation of Rape Crisis Cells in every district, which would be immediately notified upon registration of an FIR and provide survivors with integrated legal aid, trauma counselling and psychological support from the first stage of investigation. While the government introduced One Stop Centres (Sakhi) in 2015, the Committee's vision of an automatic, police-linked rape crisis response has never been fully implemented.

Women should not have to calculate which road is safer, which park is brighter or whether a public bus can be trusted. The burden of safety cannot continue to rest on the victim's precautions instead of the state's preparedness.

Makhija is a Supreme Court lawyer and former special public prosecutor for the ED. Sharma is a final-year student at Maharashtra National Law University, Nagpur

How India should respond to green card crackdown



ARYA ROY BARDHAN

INDIAN IT'S retreat from visa-dependent delivery predates the White House's latest IT salvo. New H-1B approvals for TCS, Infosys, Wipro, HCL and Cognizant fell 84 per cent, from 15,919 in FY2015 to 2,486 in FY2025. Their share of initial-employment approvals dropped from 14 per cent to 2.2 per cent. Over the same period, approvals for Amazon, Microsoft and Google rose from 2,860 to 7,060. Indian firms increasingly hired locally in America and delivered work offshore.

Indians received 51-58 per cent of all PERM certifications in each full year from 2015 to 2023. In June 2026, 356,360 approved Indian EB-2 petitions, counting principal applicants alone, awaited visas. India received just 3,916 EB-2 green cards in FY2024. Those with approved petitions are unaffected by this suspension. The additional barrier falls on workers still seeking certification. The US labour-market anxiety is understandable. Unemployment in computer and mathematics occupations rose from 1.9 per cent in 2022 to 3.3 per cent in 2025. Software job postings are 66 per cent below their 2022 peak. Yet restricting foreign workers does not ensure their jobs go to Americans. Firms can move the work abroad. Microsoft employs more than 22,000 people in India and has committed $17.5 billion of investment over 2026–29. Adobe employs more than 8,000. These operations offer an alternative when US recruitment and retention become harder. Any gains for American workers competing for those roles could be offset by lost investment and work moving overseas.

The economic effect would emerge through retention and future hiring, rather than an immediate loss of existing visa holders. When permanent settlement becomes less attainable, some workers may prefer employers or countries offering greater security. Firms could relocate teams or expand recruitment abroad to retain those skills. The risk for America is that restricting settlement changes where work gets done, without creating equivalent domestic jobs.

India is positioned to receive some of that work. Employment at global capability centres — the in-house operations of multinational companies — rose from 1.9 million in FY2024 to 2.36 million in FY2026. Cognizant's Indian workforce grew from 194,700 in 2018 to 256,900 in 2025, while its North American workforce shrank from 50,000 to 41,600. The shift is already underway. But more work in India does not automatically translate into more opportunities for fresh graduates. Net technology hiring fell from 445,000 in FY2022 to between 60,000 and 135,000 annually thereafter. In ICRIER's survey of 651 IT firms, 65 per cent reported cutting hiring after adopting AI, while 55 per cent reduced entry-level employment and 42 per cent increased mid-level hiring. Experienced returnees and relocated roles may fit that demand better than the 820,000 engineering graduates India produces annually. Graduate unemployment remained 11.2 per cent in 2025, against 3.1 per cent across all education levels. Offshore expansion alone cannot resolve this mismatch.

Preserving mobility matters. But the central task is to turn relocated work into broader opportunity

There is a longer-term cost. The US supplied 27.7 per cent of India's $118.7 billion in remittances in 2023-24. Fewer Indians settling there could slow remittance growth and weaken diaspora networks. India's response should focus on capturing higher-value work through effective GCC policy, predictable tax and transfer-pricing rules, and skills that help experienced workers use AI. Preserving mobility matters. But the central task is to turn relocated work into broader opportunity. A larger offshore industry alongside a narrower American dream would otherwise leave too many young Indians behind.

The writer is with ORF

INSTRUCTIONS AGREED AT LAST WEEK'S GST COUNCIL MEETING

States, Centre told to focus on data analytics, tech to widen GST base

Aanchal Magazine
New Delhi, October 12

DEEPER DATA analytics, leveraging technology, moving away from enforcement-led and intrusive actions, tracking taxpayers who do not pay tax in cash and using invoice matching are among the measures that central and state officers have been asked to focus on to deepen the tax base under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime.

Following a series of process reforms announced at the 57th meeting of the GST Council last week, tax officials have also been asked to undertake granular data analysis to identify opportunities to expand the tax base. This includes closely monitoring transactions in which retail sales may be misdeclared as business-to-business (B2B) transactions to claim input tax credit (ITC), and identifying registered GST taxpayers who report no cash tax payments and instead set off their entire GST liability against eligible ITC.

Several business-friendly measures announced at the Council meeting, including the introduction of a Rs 10,000 threshold for issuing showcause notices under GST, are also likely to be rolled out before April 1, 2027, the implementation date for other measures.

"It is very important to look at stabilising the GST system. And that's why rate rationalisation was undertaken last year and now the process reforms. The GST authorities have been instructed to use technology and data analytics to detect evasion and make efforts to deepen the tax base. Although we have a good number of taxpayers registered under GST, there is scope to widen the tax base and we have asked states to widen the base," a senior official said.

"Businesses that are registered but showing anomalies in their GST declarations can have their transactions studied, and they can be nudged accordingly to become part of the tax system," the official added.

The technology-led GST data analytics initiative is expected to follow the approach of the Income Tax Department's NUDGE (Non-intrusive Usage of Data to Guide and Enable) campaign,



Tax officials have been asked to monitor retail sales misdeclared as B2B transactions to claim input tax credit. REUTERS

which uses risk analytics, behavioural insights and information sharing through global networks such as the Common Reporting Standard (CRS) and the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA) framework to nudge taxpayers towards compliance.

GST authorities will also rely on the Invoice Management System (IMS) to match credit details between sellers and buyers. Under a proposed additional layer to prevent mismatch notices, buyers will be able to accept, reject or hold each invoice as it appears. Accepted invoices will flow into their returns.

"A seller who wants to reduce something he has reported does it where the buyer will see it, so the two sides stay aligned. Much else rests on this," the official said.

Linking the input and output ledgers with the summary return would help identify fake credit as it arises, the official added.

To enable this invoice-matching mechanism, GST authorities will also introduce electronic invoicing (e-invoicing) as a step before the matching process. E-invoicing for business-to-consumer (B2C) transactions will be introduced from April 1, 2027, the official said, adding that the GST Network will provide the necessary support system to states for the transition. Under the existing GST e-Invoice System, businesses are required to upload B2B invoices to a government-approved Invoice Registration Portal (IRP) for validation and the generation of a unique Invoice Reference Number (IRN) and a QR code.

GST authorities are also expecting smoother movement of goods following the Council's recent decision to allow vehicles to be stopped only by tax officers from the state of the supplier or recipient, and only on the basis of "specific intelligence" and due authorisation. The measure was initially proposed only for supplier states. However, following detailed discussions at the Council meeting, recipient states were also included at the request of some states, the official said.

FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Rupee rallies by 1%, logs biggest daily gain in six months after RBI steps

ENS Economic Bureau
Mumbai, October 12

THE RUPEE appreciated 95 paise, logging its steepest single-day gain in more than six months, to close at 95.78 against the US dollar on Monday after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) introduced several measures aimed at supporting the domestic currency.

"The Indian rupee emerged as the strongest performer among its Asian peers, supported by the RBI's targeted measures to curb speculation and contain volatility in the forex market," said Dilip Parmar, Senior Research Analyst, HDFC Securities. A pullback in crude oil prices, driven by expectations of improving supply conditions, further aided sentiment.

However, weaker domestic equities and continued foreign fund outflows weighed on the currency, limiting its gains after the initial rise.

According to Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst, Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities, the RBI's measures are expected to ease pressure on the spot market and curb speculative dollar buying, supporting the rupee in the near term. However, a sustained recovery will depend on foreign institutional investor (FII) flows, crude oil prices and broader dollar movements.

On October 10, with the rupee inching closer to the 97-per-dollar mark and crude oil prices surging above $100 per barrel, the RBI tightened its grip on the rupee derivatives market. It introduced a package of regulatory measures aimed at strengthening market discipline, curbing excessive speculative activity and improving transparency in foreign exchange transactions.

The central bank announced restrictions on rebooking cancelled foreign exchange derivative contracts, lowered the threshold for transactions permitted without establishing underlying exposure, strengthened documentation requirements and introduced a new Foreign Exchange Risk Reserve. The changes could significantly alter how banks, corporations, financial institutions and currency traders manage their foreign exchange positions. Forex reserves fell by $12.95 billion to $734.60 billion in the week ended October 2. The rupee had remained under pressure despite inflows of more than $14.3 billion under the FCNR scheme.

Meanwhile, the BSE Sensex declined 0.76%, or 547 points, to 71,924.68 on Monday. The NSE Nifty fell 0.70%, or 157 points, to 22,363.35.

FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Banks seek relief, clarity from RBI on FX measures

Mumbai: Banks have urged the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to ease one of the key measures the regulator announced over the weekend to support the rupee and scrap the threshold above which the rule comes into effect, four people familiar with the discussions said.

Lenders have approached the central bank through a forex industry body, seeking the removal of a mandate that banks make a 20% cash deposit with the RBI for FX derivatives used to hedge current-account exposures, the people said. The people declined to be named.

The RBI's measures, announced on Saturday, are aimed at curbing corporate demand for forward dollars that have piled pressure on the rupee, which has been falling due to steep oil prices and capital outflows.

Banks have proposed the RBI replace the 20% deposit mandate with a flat charge on companies hedging current-account exposures through forward dollar purchases, or other derivatives. REUTERS

Tata Sons' IPO ambitions clouded by shareholder test, structural obstacles

George Mathew
Mumbai, October 12

TATA SONS' decision to proceed with steps towards a public listing has opened complex corporate and regulatory hurdles, with the proposed initial public offering (IPO) facing potential roadblocks involving shareholder approvals, changes in corporate structure and amendments to its Articles of Association.

"The IPO will require Tata Sons to convert itself from a private to public company and also amend the Articles of Association. These actions require prior approval of shareholders in AGM or EGM," said a top-level source in the Tata group. This means all the parties involved in the power struggle will have to settle the disputes and come to an understanding.

While there is a move for mediation to settle the disputes, it's learnt both sides have not budged from their positions so far.

Tata Sons' board does not necessarily require AGM approval merely to decide to pursue an IPO. "However, shareholder approval may be required depending on the structure of the issue and the applicable provisions of the Companies Act, 2013, SEBI regulations and Tata Sons' Articles of Association. Therefore, whether AGM approval is mandatory depends on the specific corporate actions proposed as part of the IPO," said Sonam Chandwani, Managing Partner, KS Legal & Associates.

The board of Tata Sons, the holding company of the Tata group, voted on September 17 to proceed with the listing following the Reserve Bank of India's rejection of its application to surrender its registration as a Core Investment Company. Four directors backed the listing process, while Tata Trusts Chairman Noel Tata opposed it.

Tata Sons has reportedly initiated preliminary talks with some banks for the IPO plan. "How will the company go for an IPO if it needs shareholder approval. Tata Trusts which hold 66 per cent of the company can easily block it. The company will have to change its status to a public limited company. Four independent directors can't alone decide whether to go for an IPO. Then the issue of Articles of Association. Tata Sons will need the support of shareholders," said an observer tracking the Tata group developments.

FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Lakshmi, Mallika flag unresolved Venu family asset dispute

George Mathew
Mumbai, October 12

LAKSHMI VENU and Mallika Srinivasan have said no economic settlement has been reached over the ownership and division of assets within the Venu Srinivasan family, underlining continuing differences despite the completion of a broader partition within the TVS family.

The statement comes amid a dispute between TVS Motor Chairman Emeritus Venu Srinivasan and his son Sudarshan Venu on one side, and Mallika, Venu's wife, and their daughter Lakshmi on the other.

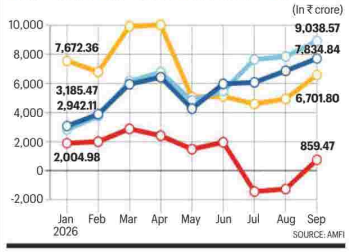
In a joint statement, Lakshmi and Mallika said the broader TVS family partition, agreed upon in 2020 and implemented implemented later, involved the relevant stakeholders. However, they said no comparable process had taken place to settle the economic interests within the Venu Srinivasan family.

"The fundamental issue is not about management positions, which have been compensated appropriately and commensurately. It is about the fair recognition of rightful economic ownership, which remains unresolved," they said.

FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

SIP inflows hit record Rs 32,490 crore in Sept

INFLOWS INTO LARGE-CAPS HAVE LAGGED



Akash Mandal
Mumbai, October 12

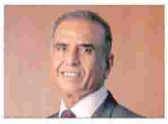
EQUITY MUTUAL funds continued to draw strong interest in September despite a challenging geopolitical environment and muted market returns. Retail investors remained undeterred as contributions through systematic investment plans (SIPs) hit a record Rs 32,490 crore during the month, as per the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI).

When asked whether a prolonged period of muted equity returns could dent retail investors' sustained confidence, AMFI President Venkat Chalasani emphasised that equity mutual funds are long-term investment tools, offering benefits such as averaging during periods of market weakness and compounding over several years.

"One should invest in equity funds according to their long-term investment goals, instead of investing with a time frame of 1-2 years. We have been telling people to focus on the long-term India growth story and encourage long-term investing. That's why we are encouraging people to invest in SIPs," Chalasani said.

FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Sunil Bharti Mittal gets France's top civilian award



Sunil Bharti Mittal. BHARTI AIRTEL

New Delhi: Bharti Enterprises Founder and Chairman Sunil Bharti Mittal has been conferred the highest civilian award in France, Chevalier de l'Ordre national de la Legion d'Honneur (Knight of the National Order of the Legion of Honour), by French President Emmanuel Macron.

Established in 1802 by Napoleon Bonaparte, the Legion d'Honneur is the highest civilian award bestowed by the French Republic. Mittal has been conferred the distinction in recognition of his longstanding commitment to deepening India-France economic ties and his outstanding achievements in telecommunications and digital infrastructure, a company statement said. PTI

IMF raises India's FY27 growth forecast to 7%

Siddharth Upasani
New Delhi, October 12

THE INTERNATIONAL Monetary Fund (IMF) has raised its GDP growth forecast for India to 7% for 2026-27, up from 6.4% in July, on the back of "stronger-than-expected momentum, supported by resilient domestic demand and robust services activity". The sharp increase in the forecast for the current fiscal comes days after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) did the same. The Indian central bank now expects India's GDP to expand by 7.1% this year.

"India stands out with upward revisions, reflecting sustained momentum and growing evidence of stronger growth potential supported by favourable demographic dynamics, a large and expanding domestic market, and continued structural reforms," the IMF said in an update to its flagship World Economic Outlook report.

GDP growth in 2027-28 is also seen at 7%, up from the July estimate of 6.7%. The IMF's forecasts assume that the average price of crude oil — across Brent, Dubai Fateh, and West Texas Intermediate — will be $95.74 per barrel in 2026, up 41% from 2025. In 2027, the oil price is assumed to decline around 9% to $87.39. The sharply higher growth forecast for India is in contrast to the global economy. In 2026, the IMF now sees the world's output growing by 3.1%, only slightly higher than 3% in July. Meanwhile, global growth in 2027 is seen unchanged at 3.4%.

According to the multilateral agency, the negative supply shock from the war in West Asia is making its way through the world economy. And while the private sector has seemingly adjusted well to the conflict and trade-related shocks, the "possibility of larger economic costs" is becoming "more palpable". This is because the conflict is dragging on and buffers are becoming narrower.

Countries that are now projected to grow at a significantly higher rate in 2026 than in July include Germany (1.3% versus 0.7%) and UK (1.3% versus 1%). In fact, advanced economies as a whole are seen growing 2.1% in 2026, up from 1.7% before.

FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

BRIEFLY

Tata Trusts row: SDTT gets one week extension

Mumbai: The Maharashtra Charity Commissioner has given a one-week extension till October 19 to Sir Dorabji Tata Trust (SDTT) for its response to the complaints filed by SDTT Vice Chairmen Venu Srinivasan and Vijay Singh. The Charity Commissioner earlier sought a response from SDTT by October 12. The proceedings have also affected Tata Sons, forcing the holding company to adjourn its AGM after a restraining order barred Sir Ratan Tata Trust (SRTT) from holding board proceedings. ENS

Tata, Stellantis to expand global vehicle tie-up

New Delhi: Stellantis India, Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles Ltd and its subsidiary Tata Passenger Electric Mobility Ltd on Monday announced the signing of a definitive agreement to expand the scope of their long-standing partnership further into advanced technology and product collaboration. Under the agreement, TMPV and Stellantis will collaborate to develop vehicles for more than 50 global markets and manufacture them in India at Fiat India Automobiles Pvt Ltd. PTI

MARKETS

Sensex	NIFTY	Gold ▼	US Dollar ▼
71,924.68	22,363.35	₹1,48,061	₹95.78
-547.65	-157.10	Silver ▼	Oil ▼
-0.76%	-0.70%	₹2,20,295	$124.22

NOTE: GOLD, SILVER RATES AS PER INDIA BULLION AND JEWELLERS ASSOCIATION DATA GOLD PER 10G, SILVER PER 1 KG; CRUDE OIL (INDIAN BASKET) AS OF OCTOBER 9, 2026

BEFORE THE NATIONAL COMPANY LAW TRIBUNAL
AHMEDABAD BENCH, AHMEDABAD
C.P. (CAA)/ 46 (AHM) 2026
connected with
C.A. (CAA)/ 29 (AHM) 2026
In the matter of Sections 230 to 232 read with other applicable provisions of the Companies Act, 2013
and
In the matter of Scheme of Amalgamation
of
Orient Cement Limited ("Transferor Company")
with
Ambuja Cements Limited ("Transferee Company")

ORIENT CEMENT LIMITED,
a company incorporated under the provisions of the Companies Act, 1956, and having its registered office at Adani Corporate House, Shantigram, Near Vaishno Devi Circle, S. G. Highway, Khodiyar, Ahmedabad – 382 421, Gujarat, India.
CIN: L26940GJ2011PLC171878 ... PETITIONER NO. 1/ TRANSFEROR COMPANY

AND

AMBUJA CEMENTS LIMITED,
a company incorporated under the provisions of the Companies Act, 1956 and having its registered office at Adani Corporate House, Shantigram, Near Vaishno Devi Circle, S. G. Highway, Khodiyar, Ahmedabad, Gujarat – 382 421, India.
CIN: L26942GJ1981PLC004717 ... PETITIONER NO. 2 / TRANSFEREE COMPANY

NOTICE OF HEARING OF THE PETITION

A Joint Company Petition under Sections 230 – 232 and other applicable provisions of the Companies Act, 2013, for Scheme of Amalgamation of Orient Cement Limited with Ambuja Cements Limited **("Scheme")** was presented by the Petitioner Companies on September 30, 2026. By an order dated October 8, 2026, the Hon'ble National Company Law Tribunal, Ahmedabad Bench **("Hon'ble Tribunal")** has fixed the hearing of the said Joint Company Petition on November 19, 2026, before the Hon'ble Tribunal at 10:30 a.m. or soon thereafter.

Any person desirous of supporting or opposing the said Joint Company Petition should send to the Petitioner Companies' advocate at the address mentioned hereunder, notice of his intention, signed by him or his advocate, with his name and address, so as to reach the Hon'ble Tribunal and the Petitioner Companies' advocate not later than 2 (two) days before the date of hearing fixed by the Hon'ble Tribunal, i.e., November 19, 2026. Where such person seeks to oppose the Joint Company Petition, the grounds of opposition or a copy of his affidavit shall be furnished with such notice.

A copy of the Joint Company Petition will be furnished by the Petitioner Companies' advocate to any person requiring the same on payment of the prescribed charges for the same.

Dated: 9.10.2026

Sd/-
Singhi & Co.,
Advocates for the Petitioner Companies

Address:
Singhi & Co., Advocates & Notary, Singhi House,
1, Magnet Corporate Park, Near Sola Bridge,
S.G. Highway, Ahmedabad – 380 059

BEFORE THE NATIONAL COMPANY LAW TRIBUNAL
AHMEDABAD BENCH, AHMEDABAD
C.P. (CAA)/ 47 (AHM) 2026
connected with
C.A. (CAA)/ 33 (AHM) 2026
In the matter of Sections 230 to 232 read with other applicable provisions of the Companies Act, 2013
and
In the matter of Scheme of Amalgamation
of
ACC Limited ("Amalgamating Company")
with
Ambuja Cements Limited ("Amalgamated Company")

ACC LIMITED,
a company incorporated under the provisions of the Indian Companies Act, 1913, and having its registered office at Adani Corporate House, Shantigram, Near Vaishno Devi Circle, S. G. Highway, Khodiyar, Ahmedabad, Gujarat – 382 421, India.
CIN: L26940GJ1936PLC149771 ... PETITIONER NO. 1/ AMALGAMATING COMPANY

AND

AMBUJA CEMENTS LIMITED,
a company incorporated under the provisions of the Companies Act, 1956 and having its registered office at Adani Corporate House, Shantigram, Near Vaishno Devi Circle, S. G. Highway, Khodiyar, Ahmedabad, Gujarat – 382 421, India.
CIN: L26942GJ1981PLC004717 ... PETITIONER NO. 2 / AMALGAMATED COMPANY

NOTICE OF HEARING OF THE PETITION

A Joint Company Petition under Sections 230 – 232 and other applicable provisions of the Companies Act , 2013, for Scheme of Amalgamation of ACC Limited with Ambuja Cements Limited **("Scheme")** was presented by the Petitioner Companies on October 1, 2026. By an order dated October 8, 2026, the Hon'ble National Company Law Tribunal, Ahmedabad Bench **("Hon'ble Tribunal")** has fixed the hearing of the said Joint Company Petition on November 19, 2026, before the Hon'ble Tribunal at 10:30 a.m. or soon thereafter.

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S.G. Highway, Ahmedabad – 380 059

• LAW

Jantar Mantar de-notified: What courts have said about designating protest sites

Amaal Sheikh
New Delhi, October 12

THE DELHI Police on Monday de-notified Jantar Mantar as a designated protest site, naming Ramlila Maidan and Burari Ground in north Delhi and CBD Ground in east Delhi as alternatives.

According to the official notification, the decision follows a recommendation by a committee constituted by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). The move comes amid the Delhi police's heavy barricading and crackdown on protesters in central Delhi since October 10. Protesters have gathered at several locations, including outside areas where prohibitory orders have been imposed under Section 163 of the BNSS.

The designation of protest sites is intended to regulate demonstrations while addressing concerns over traffic, public safety, and residents' rights.

Who decides Delhi's protest sites?

Article 19 of the Indian Constitution guarantees the fundamental rights to freedom of speech and expression, and to assemble peaceably, subject to reasonable restrictions — including in the interests of "public order".

Unlike other states, Delhi's police and public order fall outside the powers of the Delhi Assembly. Under Article 239AA(3)(a), the Legislative Assembly has the power to make laws for NCT Delhi except on three issues: public order, police, and land.

The Delhi Police thus function under the MHA. The police regulate demonstrations, including applications for permission and compliance with conditions governing designated sites. Organisers had to apply 10 days in advance to protest at Jantar Mantar, which had a cap of 1,000 people. Ramlila Maidan was another designated site, with a capacity of around 50,000 people.

Law and order vs 'public order'

While the police often cite law and order when regulating protests, Article 19 permits restrictions on fundamental rights on specified grounds, including "public order". The Supreme Court has treated them differently.

In the 1966 SC ruling of *Ram Manohar Lohia v. State of Bihar*, the court observed that an act may affect law and order without affecting public order. It described law and order, public order, and security of the state as three concentric circles, with public order occupying a narrower category.

"Law and order represent the largest circle within which is the next circle representing public order and the smallest circle represents security of State. It is then easy to see that an act may affect law and order but not public order, just as an act may affect public order but not security of the State," it said.

In *Re: Ramlila Maidan Incident* (2012), the court said a restriction imposed to maintain law and order "would be least intruding into the guaranteed freedom", while public order "may qualify for a greater degree of restriction" since it was of greater social concern. The court clarified that "every breach of peace may not always lead to public disorder."

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan explained that law and order issues can involve localised disturbances, such as two people fighting on a street. Public order, he said, concerns disturbances that affect the wider community, such as large-scale disruption of transport.

"Law and order is not a valid basis to limit the right to speech and expression," he said, adding that the police cannot invoke public order on their own to justify restricting fundamental rights. "The first step is a law needs to be made which gives police that power. Then the police exercise the power under that law," he said, adding that the police must identify the law under which they are exercising their powers.

Professor G Mohan Gopal told *The Indian Express* that dissent is the "lifeblood of a peaceful and law-abiding society" and democracy exists to accommodate different opinions. He added that shutting down designated protest sites and suppressing peaceful dissent under "law and order" grounds risks driving citizens to desperation, "because all the legitimate channels, democratic channels for defending the public order based on democracy have been closed".

How can protest sites be designated?

The bench in *Himat Lal K. Shah v. Commissioner of Police, Ahmedabad* (1972), held that the police could require prior permission for public meetings on streets. But it added that the State "cannot by law abridge or take away the right of assembly by prohibiting assembly on every public street or public place".

In *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan v. Union of India* (2018), the case pertained to restrictions on demonstrations at Jantar Mantar and moving them to Ramlila Maidan. The petitioners argued that the ground would be too far from the "concentration of 'power'" in New Delhi, and would impact the protests' goals, concerning the very authorities the slogans are raised against.

While the court accepted that contention, it underlined the need to balance the rights of protesters with those of residents and held that "while regulating such demonstrations in public interest, particular areas can be earmarked". It thus allowed a limited portion of Jantar Mantar Road to remain open for regulated demonstrations, noting that the site had been used for protests for a considerable period.

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

• TECHNOLOGY

IndiGo scare: When do power banks catch fire?

Ishika Gupta
Mumbai, October 12

A CHENNAI-BOUND IndiGo flight was forced to make an emergency landing at Hyderabad airport on Sunday after a passenger's power bank caught fire mid-air. The cabin filled with smoke before the crew extinguished the fire.

A similar incident occurred in May on an IndiGo flight. The incidents have raised concerns over the safety and potential risks posed by power banks during flights.

Why did the power banks catch fire?

Power banks typically contain multiple lithium cobalt oxide (LCO) or lithium-ion battery cells, many of which may be low-quality, poorly manufactured, or even recycled. Experts say these batteries are highly energy-dense and vulnerable to overheating and combustion under certain conditions. When substituted with low-quality counterfeit cells, power banks exhibit manufacturing defects, which might be the most probable cause of the incident Sunday, said Sagar Mitra, professor at IIT Bombay.

There are other reasons, too. "Aircraft typically experience a slight jolt during landing, which may have caused a mechanical vibration in the power bank. Combined with a fully charged LCO battery, this could have triggered an internal short circuit, eventually leading to the fire," Mitra said about the May incident.

Internal leakages between a battery's positive and negative terminals and manufacturing defects can also trigger such incidents. Certain user habits can exacerbate the risk. "Many people unknowingly overexpose their power bank to higher temperatures or overcharge their power banks or continue using damaged devices, which can make them unsafe," said Vivek Panchal, MD of battery manufacturer Powertron.

Generally, the power bank's state-of-charge should be kept at 80%. Charging it to maximum capacity should be avoided to reduce stress on the battery cells and extend their storage life.

GLOBAL INCIDENTS

- In June 2024, a passenger's power bank exploded aboard an Air Arabia flight from Abu Dhabi to Kozhikode, triggering panic among passengers.
- A fire linked to a portable power bank in March 2025 severely damaged a South Korean aircraft before take-off.

What do the rules say?

Most airlines in India prohibit passengers from carrying power banks in check-in baggage. Such devices, however, are generally permitted in cabin baggage under prescribed limits. "Keeping them in the cabin ensures that crew members can immediately detect and contain any potential fire," said aviation expert Jai Rao. In contrast, if a battery fire were to occur in the cargo hold, it would be significantly more difficult to access, he added.

After several such incidents globally, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation in November 2025 issued an advisory prohibiting passengers from using or charging power banks during flights. It also barred passengers from storing power banks in overhead bins, citing concerns over a delay in emergency response during a fire.

What should passengers keep in mind?

Apart from combustion risks, overheating is a major issue associated with power banks. Most modern power banks are equipped with an inbuilt cut-off feature, which protects against overcharging, excessive discharge, and overheating while monitoring battery health.

Consumers should prioritise battery life cycle, cell quality, and warranty during purchase. Visible swelling, leakage, unusual odours, or excessive heating are also warning signs.

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• NOBEL PRIZE IN ECONOMICS 2026

How to keep an economy stable using policy tools

The Great Depression prompted policymakers to advocate government intervention in economic crises. Hall and Woodford's work refines that idea



UDIT MISRA

THE ROYAL Swedish Academy of Sciences has awarded the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel 2026 — commonly called the Economics Nobel — to two American economists: Robert E Hall of Stanford University and Michael Woodford of Columbia University. They will share the prize money of 12 million Swedish kronor (approximately Rs 12 crore).

What have they been awarded for?

The official citation states they have received the award "for microeconomic foundations of macroeconomic stabilisation". Macroeconomic stabilisation refers to policies that governments and central banks use to "stabilise" an economy.

For instance, the Reserve Bank of India last week raised interest rates with a view to contain inflation. Inflation in India has been going up owing to a rise in crude oil prices and prices of other commodities in the wake of the US-Iran war, the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, etc. There are also worries that inflation will rise further because deficient rainfall and higher temperatures due to El Niño may hurt food production and push up food prices.

If the government and the central bank followed the dictum that the government should not intervene and that the markets will price things correctly on their own, inflation can potentially soar quite high. That would hurt most Indians, since they are not rich enough to handle such a situation. It could lead to people cutting down all other expenses to focus on the essentials, which would cause many businesses to fail and lots of job losses. The economy, as a whole, may take a much longer time to recover.

But an RBI intervention could stabilise the path in such a manner that the situation never becomes as dire as it could become if nothing was done.

Similarly, over the past few years, the Union government has been cutting taxes — both direct taxes (personal income tax and corporate tax) and indirect taxes (GST) — with a view to boost consumption by individuals and investments by companies. That's because in the years leading up to and during the Covid-19 pandemic (and resulting lockdowns), India's economy struggled.

Through tax cuts, the government tried to boost economic activity — the RBI also helped in those years by cutting interest rates. Without such interventions, a recovery might have taken much longer.

These are the examples of macroeconomic "stabilisation" policies that academics such as Hall and Woodford helped refine through their work.

To understand the "microeconomic foundations" of these macro policies, one has to understand the trigger for their work.

What is their contribution?

A crash in the stock markets in October 1929 marked the start of the Great Depression in the US. As the days and months rolled by, the US gross domestic product — the value of annual output — fell by 30% and the unemployment rate soared to 25%.

Thousands of banks and businesses went under. The crisis reverberated through the world, especially affecting Europe.

'For microeconomic foundations of macroeconomic stabilisation'



Developed new macroeconomic models, leading to policies that reduced the economy's peaks and troughs.



ROBERT E HALL, 83
Stanford University, U.S.



MICHAEL WOODFORD, 71
Columbia University, U.S.



SOURCE: WORLD BANK SHADED AREAS INDICATE U.S. RECESSIONS



SOURCE: U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS

Demand and supply

Hall focused on the demand side of the economy: how do people decide how much they would consume, and when and how do they choose to raise or cut consumption.

•

Woodford's work focused on the supply side: how firms behaved and took decisions such as changing prices.

The dominant policy paradigm leading up to the Great Depression was that governments should not intervene, letting markets resolve through forces of demand and supply instead. But the widespread devastation made everyone rethink.

British economist John Maynard Keynes provided a solution that seemed to work: Governments and central banks should "stabilise" the economy through policy interventions. When growth is slow (and unemployment high), policymakers should cut interest rates and taxes, and the governments should spend more even at the cost of borrowing money itself and having a budget deficit, thus incentivising economic activity.

When the economy starts overheating and the inflation rate starts rising fast, the policymakers should slow down the economy by policies like raising interest rates. Thus, government intervention could save economies from suffering from wild fluctuations.

This broad policy formula worked until the experience of the 1970s. As the *charts* show, this was a decade when economies faced high inflation and high unemployment both at the same time, thanks to repeated oil price shocks. Efforts to boost a slowing economy only spiked inflation. Efforts to contain inflation further worsened unemployment. The situation became so bad (shaded areas in the *charts* show recessions) that the Keynesian recipe of government intervention was seen as the problem, not the solution.

Through their work from the late 1970s onwards, Hall and Woodford revitalised the Keynesian approach by making it grounded in research. Keynes had assumed a linear or straight relationship between variables such as inflation and unemployment, and consumption and production. Hall and Woodford started studying the ground-level data.

Hall focused on the demand side of the economy: questions such as, how do people decide how much they would consume, and when and how do they choose to raise or cut consumption. A better understanding of these, based on household data, has informed policy choices.

For instance, in 1982, he used microdata for a number of individual households to arrive at the insight that not everyone in the economy increases consumption based on income and future expectations; households that are living hand-to-mouth do not follow that assumption.

Woodford's work focused on the supply side: how firms behaved and took decisions such as changing prices. The assumption is that markets find the ideal price based on supply and demand, but businesses don't change prices everyday. He found that businesses look to the future when fixing prices. This means that expectations about future interest rates are important for inflation. In turn, this had a tremendous policy implication: Central banks must clearly convey what they intend to do, which is important for firms when they fix prices.

What is its significance?

Over the past few years, the global economy has faced an exceptional number of risks and challenges: from a global pandemic that brought all economic activity to a sudden halt, to a growing number of wars that have spiked prices of essential commodities, to policy missteps like tariffs.

And yet, far from a recession, the economic growth continues to surprise on the upside. A big reason why policymakers worldwide have been able to avoid worse outcomes is because their policies are informed by the work of academics such as Hall and Woodford.

• CULTURE

Garba in Gujarat: From dancing in villages to multi-crore enterprise

Ritu Sharma
Ahmedabad, October 12

THE NINE nights of the Navratri festival, marked by dancing the Garba to welcome the goddess Ambe Maa, began in Gujarat on Sunday.

Navratri and Garba

Garba, inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in December 2023, is the devotional ritual dance once performed only by women in their homes and in temple courtyards during Navratri. Over the past few decades, Garba has crossed geographical and cultural boundaries.

In Gujarat itself, Navratri is a multi-crore economic phenomenon that has been taking new forms every season. There are theme-based Navratri nights; there has been a resurgence of the traditional form of 'mandli' and 'sheri' Garba, "sustainable and eco- friendly" Garbas, as well as events dedicated to pet animals. The dancing happens in venues from open grounds to humongous air-conditioned domes.

While Garba can be performed at any celebration or happy occasion, the Navratri Garba is Gujarat's true community celebration. Social groups, *Yuvak Mandals*, apartment complexes, event planners, and clubs in cities all organise Garba nights. The accompanying musicians can range from a single *dholi* (drummer) to large ensembles.



Garba rehearsals in Ahmedabad on Saturday night. EXPRESS

How it started, evolved

Prof Parul Shah, former dean and head (dance), at the Faculty of Performing Arts, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda in Vadodara, said the word '*Garbo*' or '*Garba*' comes from the Sanskrit word '*Garbhdeep*', which refers to an earthen pot with circular holes, and is popularly known as '*Garbo*'.

"There isn't a clear date for the beginning of Garba, but the celebration is associated with both the dynasties that ruled Gujarat and with the peasantry and agricultural classes. Singing and dancing with the flute and other musical instruments as part of dance forms like Garba, Garbi, and Raas, and variations such as dandia or the 'stick raas', is believed to date back to the age of Lord Krishna," Shah said.

"Then, with the establishment of the Ambaji Shaktipeeth around 700 years ago, people started worshipping the goddess through the Garba. The earthen pot is a symbol of the human body, and the lamp inside signifies the divine soul. The festival is dedicated to the worship of the feminine energy or *Shakti*," Shah, who was among the experts who prepared the dossier for the nomination for the UNESCO designation, said. "Women would do the *sthapana* (installation) of Mataji in the chowk of their village temple, do *aarti*, and dance the Garba," Shah said.

The antiquity of Garba songs is difficult to establish precisely, Shah said. In the 20th century, Garbas were mainly passed down through generations of women in families and communities, she said. The artisans who craft Garba objects also pass on their skills orally and through practice.

Ghazal singer Atul Brahmbhatt, whose father Jitu Bhagat started the Sri Jitu Bhagat Satsang Mandali in Ahmedabad in 1949, told *The Indian Express* that his father was initially criticised for participating in an activity that was traditionally the preserve of women.

Atul said Jitu was influenced by the Vallabh and Dhola brothers who are credited with having written the 118-paragraph '*Anand no Garbo*', sung even today. "My father wrote hundreds of Garbas. Since there was no recording, devotees would memorise them and go back to their villages to sing," Atul said.

Living heritage

- Garba was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in December 2023.

Changing Garba events

"Garba has been redefined by every generation through new performative styles, contemporary lyrics, and changing fashion trends, while keeping the circle of feminine energy or *Shakti* intact. It remains a living tradition," Prof Shah said.

However, some old-timers who see Garba as essentially an expression of devotion are put off by the modern commercial dimensions the celebration has acquired.

Then there is the increasingly visible presence of communal elements who have in recent years sought to associate themselves with Navratri.

A multi-crore celebration

The Navratri Garba celebrations are a massive economic enterprise — from the owners of party plots, planners of the event, choreographers, and providers of sound and light systems, to those involved in the food industry, and the artisanal community of potters, blacksmiths, and carpenters. Then there is the cloth and jewellery industry.

Many schools and universities offer professional courses in dance and music, costume and ornament design, landscape planning, and sound and light design, which contribute to Garba creations.

the hindu businessline.
TUESDAY - OCTOBER 13, 2026

Signs of nerves

RBI should avoid knee-jerk response to Re movement

The Reserve Bank of India's weekend moves — to contain demand for dollars and curb speculative dollar-rupee positions — betray a strange sense of nervousness over the rupee's trajectory. Oddly enough, they have come just days after the MPC meeting that decided to raise policy rates by 25 basis points. For a central bank which has always maintained that it is not targeting any level of the rupee but is only concerned about keeping volatility in check, RBI's actions suggest the contrary.

Such muddled messaging could send wrong signals — of vulnerability, despite macros being sound. It is to be hoped that speculators are not emboldened. The trigger seems to have been the pressure on the rupee last week, owing to Brent crude oil prices moving above $100 a barrel and the US treasury bond yields spiking above 5.2 per cent. The RBI has announced two sets of measures to curb rupee depreciation. The first set, meant to curb currency speculation, is aimed at preventing transmission of prices from the offshore non-deliverable forward market to domestic markets. These include disallowing re-booking of cancelled rupee derivative contracts and reducing the limit for taking hedging positions in rupee derivative contracts in the domestic market without showing an underlying exposure — to $5 million from the existing $100 million. It may be recalled that the RBI had capped this limit at $100 million in March this year, when the rupee was under pressure due to the onset of the US-Iran war. By slashing the limit to $5 million, the central bank is clamping down strongly on the trading positions of banks. For contracts exceeding $2 million, the RBI has asked banks to maintain 20 per cent of the notional value in a foreign exchange risk reserve.

The other significant measure is a special window for sale of dollars directly to oil marketing companies to meet their daily requirements. This move appears aimed at cooling the spot dollar-rupee market. The RBI had announced a similar window in August 2013, following the taper tantrum. But the central bank had supplied dollars through dollar/rupee swaps then, and the window had been kept open for three months. While the central bank has not outlined how it intends to manage the payment this year, given the robust forex reserves of $735 billion, it may not have trouble meeting the daily demand from oil marketing companies, which ranges between $250-300 million. However, managing genuine demand and supply forces in determining the rupee's value may create unforeseen distortions.

The appreciation of over 1 per cent in the dollar-rupee exchange rate on Monday shows that the currency has got a temporary reprieve. The move to curb banks' speculative positions by 95 per cent and requiring them to set aside 20 per cent of their positions, will help. So will concerted moves to drain out liquidity surplus. But while the rupee can appreciate in the near term, the long-term pressure on the currency is likely to continue as long as geopolitical factors exert upward pressure on crude oil prices and portfolio outflows continue.

POCKET

RAVIKANTH





VIPIN SONDHI
THULASI RAMAN KH



Cancer — an opportunity for manufacturing

SAME PRESCRIPTION. The capabilities for manufacture of advanced radiation therapy equipment are similar to those for semiconductor fabrication, fusion energy and defence

GETTY IMAGES

Walk into the radiotherapy wing of a cancer hospital in most Indian cities and the waiting area tells you something. Patients travel from districts where no machine exists. Where one does exist, a single linear accelerator serves a caseload that demands three and when it breaks down, as imported machines serviced on foreign timelines do, the list grows longer still. India recorded nearly 1.5 million new cancer cases in 2022; over half require radiation therapy at some point. Yet the country has roughly 0.6 machines per million people, against four to six in developed healthcare systems, with a shortfall conservatively at about 1,200. This is a healthcare crisis and seen differently, one of the most consequential manufacturing gaps in the country.

India trains radiation oncologists of international standing and its medical physicists are sought after globally. The clinical knowledge to deploy even the most advanced radiation technologies exists within the country. What does not exist, in any meaningful measure, is the industrial capability to build the machines those clinicians need.

This is not a matter of cost or foreign exchange alone; it is a question of strategic dependence. The next generation of radiation therapy — proton beam systems, carbon-ion therapy, MR-guided linear accelerators and AI-driven adaptive treatment — represents the convergence of accelerator physics, superconducting magnets, high-vacuum engineering, precision robotics and software. India imports virtually every critical subsystem: each new centre commissioned, each machine replaced, sends capital abroad and transfers no capability home.

India has been here before, in Defence. Decades of dependence on imported platforms — aircraft, submarines, artillery — created not merely a foreign exchange burden but a structural inability to absorb, adapt or advance the technology. The lesson took a long time to learn. In radiation therapy, there is still time to learn it earlier.

Proton therapy, which stops a beam of charged particles within a tumour rather than passing through surrounding healthy tissue, has treated close to 350,000 patients and is no longer experimental. India has two operational proton centres, with several more projected by 2028.

THE RIGHT QUESTION

The standard question asked about medical equipment in India is whether a machine is 'Made in India'. For advanced radiation therapy systems, that question is too blunt. A proton therapy installation contains an ion source, radio-frequency accelerating structures, precision electromagnets, high-vacuum chambers, a rotating gantry that must position tonnes of hardware to within a millimetre, scanning systems and treatment-planning software. No country manufactures all of this from scratch. The productive question is which layers India can progressively own.

The answer is more encouraging than current policy conversation suggests. RRCAT in Indore has built major operational accelerator facilities and demonstrated capabilities across superconducting RF, cryogenics, ultra-high vacuum and proton-accelerator subsystems, training generations of accelerator physicists. BARC and VECC bring decades of experience in radio-frequency systems, vacuum engineering and radiation instrumentation. The Bhabhatron programme showed that laboratory-grade accelerator capability can be translated into a clinical-grade cancer treatment machine. Indian software houses already contribute to treatment planning internationally.

The gap is not one of scientific knowledge. It is the fragmented connection between laboratories, hospitals, industry and regulatory pathways and the absence of a procurement philosophy that treats each machine purchase as an opportunity to close that gap.

Government cancer centres will require new and replacement equipment consistently over the coming decades

PROCUREMENT AS STRATEGY

Government cancer centres will require new and replacement equipment consistently over the coming decades; substantial, predictable demand of the kind that has driven manufacturing capability-building in other strategic sectors.

Global suppliers seeking to participate in India's growing radiation therapy market should be invited through structured arrangements that include technology co-development, subsystem localisation and vendor qualification for Indian manufacturers. This is not protectionism. The clinical benchmark must remain what IBA, Siemens, Hitachi and Toshiba can deliver and patient outcomes are non-negotiable. But procurement that also asks what capability each purchase creates in India is the kind of patient industrial policy that has worked in space, pharmaceuticals and more recently, semiconductor design.

The measure of success should not be the share of components sourced domestically by weight. The measure should be design ownership, intellectual property and manufacturing competence in the high-value subsystems: accelerator architecture, magnet technology, radio-frequency systems, beam diagnostics and treatment-planning software.

There is a larger reason this matters. The capabilities required to manufacture advanced radiation therapy equipment — superconducting magnets, high-vacuum accelerator chambers, precision motion systems, beam control electronics — are the same capabilities needed in semiconductor fabrication, fusion energy, scientific instruments and defence: an anchor application for an advanced engineering ecosystem whose value extends well beyond healthcare.

India has built nuclear reactors, launch vehicles and sophisticated digital infrastructure. Machines that direct particle beams to destroy tumours with sub-millimetre precision are a different order of challenge but not a categorically different one. The ingredients are present: accelerator laboratories, engineering universities, medical physicists, a growing precision manufacturing base, a world-class software industry and a cancer burden that will, regrettably, create one of the largest markets for these technologies on earth.

The question before policymakers is not whether India can afford to build this capability. It is whether India can afford to spend the next 20 years creating the world's largest market for radiation therapy equipment entirely for the benefit of those who manufacture it elsewhere.

The machines that treat cancer could, with the right intent, also build the industrial capability India needs.

Sondhi is former MD & CEO of Ashok Leyland and JCB India, and serves as an Independent Director. Raman is Principal Research Scientist, Society for Innovation and Development, Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru. Views are personal

Nobel Prize for macroeconomic stabilisation

The Laureates argue markets cannot be left to self-correct, and govt action is needed for economies to recover from crises

Madan Sabnavis

It is quite befitting that this year's Nobel Prize in Economics goes for work related to economic stabilisation. The world economy is typified by volatile markets and idiosyncratic political developments, including tariffs that are puzzling. We see different shades of unemployment and inflation across countries which call for concerted action by governments and central banks.

Robert Hall and Michael Woodford have been awarded the prize for their work that goes back to the micro foundations of economics, to explain macroeconomic stabilisation solutions. The former worked more on household decisions to spend based on income; and the latter on decision-making process of firms. Together, they had the right recipe for governments as they represent consumption and production. And given the rapid pace of globalisation where countries are interconnected, these lessons are universal.

Their work in a way means going back to Keynesianism of the 1930s, which focused on governments lowering taxes and interest rates to spur demand. For a while, these principles were given up when the oil crisis struck in the early 1970s. Countries inflated their economies to lower unemployment when the price shock was on the supply side leading to hyperinflation. Some even said, Keynesianism is dead. The route followed was to let the markets decide the course of the economy. However, as Hall and Woodford have argued, markets cannot be left to self-correct.

GOVT INTERVENTION

The Lehman crisis showed that we need government intervention to stabilise economic systems when they are dealt severe blows. For this Hall and Woodford went back to the micro foundations of the subject. Households look at future and not current income when taking decisions today. Right? This holds for us too when we guide our consumption according to future flow of income.

With AI looming, this will hold even for white-collar workers. Hall thus used the rational expectations theory tenets here to show that transitory benefits don't work and if there are tax cuts, they should be sharp and permanent to have an impact. The GST cut in India last year had this flavour.

Similarly, as Woodford pointed out, firms fix the price of products of, say, ice cream, for the season and cannot change the price every day when making plans. Hence the future is what matters when drawing up the macro picture. This in turn affects the financial system in terms of credit growth as well as asset quality.



THE WINNERS. Robert Hall and Michael Woodford

How does the government fit in here? It brings about stabilisation through both monetary and fiscal policies. During the Lehman crisis, central banks could not lower rates below zero. Hence the answer was quantitative easing which stabilised the world economy as central banks bought assets.

When Covid struck, governments generally veered towards lowering interest rates besides running large deficits to ensure that the economies did not collapse. There were cash transfers and deficits touched double digit numbers. Macroeconomic stabilisation was of utmost interest. It was not surprising that the world economy (barring China) was able to bounce back as policies had addressed the micro issues of employment, income and production. The current environment of war and tariffs is destabilising. This eventually affects employment and income and consumption of households. This in turn affects production decisions of other firms. Markets cannot correct on their own and require action from the government.

In India for example, the RBI is seen working to stabilise the rupee as it has to balance stability with providing an advantage for exporters. All central banks are raising interest rates to control inflation, even though it is on the supply side. This is a strong way to manage inflationary expectations. The forward guidance provided by some of them bears testimony to how expectations are guided, which affect decisions of households and firms.

It has been observed that over the years countries have realised that while growth is important, macroeconomic stability is non-negotiable. This is because growth can be directed through policy, but without stability will mean less. This is what the Nobel laureates would underline.

The writer is Chief Economist, Bank of Baroda and author of: Policies that shaped Modern India. Views are personal

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

Cost-push inflation

This refers to 'Can rate hikes control cost-push inflation?' (October 12). Since 2000, the dot-com crash and 2008 global financial crisis had caused major economic upheavals. The current crisis has its origin to Russia-Ukraine war and US-Iran conflict. Greater political sagacity might have averted or contained these conflicts, which had disrupted supply chains and pushed up crude oil prices. The resulting inflationary pressures had prompted central banks to tighten monetary policy. Since several forces are at play, rate hikes could contain demand-driven and second-round inflationary pressures, but breaking the cost-push inflation cycle requires geopolitical de-escalation, restoration of energy supplies and resilient supply chains.

Srinivasan Velamur
Chennai

Starlink entry issue

This is with reference to 'Spaced out' (October 12). The editorial has rightly mentioned that satcom's need for India cannot be overemphasised and the government should resolve the issue through a balanced and transparent regulatory framework. However, the unsubstantiated allegation made by Elon Musk accusing an Indian industrialist of blocking Starlink entry is in poor taste and doesn't behove a person of his stature on the world's business space. Public allegations against competitors are no substitute for evidence. It is futile trying to exert pressure through inflammatory rhetoric to influence Indian regulatory decisions. India would naturally have to take into account national security and critical data security considerations, even while adhering to its policy of strategic autonomy, before allowing a foreign company into the satcom network.

Kosaraju Chandramouli
Hyderabad

Security concerns

This refers to 'India will not succumb to Musk's pressure tactics' (October 12). India is justified in placing national security above commercial pressure when considering foreign satellite communication services. However, security concerns must be supported by a transparent assessment rather than vague apprehensions. The government should establish clear, consistent rules covering spectrum allocation, data protection, lawful interception and emergency access. These requirements must apply equally to domestic and foreign operators.

BA Avyaan
Perundurai, TN

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Trump sees red in midterm

Why GOP's last-minute gimmicks may not work

Sridhar Krishnaswami



TRUMP. On a sticky wicket

The White House and the administration seem to be working overtime to ensure that the political damage from the midterm elections on November 3 is limited. Strategists in the grand old party appear to have concluded that even the deep red states that President Donald Trump carried comfortably in 2020 and 2024 may no longer be safe; hence, millions of dollars are being spent for last-minute ads to save what was once considered 'sure wins', leaving Republicans in a tight contest out in the cold.

With President Trump's approval rating hovering between 29 per cent and 32 per cent, the rank and file have started thinking aloud about Texas, Ohio, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, Alaska and even the ruby red states of Oklahoma and Alabama. And throw in Michigan and Georgia, it gives a complete picture of the GOP's worries over both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Republicans were hoping for relief from an end to the Iran war, which has had an impact on gas and grocery prices. But they have had no luck.

A SLIPPERY MOVE

Unmindful of all the hoopla around the Lindsey Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act 2026, which called for 100 per cent tariff on buyers of Russian oil, President Trump called President Vladimir Putin for a "highly successful discussion", after which the Russian leader agreed to supply hundreds of thousands of tonnes of diesel fuel to the American and global markets through April 2027.

Undercutting the Graham Act was meant to appease the farmer voting blocs in the red states and the transportation industry reeling under high fuel prices of $6 per gallon.

Immigration has always been a hot button issue for the Trump administration, both legal and undocumented, and one of the prime objectives is to make the process of getting permanent residency difficult.

RESIDENCY STATUS

A subject close to the Make America Great Again (MAGA) campaign is the H1B visa, green cards and the optional practical training permit for foreign students, seen as a pathway to residency and eventual citizenship. In one swoop, the Labor Department moved against Microsoft and top Indian IT companies by halting the processing of new and pending applications for permanent residency.

"You cannot lay off American workers and then replace them with foreign indentured servants," said Vice President JD Vance.

New Delhi hit back, calling the statement "unwarranted and deeply offensive", and reminded that America has been shaped by "generations of immigrants whose labour, enterprise and innovation have contributed to its growth and prosperity".

Ironically, on the same day, Trump honoured Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella and five other prominent tech leaders, including Elon Musk, with the National Medal of Science and the National Medal of Technology and Innovation. Five out of the six awardees, except Michael Dell of Dell Technologies, were born outside the US.

ROLE OF INDIAN AMERICANS

The yanking of the PERM applications may have been welcomed by the MAGA crowd, but even some Republicans could be questioning the timing and the fact that it is pushing another demographic group, the Indian Americans, farther away from the Republican camp.

As surveys show, Hispanics and African Americans, instrumental in President Trump's 2024 win, are moving away from him and the GOP in huge numbers. Now, questions will be raised if alienating the three million Indian American voters — for whom legal immigration is a high priority and have demonstrated their importance in the key suburban centers in recent polls — was a smart thing to do.

The writer is a senior journalist who has reported from Washington DC on North America and United Nations

Desperate moves to shore up rupee

THE VOID. Steps to prevent rupee depreciation have been futile. The most recent measures are also less likely to succeed

MACROSCAN.



CP CHANDRASHEKHAR, JAYATI GHOSH

The Modi government's cup of woes runneth over. Politically, the government is unable to respond to — much less effectively address — the widespread protests against the urgent problems of lack of employment, scams in education, and now the public anger over manipulation of voters' rolls and elections. Its ham-handed, large-fisted, stick-wielding approach to protests is making things much worse.

Its economic policy is similarly a combination of paralysis and doubling down on clearly failed strategies, which are now generating even worse outcomes for the people. All of this has spread to the external sector, which is showing great strain. It was always more fragile than the government sought to portray, but now seems heading into quicksand.

One clear example of this is the continuous, occasionally precipitous and apparently unstoppable decline in the value of the rupee. The rupee to US dollar rate fell for several years from 2012 onwards, including 2020-22; it was largely stable at around ₹82 to the dollar in 2024, but thereafter it has slid substantially. In 2026, the rupee was one of the worst-performing currencies in the world. As chart 1 shows, it has even fallen significantly against the US dollar, which itself has been losing ground globally vis-a-vis other major currencies.

As in so many other areas, the Modi government's attempts to thwart, or even mitigate this process, have largely failed, or at best produced only temporary effects. Yet, these strategies themselves, which attempt to tide over the current problem of the falling rupee, are mostly not all that effective and can be very expensive in the future, entailing even more forex liabilities that the country may find it difficult to repay.

RBI INTERVENTION

The most standard way central banks today try to control currency volatility is through open market operations, selling or buying (typically) US dollars or other reserve currencies to prop up the value of the rupee in the currency markets. The RBI has certainly tried this multiple times even in the current year, losing tens of billions of US dollars through market interventions to support the rupee.

Ironically, the very loss of official foreign exchange reserve holding that this requires tends to create investor expectations of future depreciation, which can therefore add to more private financial outflows. This conundrum led to the extraordinary measures taken in early June, when the RBI sought to encourage private inflows through all possible means. This involved creating a set of three concessional swaps aimed at encouraging overseas fund-raising by state-owned firms and attracting foreign currency non-resident deposits — Foreign Currency Non-Resident(B) scheme, the Overseas Foreign Currency Borrowing (OFCB) and External Commercial Borrowing (ECB) schemes.

FCNR(B) DOES MAGIC

All of these are questionable in that they enable and even actively encourage more foreign currency borrowing even when there is no reason to believe that the forex constraint on the Indian economy is likely to be eased much in the medium-term future. But the most extraordinary — and most significant — of such schemes is the FCNR(B) scheme.

This provided such a bonanza to non-resident Indians that it could even be called the FCNR(B) scam, not a scheme. It offered 6-7 per cent interest (more than double of what US term deposit rates provide), with the principal guaranteed in US dollars at maturity. The exchange rate risk is borne by the RBI, so there is no fear of nominal depreciation of the rupee reducing returns to NRI investors. What is even worse is the option provided to leverage the initial investment into further investments within India such as in GIFT City.

Not surprisingly, this proved to be popular with NRIs to the point that the scheme, which was intended to continue until mid-October, was closed on August 31. Nearly $1.33 billion flowed into these accounts, adding to India's future forex debt. As chart 2 show, this scheme dominated over the other two in terms of inflows.

The massive amount of investor interest and the inflows this generated led the government to proclaim the FCNR(B) scheme/scam to be a huge success. And chart 3 indicates that this was associated with a recovery of foreign exchange reserves from late June to the end of August. But this recovery was short-lived, with reserves once again beginning to fall once the scheme came to an end. So, it is difficult to claim success. And in any case, success for whom? While NRIs certainly benefit from this scheme, the people of India are set to lose because of the heavy costs of unnecessary forex borrowing which, in any case, is unlikely to be associated with any productive investment.

Another standard practice for dealing with currency volatility and depreciation fears is the exercise of various types of prudential regulation on cross-border financial flows. Indeed, these were the next to be resorted to after forex reserves fell by nearly $52 billion from $785.7 billion on September 4 to $734 billion on October 2. By October 10, the RBI announced a new set of measures. These include restrictions on rebooking of cancelled foreign exchange derivative contracts; reduction in the threshold for undertaking foreign exchange derivative transactions without establishing underlying exposure; requirement of additional documentation for verification of underlying exposures; and introduction of exchange risk reserve (FERR) for all foreign exchange derivative contracts involving rupee with notional values exceeding the equivalent of $2 million.

The rupee was one of the worst-performing currencies in the world in 2026. It has even fallen significantly against the US dollar, which itself has been losing ground globally vis-a-vis other major currencies



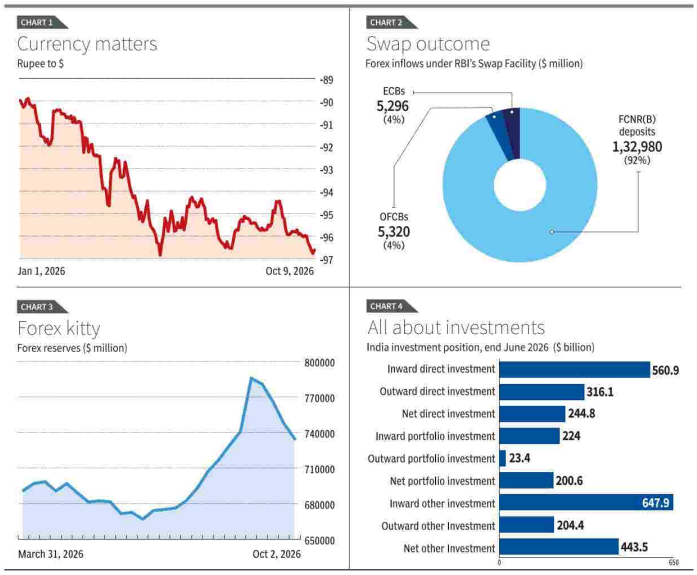
THE ROOT CAUSE

Unfortunately, while these measures may reduce some of the bleeding, they are unlikely to address the root cause of the rupee's decline: the combination of unbalanced trade, lower remittances from workers abroad, and stagnant domestic mass consumer demand that makes even domestic businesses less interested in expanding productive capacity.

We can hardly expect foreign corporations to invest in India (without massive and expensive blandishments) if domestic companies and our own wealthy people refuse to do so. Indeed, one of the reasons why our balance of payments position remains so weak despite our claims of great strength, is the extent of outflows by various forms of capital, which have been enabled by financial deregulation.

Chart 4 shows the net investment position of India, indicating both direct and portfolio investments and other investments (these categories contain both equity and debt holdings and are stock numbers, not flow). For a lower middle-income country, with most of its development projects incomplete and greatly in need to additional investments, the extent of capital outflows appears to be quite large. It significantly reduces the net inflows that economies in India's position require for development.

Overall, the government appears to have run out of ideas on all fronts. The turmoil within the country can and will be sorted out, ideally with more democratic and inclusive outcomes. But the costs of continued economic mismanagement today will haunt the people of India for decades thereafter.



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TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

October 13, 2006

Cairn IPO may raise $2 billion

Cairn India Ltd today filed with SEBI for its proposed IPO, which, according to analysts, stands a chance of being among the largest offers on the Indian bourses. The oil exploration company proposes to offer 538.47 million new equity shares of Rs 10 each for cash at a premium to be decided through a 100 per cent book building process.

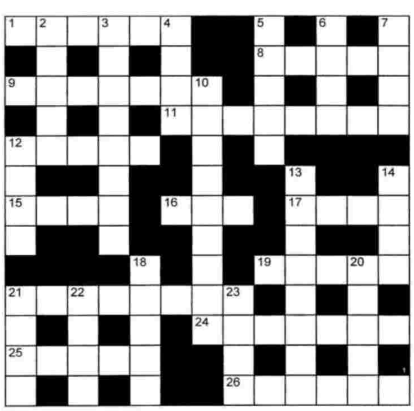
RIL cuts petrol, diesel prices

Within just 12 days of reducing prices of petrol and diesel sold through its retail outlets, Reliance Industries Ltd has once again cut prices of the two products by Re 1 a litre. However, the price of Reliance petrol and diesel would still continue to be marginally higher than the public sector products by about 50 paise to Re 1 in most of the States.

BSNL slashes fixed-line STD rate to Re 1/min

Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd has reduced STD rates by 60 per cent from Rs 2.40 per minute to Re 1 per minute. Tariffs of local calls have also been brought down from Rs 1.20 to Re 1 for a three-minute call. The move is part of BSNL's One India plan, which allows calls to any part of the country at Re 1.

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2755



EASY

ACROSS

1. To shine (6)
8. Cessation of hostilities (5)
9. Concerning doctoring (7)
11. Separate, unconnected (8)
12. Escargot (5)
15. _____ mater : old school, university (4)
16. Whichever; whatever amount (3)
17. Give back sound (4)
19. Spry, nimble (5)
21. Ringing instrument with a handle (8)
24. Backed for win or place (4,3)
25. To sport with epée (5)
26. Signify (6)

DOWN

2. Greek theatre or concert hall (5)
3. Hostile (8)
4. Leader, chief (4)
5. Cut of beef such as fillet, rump (5)
6. Apply pressure to (4)
7. Curve (4)
10. A species of flatfish (5,4)
12. Chair (4)
13. Increase the extent of (8)
14. To be tedious (4)
18. Declined, flowed back (5)
20. Minimum amount (5)
21. A fit of offended dignity (4)
22. The number of worthies, days' wonder (4)
23. The rendered fat of a hog (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

1. One could impart a gloss to this language (6)
8. Some respite for the English, rude and brief in retreat (5)
9. Sort of treatment claimed to cure (7)
11. Somehow cheated daughter in an impartial manner (8)
12. Its slow pace pins it tail-first (5)
15. An Egyptian dancing-girl in the carnival market-place (4)
16. Whichever, it can fail to start with an unknown (3)
17. Some of the chorus will repeat what's been said (4)
19. A leg one can shake if one's nimble (5)
21. But its ringer doesn't need to know the ropes (8)
24. Win or place it north, south, east and west (4,3)
25. A palisade may be visited by the thief (5)
26. Need to change it to mean something (6)

DOWN

2. A theatre to do up : one needs to change it (5)
3. At home, perhaps I claim it is unfriendly (8)
4. Possessed the internal energy to be at the top (4)
5. A meat portion takes some sorting out (5)
6. It could be considered offensive if this comes to shove (4)
7. It's a knot of a sort that won't go straight (4)
10. Yellow the only colour for this fish? (5,4)
12. If one is standing successfully one will gain one (4)
13. Stretch out from the glen, turning north (8)
14. How it carried the calibre of a shotgun (4)
18. Be up to the sea floor as the tide receded (5)
20. There's none less than the tales woven about it (5)
21. How to remove draughtsman in a fit of pique (4)
22. How many Morris men are over the eight? (4)
23. The fat deposited in a particular disorder (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2754

ACROSS 1. Constructor 8. Air-speed 9. Kale 10. Trust 13. Near 16. Drop 17. Lint 18. Sill 20. Ebbed 24. Easy 25. Parabola 26. Merchandise

DOWN 2. Ours 3. Super 4. Reeds 5. Token 6. Haberdasher 7. Territorial 11. Undue 12. Throb 14. Evil 15. Goal 19. Layer 21. Brava 22. Eland 23. Coss

Individuals, Key to Making Crisis Policy

Nobel winners show how to pull right levers

Central banks now have a polished playbook about how to deal with economic crises. They lower interest rates, while governments raise budget deficits to ride out a downturn. These prescriptions have been around since the Great Depression in the US, when John Maynard Keynes and others demonstrated effectiveness of countercyclical government policy. But, then, the medicine stopped working. Oil shocks of the 1970s led to stagflation as policymakers attempted pump-priming economies. Milton Friedman and monetarists argued against abrupt changes to money supply and budget deficits, and this became dogma for Reaganomics and Thatcherism. Robert Hall and Michael Woodward, winners of this year's Nobel Prize for economics, waded into this turbulent divide to show how countercyclical measures worked at the level of the individual. And this was the missing key for policymakers.



Hall examined how consumers are affected by expectations, and Woodward used these findings to explain how governments should go about pulling economic levers. They created a policy framework that puts the individual in the centre. This approach has survived over a considerable period during which the frequency of economic crises has climbed. Central banks now put as much effort into signalling their intent over interest rates as they do in changing them to smooth business cycles. More importantly, central banks now act in concert, which helps with managing global crises. Economic turbulence is rarely restricted within countries at current levels of globalisation. Consensus is vital for policy response, even if the shocks originate in political conflict.

Hall and Woodward did something more than heal a schism in macroeconomics by bridging it to microeconomics. Micro underpinnings have made the macro stronger. The duo showed policy is better designed from ground up. It has helped the world tackle the subprime crisis, Covid, and Ukraine and Iran energy disruptions. Central bankers have the right response to crises. Lawmakers must find better ways to avoid their causes.

Cheating Needs More Than a Gentle Warning

IIT Bombay's revised interim SOP for examinations, released last week, seeks to make suspected cheating less confrontational. Students caught allegedly copying can continue writing their papers in fresh answer books, while invigilators document incidents. Students will also have the option of documenting their version of events. The case will subsequently be placed before a departmental disciplinary action committee. Faculty members who suspect cheating or notice signs of stress in a student must alert counsellors. These are sensible safeguards against humiliation and arbitrary action. The revision follows the death by suicide of a second-year BTech student who was allegedly caught copying.

Leading universities offer useful models. MIT can impose academic penalties or refer cases to disciplinary bodies, while Stanford's sanctions range from probation to suspension and expulsion, depending on the circumstances. Neither treats every first offence as grounds for expulsion. The objective of any SOP must not be to make examples of vulnerable students.



Going forward, IIT Bombay can also explore a graded response combining department-level warnings with centralised records of proven offences. Invigilators should report every incident to the department, which can issue an informal warning for a first, relatively minor offence. Repeat violations should trigger an official letter entered in the student's academic record. Forfeiture of the examination and a fail grade should be the default penalty for proven cheating, with suspension and, in serious or repeated cases, expulsion. The focus should be on establishing clear boundaries that disincentivise cheating: academic pressure merits support, cheating carries consequences.



JUST IN JEST

Chin up, future protesters – three other grounds treble your access

Chhoo Mantar! Better JanMan Alternatives

Based on recommendations of a home ministry committee formed on Oct 9 to examine public protest venues other than Jantar Mantar, Delhi Police uttered 'Chhoo mantar!' and made JanMan vanish as a protest venue. In any case, the police had *de facto* denotified the site two days before, when they kept protesters away from the still *de jure* area. Lest anyone believes that GoI, like Queen Gertrude in Hamlet, thinks that citizens of this country doth protest too much — and should, instead, stick to marvelling the 13 architectural astronomical instruments in the observatory that Sawai Jai Singh of Jaipur built in 1724 — don't be daft. The committee has thoughtfully suggested three lovely alternatives: Ramlila Maidan in Old Delhi; CBD (Central Business District) Ground in Shahdara, east Delhi; and Burari Ground in north Delhi. These three expansive spaces should provide plenty of elbow room and light for demonstrators.

Some folks are upset about JanMan becoming off-limits for protesters. But barring a nice lunch at nearby Connaught Place, the other three places will make for far better optics. There was a time when being close to Parliament was a distinct advantage — physically and symbolically. Now, with mass and social media, such an offline tactic is as redundant as 'appeals' to stay away from anti-government protests altogether. To Ramlila then!

EC is facing widening chasms in its dealings with voters, opposition parties, and its own system

Unease of Doing EC Business



Pranab Dhal Samanta

When was the last time the head of a constitutional body became an object of public hate? Almost never. Outrage is mostly targeted at governments, ministers, their policies or inefficiencies. Which is why the current anger against CEC stands out as unique and institutionally worrying.

What's at stake is not the law-and-order fallout from protests that GoI is handling, but EC's ability to carry out its core function in the future: conducting elections. In this climate of distrust, every EC decision will be contested by opposition parties.

From publication of updated electoral rolls, EC's mandated all-party meetings in poll-bound states, to authenticating EVM checks by all parties, and the final publication of election schedule, all require stakeholders' consent. This process has always been a trust-based dialogue. This has now been replaced with deep-seated suspicion.

Controversies are not new to EC. There have been serious issues of dissent and differences among commissioners, allegations of political partisanship, incidents of highhandedness and errors in judgement over the decades. But none of those have cast a shadow on the basic tenets of EC's functioning like now.

Seeds of doubt have been sown on 3 critical fronts: EC-voter dynamic; EC-political parties' relationship; and uncertainty within the EC system on the way forward.

For starters, the problem isn't with the decision to conduct SIR. Parties can debate either way. But maintaining the purity and health of the electoral roll is very much within EC's purview. But the manner of conduct ought to uphold the principles on which the institution has functioned since its inception. That involves transparency, responsiveness and facilitation of voters.

The SIR process turned this principle on its head. It put the burden of proof on the voter. So, the response has ranged from political mobilisation against voter deletions to potential voter apathy in urban areas, given that voting is a voluntary activity unlike essential matters that need more attention than digging out old parental records.

As a result, for the first time, EC has come in conflict with the very voter it has always sought to facilitate and celebrate. 'EC-voter bond', regardless of all controversies, has provided the fulcrum to all reforms EC has undertaken — from Model Code of Conduct to introducing EVMs and digitisation of processes.

STATE OF PLAY

But BLOs today, engaged in difficult discussions with voters trying to prevent their names from being struck off the rolls, is at odds with the good old picture of EC officials physically assisting voters in polling booths, ensuring voters are not harassed by competing agents of political parties, or arranging 'at-home' voting for those above 85.



For the first time, EC has come in conflict with the very voter it has always sought to facilitate and celebrate

Then there's transparency. A 3-step process — draft roll, claims and objections period, and publishing of final roll — is in place. But this needs iteration on how many have been deleted so far, and their breakup in terms of duplicate addresses or illegal immigrants. No outcome publication of the exercise is available.

This is a break from the past. Each time EC has faced a challenge, it has come out with detailed responses. When questions were raised on EVMs being compromised, EC held an open hackathon, inviting anyone to have a go. On SIR, however, it has stonewalled any query. It has also given no reason on why it has not carried out the annual SSR to include 18-yr-olds for the past 2 yrs.



Cracks are showing



As space opens up to resurrect settled issues like 'vote chori', GoI and courts will worryingly develop a greater say, if not overrule/influence EC decision-making

The next big structural shift is in EC's method of engagement with opposition parties from a more open-ended, flexible style to a 'top-down' structured format. According to CEC's new procedure, a party can approach the commission only through pre-listed 'authorised persons'. These persons will also have to place a formal request, elaborating the purpose of meeting. If approved, the meeting is granted.

That has ended the days of party delegations going and venting their grievance, even if for effect. Hence the brewing anger directed at the commission, no matter how misplaced it may be. The impact of this will be felt in conversations with EC officials across levels as they seek to take all stakeholders on board before upcoming elections in Punjab, Manipur, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh.

Finally, there's upheaval down the line within EC because of a core shift in institutional ethos. No CEC, until now, has tinkered with basic principles of proactive transparency, voter-first approach, and flexible engagement with all political parties. In fact, each CEC has sought to refine and improve these processes, regardless of dissent, differences or controversies. So, the playing field and rules of play never changed through the EC system as fundamentally as it has recently.

There are now 3 widening chasms confronting the EC leadership — with voters, opposition parties, and its own time-tested system. As these chasms grow, space opens up for opposition parties to resurrect settled issues like 'vote chori'. As a counter, GoI and courts will develop a greater say, if not overrule/influence EC decision-making.

That said, neither GoI nor courts can discharge EC's principal function of conducting elections. And it's to that end — even if CEC tides over the current politically-surcharged environment — that navigating past these chasms is going to be arduous. It may require CEC to repeatedly lean on GoI or courts to validate his decisions to all three.

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Inches, Not Just Percentages



Ashish Gupta

The Indian economic discourse has recently found itself trapped in a familiar, exhausting loop. With every release of GDP figures, a predictable tug-of-war ensues. On one side, we see celebration of 'fastest-growing major economy' status. On the other, multiple commentators question deflator methodologies, base year revisions, and the gap with observable ground realities.

Our collective obsession with a single headline number — GDP growth to the first decimal point — may be the problem. One is reminded of Goodhart's Law: when a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure. GDP is a vital barometer. But it's a blunt, singular instrument. It may tell you how fast the wheels are turning. But it doesn't always tell you if the vehicle is reaching its destination. To truly understand a nation's trajectory, one must adopt a more holistic view of development.

China's GDP figures have been a subject of intense global scepticism for years. Yet, on the ground, the debate over whether the growth was 5% or 6% feels secondary to the undeniable reality of the development that has taken place. Infrastructure is no longer about 'potential' but a finished, world-class reality. From futuristic airports to a bullet train network to preponderance of EVs, the scale is unmatched.

But development is never a straight line. China's real estate crisis is not just a headline but a visible landscape. Massive residential projects that once padded GDP figures now stand mothballed or abandoned — reminders that when a single metric (like GDP-contributing construction) becomes the sole target, the result can be a profound misallocation of capital.

But the most striking observation of anyone visiting China has nothing to do with infrastructure or innovation. It's a biological manifestation of holistic progress: teenagers. Walking through Shanghai or Hefei, one is struck by teenagers being significantly taller than their parents.

This anecdotal observation is confirmed from data from The Lancet that the average male 19-yr-old Chinese now stands at 5 ft 9 in. This represents a staggering gain of nearly 4 in (10 cm) over the height of the average 55-yr-old Chinese man. Chinese youth have now achieved height parity with their counterparts in the US and Britain.



Reaching new economic heights

This observation isn't an argument to replace GDP with a 'tape measure' as our primary economic tool. Rather, it serves as a powerful proxy for the totality of development. You can manufacture GDP by building 'ghost cities', but you cannot manufacture an extra 4 in of average height without improvement in standard of living. It requires the compounding effect of decades of rising household incomes, better nutrition and reliable healthcare.

This brings us back to the Indian context and our obsession with the '5% vs 7%' debate. While we argue over whether our GDP growth is being measured correctly, we should be widening our lens to look at more holistic barometers of well-being.

Our progress is undeniable. By World Bank's measure, India's extreme poverty rate has roughly halved in past decade from over 20% to about 12%. Household electrification, bank deposit penetration and rural sanitation coverage are all near-universal access.

Yet, gaps remain. An average male 19-yr-old Indian's height has remained relatively stagnant at around 5 ft 5½ in. The 'height gap' between a Chinese and an Indian teenager is now nearly 4 in. India's childhood stunting rate — children under 5 who are too short for their age, a marker of chronic malnutrition — is still over 35%, nearly 7× China's under 5%.

The lesson is that GDP is merely the fuel, development is the vehicle. Real progress lives in the quiet indicators. Are children better nourished than their parents? Do they stay longer in school and learn more? Is the middle class thickening or thinning? Is the next generation taller, healthier and more capable?

If 20 yrs from now, the average Indian teenager stands a head taller than his grandfather, no one will be debating the GDP methodology. Until then, let's treat the number as a compass, without mistaking the map for the territory.

The writer is MD, ValueQuest

Devil's in the Diesel, Get e-Truckin'



Arijit Barman

With the launch of JSW's AMPSTAR brand of electric commercial vehicles (CVs) last month, Sajjan Jindal wants to recreate a BYD moment in trucking. It's a great time to rev engines — a worldwide diesel squeeze, improved battery tech around fast charging and growing institutional buy-ins, and a worldwide policy push. But unless distortions in customs duties on heavy trucks are ironed out, all efforts to spur localisation of e-truck manufacturing will short-circuit.

Everything we buy or use to build rides on a diesel-run truck at some point. In FY26, diesel accounted for about 82.4% of India's CV retail sales. CVs also guzzle 55% of the country's diesel demand and are responsible for 34% of vehicular carbon emissions. To wean India off its crude oil addiction, electrifying our freight fleets makes total sense.

EV transition in trucking potentially makes any e-car boom look like a sideshow. Problem is, world over, trucking is a low-margin business. Owners treat their vehicles as long-term investments, keeping a hawk's eye on operating costs. e-Trucks are expensive. In India, the sticker price for a 55-t plug-in trailer is 2.5× an equivalent diesel rig. Emission control is a noble idea but won't accelerate mass transition. Any new tech that allows a transporter to shave off a few extra bucks can only hasten a switchover. It's already playing out wherever electricity prices are competitive with diesel. Much like the e-car boom, developing economies are turbocharging sales, leapfrogging US and Europe in their push towards cleaner fuel options.

Conflicts across West Asia and Ukraine, energy ceasefire notwithstanding, have forced up diesel price, raising questions about whether the fuel will even be available in coming months. Indian consumers have remained insulated as GoI froze retail prices of fuel at the cost of state refiners, who have already lost ₹18,149 cr last quarter. Even then, in the last 2 mths, there has been exponential y-o-y sales growth of e-trucks and CVs as consumers are getting wary of disruptions.



e-Fast and e-Furious enough?

With the West Asian conflict widening, and attacks on refineries and pipelines in Saudi Arabia and Russia, production of fuels has been severely curtailed. Diesel cracks — margin from converting crude oil into diesel — are currently at $50-70 a barrel in Singapore, far higher than the long-term average of $16 a barrel. This scarcity premium signifies the oil markets are valuing refined diesel significantly higher than the cost of crude used to make it. On Oct 1, even GoI gave in and raised ATF and commercial LPG prices. Most see it as a precursor to the inevitable: a long-pending revision in diesel and petrol at retail stations.

Higher the price of diesel, the more compelling the commercial logic of electrification becomes, especially for long-haul, predictable, closed-looped routes. Today, even without any hike, on an average, it takes 6× to buy a litre of diesel than a kw/hr of electricity at a public/commercial charging point. The higher upfront price for an e-truck can, therefore, be paid off in 3-4 yrs on the back of such lower operating costs. Improved battery range has further convinced the early adopters — cement, coal and steel industry end users — to optimise such cost efficiencies.

As Indian policymakers push the pedal for mass adoption, it's imperative to iron out the asymmetrical customs framework that has incentivised rebadging of Chinese trucks by sharp elbowed local players. Currently, completely built units of rigid commercial trucks face a steep 40% import duties, while fully built 55-t trailers, the largest segment, are taxed at 10%. Chinese manufacturers, the largest in the world, seeking to escape the meltdown of their domestic construction industry, are targeting overseas markets like ours. Instead of doubling down on localisation, several companies are playing on this duty arbitrage.

Policies help, and a start can be made by linking PM E-Drive subsidies with fiscal levers like reduced highway tolls for greener trucks. Alternatively, those charges can also be reimbursed out of the unutilised ₹500 cr subsidy pool of the flagship scheme. This slashes the freight rate differential between polluting and plug-in variants by up to 15% without any extra burden on the fiscal while directly encouraging the transporter.

It makes for a far better strategy to make the commercial logic more viable. Big corporations from steel and cement sectors are already taking advantage of stronger battery packs that tackle range anxiety. Large freight buyers — ecommerce, port operators, FMCG players — should aggregate demand and offer multi-year contracts to logistics companies on using e-vehicles. This, in turn, will also boost the financier's confidence to bankroll the fleet owners or even battery-swapping startups.

BYD's brand-new drivetrain turned the sweepstakes for passenger cars. Chinese CVs have already seized the moment by electrifying. India should not pull the plug on e-trucking.

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THE SPEAKING TREE

Tantra Vision

NARAYAN SIRDESAI

In many religious traditions and cults, kama, sexual desire, has been condemned. Sanyasis and nuns are required to take vows of celibacy, brahmacharya, to join ashrams and monasteries. The conflict between religious ideal of celibacy and opposing force of libido can cause great mental agony and guilt in a seeker's life, sometimes leading to psychological disorders and self-inflicted violence.

Sexual desire, however, is not inherently hurtful: it is a natural human impulse. Lust involves sexual violence. For those who cannot control their baser instincts through iccha-shakti (will-power), tantra offers a different perspective. Tantra, rather than condemning sexual energy, considers it a life-creating sacred energy and seeks to understand and sublimate it.

In Hinduism, Shivling, a symbol of life, is phallic. Erotic sculptures on temples at Khajuraho and Konarak stand testimony to the fact that Indic culture accepts sex as a natural process of life. Tantra offers various techniques for transmuting and sublimating primal energy into ojas, vital essence. The techniques involve choiceless witnessing of the rise, peak and fall of carnal desire, along with special asans, mudras, pranayams and visualisation techniques.

The yogi who transmutes sexual energy is traditionally referred to as an urdhvaretas in yogic terminology. The term denotes one who redirects ojas upward from the reproductive centre for bodily rejuvenation and spiritual development.

PARANORMAL ACTIVITY
Paragraphs From Fiction

Correction

Thomas Bernhard

After a mild pulmonary infection, tended too little and too late, had suddenly turned into a severe pneumonia that took its toll of my entire body and laid me up for at least three months at nearby Wels, which has a hospital renowned in the field of so-called internal medicine, I accepted an invitation from Hoeller, a so-called taxidermist in the Aurach valley, not for the end of October, as the doctors urged, but fortnightly in October, as I insisted, and then went on my own so-called responsibility straight to the Aurach valley and to Hoeller's house, without even a detour to visit my parents in Stockerau, *straight* into the so-called Hoeller garret, to begin sifting and perhaps even arranging the literary remains of my friend, who was also a friend of the taxidermist Hoeller, Roithamer; after Roithamer's suicide, I went to work sifting and sorting the papers he had willed to me, consisting of thousands of slips covered with Roithamer's handwriting plus a bulky manuscript entitled 'About Altensam and everything connected with Altensam, with special attention to the Cone'.



Translated from German by Sophie Wilkins

Chat Room

Help Democracy; Trust Democracy

Apropos the Edit, 'One Delhi Day Of 'Police State'' (Oct 12), protests erupt in democracies when government fails to address grievances of its citizens. Treating youthful discontent primarily as law-and-order problem risks deepening the alienation the government seeks to contain. Peaceful dissent is a right, not a privilege granted by the government. A government confident of its authority should not require judicial intervention to recognise citizens' right to peaceful protest. Also, ECI must break its silence. By not speaking for itself hurts its own hard-won autonomy even more. While young Indians must understand that democratic institutions can correct failures without confrontation, the Opposition must offer a persuasive alternative rather than merely capitalising on discontent. Government has to take some hard calls, failing which protests look unlikely to fade away quietly.

Pradeep Kumar
Surat

The Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

The reminder from realpolitik

The recent bypoll results show entrenched local factors can prove as significant as emerging hyperlocal protests

The bypoll results for five assembly constituencies (AC) and one parliamentary constituency (PC) were released on a day Delhi was put under an unprecedented clampdown to prevent the October 10 protests. At a time when political coverage and commentary is being dominated by an extra-parliamentary drama, the bypoll results are a good reminder of how elections can differ from what seems immediately pressing and fascinating in politics. All six elections were won by the ruling party.

In West Bengal, the results have only worsened the crisis for the previous incumbent Trinamool Congress which has already suffered a split after its loss. If the results are any indication, it might struggle to even retain the primary opposition party status in the state. The sheer scale of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) victory in Nandigram and Rejinagar ACs also underlines the fact that West Bengal has, once again, embraced the party-society model where the ruling party enjoys more than a fair advantage.

In Tamil Nadu, the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) has won the two ACs which were vacated by the resignation of All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) MLAs. So far, it seems to be the AIADMK and not the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) which is losing ground to the TVK since the May elections. But even this is going to be enough to give the TVK a decisive edge vis-à-vis the DMK. The assembly results were not a fluke is the key message.

Assam has continued with its trend of the Congress ceding further ground to the BJP. In Nagaon, the Congress could not even finish second in a PC it had won with 50% vote share in 2024. The Congress in Assam now risks losing even Muslim votes to the All-India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), a party the Congress had completely marginalised in the 2024 and even 2026 elections in the state.

Now, one can argue that incumbents, that too so close to their last victory, will have a natural advantage in bypolls and one should not make too much of the results. The argument is perhaps fair. But the results should serve as a cautionary note to anybody who is in a haste to see the ongoing protests as a pre-ordained, decisive headwind for the BJP. In realpolitik, entrenched local factors might prove to be as significant as the emerging hyperlocal protests.

Heed the Himalayas' warning in time

Just six weeks after the flash floods at the Nepal-Tibet border — leaving over 1,450 people dead and many still missing — the Himalayas groaned again to cause a second surge in river waters in Nepal. The fragility of the mountains, their particular susceptibility to warming, and the resulting vulnerability of human settlements around them were reiterated in the form of another disaster. This time it was a dry landslide that blocked the Budhi Gandaki River and suddenly gave way, unlike the August disaster triggered by the collapse of an upstream glacier. Understanding the exact triggers of these disasters remains important but addressing factors that exacerbate local warming can no longer wait. Every flood, every landslide is evidence that the Himalayas are under tremendous pressure and that business as usual, or even a gradual approach to reducing risks, simply won't hold. From lowering risks for glacial melting — forest fires, use of low-efficiency fuels in transport, and biomass burning — to banning unsustainable construction, there is much that needs to be done.

The disasters may have happened in Nepal, but warming won't spare other Himalayan countries. And there is no guarantee that the infrastructure activity in one jurisdiction won't make a collateral of another. In theory, everyone understands this. India has suffered a series of disasters in the Himalayas in recent years, and glacial melting, particularly, remains a present and future danger, not just for its mountain-states but also for the downstream riparian reaches (in terms of future water availability). The Himalayas have sent out enough warnings about anthropogenic warming and degradation of terrain due to unbridled infrastructure activities ill-suited to it. If the Himalayan nations do not pay immediate attention and act together, an apocalyptic future awaits them all.

Emerging economies need to use AI differently

The objective of emerging economies should be to maximise augmentation, not automation, through AI adoption



AI does not need to replace the work done by a farmer, construction worker, or nurse. It can improve decisions related to such work. SHUTTERSTOCK



Janmejaya Sinha

The most successful member of my St Stephen's batch, World Bank president Ajay Banga (we all take advantage of the reflected glory!) recently made the important observation in a panel discussion: Generative AI (GenAI) will impact emerging markets very differently from how it is being seen to affect advanced economies. Push that argument a little further, and an intriguing possibility emerges. Can emerging economies that make the right choices use GenAI to narrow their gap with advanced economies? At first glance, that sounds counterintuitive.

GenAI is extraordinarily capital-intensive. It requires advanced chips, enormous computing capacity, reliable electricity, data centres, data, large language models, and, increasingly, sophisticated foundation models. On almost every one of these dimensions, emerging economies start at a big disadvantage. The scale of AI investment in the US (in trillions of dollars, more than the GDP of many emerging economies) alone makes the point. The most advanced chips are scarce and expensive. Training and operating frontier models requires vast amounts of capital and energy. The leading models are being developed by a relatively small number of companies concentrated largely in the US, with China also investing heavily.

Much of the debate about AI in emerging economies simply imports the concerns of advanced countries, such as job displacement by automation. Yet, the structure of their economies is fundamentally different. For emerging markets, the bigger opportunity may not be to produce AI, but to use it to gain access to something they have historically lacked — expertise at low marginal cost.

That distinction matters enormously. Think of a dairy farmer who rarely sees a veterinarian; a nurse or community health worker operating far from a specialist physician; or a small entrepreneur who has little access to an accountant, lawyer, marketing adviser or management consultant. GenAI can potentially place elements of all these capabilities in the hands of ordinary workers, in their own language and at very low marginal cost.

That could make its economic impact in emerging economies quite different from that in advanced ones. The first fear surrounding AI is job loss. But fewer jobs in emerging economies are directly exposed to GenAI automation (between 4.5-11%). India alone has over 500 million people dependent on agriculture. In advanced economies, by contrast, employment is much more concentrated in clerical, administrative, professional and highly digitised occupations (according to ILO, around 30% of jobs) — precisely the areas most exposed to GenAI.

AI does not need to replace the physical work performed by a farmer, nurse, caregiver, technician or construction worker. It can improve the decisions surrounding that work and, therefore, raise productivity substantially. Consider the dairy farmer. AI cannot milk a cow. But it could help identify early signs of disease, recommend changes in feeding, improve breeding decisions and indicate when veterinary intervention is necessary. A farmer could photograph a damaged crop and receive advice on pests, irrigation, fertiliser or weather risks in a local language. The real innovation is not automating the farmer. It is giving the farmer something resembling an agronomist, veterinarian, and market adviser on demand.

The same logic may be even more powerful in health care. Many advanced economies are ageing rapidly. Japan, South Korea, China, France and Germany, all face growing pressures from ageing populations, while health care systems are already struggling to provide care, bedeviled as they are with workforce shortages and growing budget deficits. If AI displaces significant numbers of workers, consumption and labour-based tax revenues could come under further strain.

Emerging markets will get a big opportunity with younger, cheaper, and AI enabled workforces. Think nurses, community health workers and caregivers supported by AI could use better triage protocols, documentation, translation, medication checks and monitoring. In effect, AI could allow less highly trained workers to perform some tasks more reliably and productively.

Emerging economies also do not have to go first. AI adoption is likely to advance fastest where wages are highest, digital infrastructure strongest and employment most concentrated in AI exposed occupations. Developed economies will, therefore, confront the hardest questions earlier — automation, job redesign, reskilling, inequality and the distribution of productivity gains. The tax system itself will need reform.

Emerging economies can watch, learn, and make better-informed choices. Their objective should not be to maximise automation. It should be to maximise augmentation. That means directing AI towards sectors employing large numbers of people, developing applications in local languages, building voice-first interfaces for workers with limited digital literacy, investing in training, and designing regulations that distinguish clearly between decision support and decisions that must remain with qualified professionals.

Emerging economies may never match advanced economies chip for chip, data centre for data centre or dollar for dollar. They may not need to. The greater opportunity is to take intelligence created at enormous cost elsewhere and distribute it at marginal cost across millions of workers.

There is, of course, no guarantee that this will happen. Technology alone does not determine economic outcomes. Policy, infrastructure, education, business models and regulation will all matter.

But the strategic choice is clear. The internet democratised access to information. GenAI has the potential to democratise access to expertise. For advanced economies, AI may primarily be a technology of automation. For emerging economies, it could become a technology of capability. If that opportunity is seized, farmers could become better farmers, nurses' better nurses, and small entrepreneurs' better businesspeople. Unlike previous waves of innovation that entrenched the advantage of rich countries, GenAI may help bridge the gap. Yes, I have a dream too, that one day an Indian child may get the same opportunities as an American kid. What a world that would be!

Janmejaya Sinha is chairman (India), BCG. The views expressed are personal

Indian military must adapt, just like Russia & Ukraine



Shashank Ranjan

It has been amply clear over the past couple of years that the Russia-Ukraine war, going on since 2022, has become a laboratory for a form of military adaptation unlike anything seen in recent times. This is a continuous, high-speed contest in which tactical innovations are fielded, countered, and re-countered within weeks rather than years. At the hub of this confrontation is a feedback loop that runs from the front-line to the production-line and back — a loop defining military capability.

As per a recent analysis of the Carnegie Endowment, "the classical model of defining requirements, issuing a tender, developing a system, testing it, producing it, and then fielding it — is too slow to remain relevant in a rapidly evolving battlefield environment". This shift is most visible in the deployment of drones on active battlefields and has the repetitive relentlessness as its basis. Ukraine reached an interceptor drone production of roughly 1,500 units per day by January 2026.

Similarly, according to Ukraine's former commander-in-chief General Oleksandr Syrskyi, Russia plans to manufacture roughly 20,000 units per day. These figures typify today's wars, where a design not repeated on demand within weeks is already obsolete. Ukraine's model of a battlefield-to-factory loop is also aided by the Delta platform, a bottom-driven battlefield database that acts as a real-time drone-kill data feedback system.

This enables design iteration on a cycle of weeks rather than years. Every engagement generates data that flows back to the manufacturers.

Mass production and precision deployment are the most crucial prerequisites of an impactful military campaign.

What distinguishes this war is that mass production is strengthened by a tight feedback loop between the user and the manufacturer. In Ukraine, combat units maintain their own repair facilities, small-scale production capabilities, and some even run informal research-and-development cells.

Successful adaptations are spread laterally through information sharing on social media and by civil volunteer communities, instead of strictly through centralised bureaucratic channels. The fusion of civil and military in an all-encompassing manner has been exemplary.

As a corollary, Ukraine's most competitive drone firms maintain seamless contact with combat units, receive real-time feedback from the front, and iterate designs accordingly. The traditional boundaries between users, developers, and manufacturers have diffused.

This model also consists of mini factories that are geographically distributed and are in proximity of frontlines. For example, the German UAV company, Nordyn, designs networks of mobile, autonomous micro factories that bring assembly and maintenance directly to the frontline. If one unit is hit, there are ten others that keep running.

On the other hand, Russia's approach to adaptation follows a different rationale — slow to start, but formidable once mobilised. The initial invasion in February 2022 was characteristic of a rigid, top-down structure that discouraged initiative at lower levels. The structure was riddled with a hierarchy-monitored, zero-error syndrome.

Russian innovation was mainly driven by the battlefield needs rather than being based on an established mechanism for doctrinal absorption. The centralised system that inhibited tactical creativity was leveraged to facilitate industrial mobilisation by creating an 'ecosystem of learning'.

Dara Massicot, senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment, writes in *Foreign Affairs* that since 2022, Russia has been studying combat experience. Several specialised commissions have analysed thousands of tactical incidents, leading to over "450 interim changes to combat manuals" for the Russian military.

This has resulted in game changing innovations and tactics. Structurally, the key change was the decentralisation of command. Drawing lessons from Ukraine and to cater for fast developing battle scenarios, defence industry enterprises have established direct communication with the front, promptly implementing feedback-based improvements.

The Russian army today, is a hybrid system: centralised in direction but capable of rapid, large-scale production once a requirement is identified. Russia's mass production of Geran drones, standardised FPV warheads, and fibre optic drones reflect this pattern of transformation.

The tension between centralised industrial power and decentralised battlefield innovation is the central strategic challenge of the Russia-Ukraine war, which has demonstrated that adaptation has become a vital dimension of combat power. The side that learns faster — not the side that starts with better equipment — gains a temporary edge.

For traditional militaries accustomed to long development cycles and bifurcated users and manufacturers, the implications are discouraging.

Russia bets on mass and the ability to overwhelm; Ukraine bets on speed and the ability to out-adapt. Which bet pays off may depend less on any single technology than on the resilience of the feedback loop that connects the soldier in the trench to the engineer at the factory floor.

The broader lesson for India is that the feedback loop must shift from being merely network-centric to fusion-centric, with data from land, air, space, and cyber domains fused to compress decision cycles. This requires integrated targeting, on-the-spot thinking, and layered protection rather than stand-alone platforms. Through planned theatrisation, this need will, hopefully, be met as battlefield feedback shall have to be institutionalised.

India can establish a real-time drone-kill data feedback loop through a ministry of defence-industry joint programme, on the lines of Ukraine's Delta platform. Alongside theatrisation, a formation responsible for autonomous operations, under command of the theatre commander could be raised. Last but not the least, a customised procurement policy to accommodate the above dynamics shall be indispensable.

Colonel Shashank Ranjan (retd.) is associate professor of practice and director, Pankaj Kumar Jha Centre for Security Studies, OP Jindal Global University. The views expressed are personal

{ KAJA KALLAS } VICE PRESIDENT, EUROPEAN COMMISSION

We haven't yet seen that Russia will stick to it. I would want the ceasefire including people not being killed, not just energy infrastructure not being attacked

On the Trump-announced Russia-Ukraine energy ceasefire



HT

Pakeezah's new journey in search of admirers



Shivendra Singh

A restored version of the 1972 classic, *Pakeezah* will be screened at the Festival Lumiere at Lyon, France, which began on October 10 and will conclude on October 18.

This, of course, has again drawn attention to the life and times of the movie's lead actress, Meena Kumari.

As a young girl, circumstances at home forced her to step out and look for work. As a grown woman, she was deprived of the very things she had worked so hard for: a family, a home, friendships, and love.

But between her birth and her death; between the innocence of those early days and the loneliness of her later years; between a stifled childhood and her final agony; there hangs a life. The 38 dazzling years of Meena Kumari.

And almost as a testimony to those years, *Pakeezah* — a blood-soaked swan song — continues to breathe and shine, like an ember.

Fifty-four years after it was first released, and following the 4K restoration process, *Pakeezah* will have its world premiere.

Tragedy, tension drama, beauty, poetry, music, sorrow, hope, romance, love and loss — it is almost as if all the emotions found in human experience converged in this film to tell a tale that has seeped deep into our consciousness and will remain there for a long time to come.

When Meena Kumari was working on *Pakeezah*, she was ailing both physically and mentally. She was on the brink, not of a new world, but of one left behind — a world that had inspired hope once, but had failed her miserably.

And in the film, one of those rare examples of art imitating life, Meena became one with her character: a much-adored, much-desired courtesan of Lucknow's twilight era of nawabs.

It is poignant to watch Meena in the movie, as in her life, wanting to step across the brink, willing to leave everything behind. One can only imagine the pain that she must have borne that made the pursuit of death sweeter than life itself.

Importantly, it is not a quick, easy death that she desires but a long, drawn out one — to fade out slowly, like an incense stick, and yet managing to linger quietly, defiantly, in the air long after.

Her death was not Meena's loss. It was ours. It was the world's. It reveals a lot about the society we have built that denies hope to so many, especially to someone who had encountered its worst and yet was willing to go on and make the most of one's existence.

Pakeezah is a cry, a pleading, a protest, and a prayer — for a better and just world. The songs in the film are a gateway to the world of *Pakeezah*.

Each song adds to the narrative and takes it forward. They are not there to provide relief from the plot, or some cheap entertainment in the middle of a complex story in order to make the audience stay.

The songs push the viewer further, to make us singe and burn, so that what follows can be experienced with all the intensity and passion that *Pakeezah* requires of anyone choosing to watch it. That is the confidence of the film. She is sure of herself.

Cinematically, *Pakeezah* is an achievement of the highest order. Privately, the world of *Pakeezah* is not one that we would want to live in. It is a place we would want to visit for a while — to learn the graces, to receive an education in pride and faith, and, then, to help and rescue the people living in that world.

Will there be admirers and suitors of *Pakeezah* in today's India? Will the title character find hearts to settle in? Who knows! Our culture is being replaced by something coarser. Our politics needs a new imagination. Our air is toxic and our rivers are dying — and yet we continue to exist in our bubbles, in our gated colonies and high-rise apartments.

We succeed daily in unseeing the suffering around us and further undoing fellow human beings whom society has always strung out along the margins of power and privilege.

It might take years — even decades — to reimagine our world and to rebuild it in the image of the highest possible. And when that happens, when the values that make us human are imbibed and enshrined again, the likes of *Pakeezah*, and yes, Meena Kumari, might, just might, want to return from the brink, and dream and live again amidst us.

Shivendra Singh is a writer from Lucknow. The views expressed are personal

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A thought for today

I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept

ANGELA DAVIS

Post-Keynes Smarts

Economics Nobel recognises work on minimising economic booms and busts, high inflation, and deflation

Nobody wants a recession or, for emerging economies, a slowdown. But, like a common cold, these happen. For decades, Keynes' fix – slash interest rates and increase govt spending – worked. Until it didn't in the oil crisis of 1970s, and even 2008's financial crisis when, despite rock-bottom interest rates, spending and employment didn't pick up. That's why thousands of economists around the world have been trying to find better "cures" for all kinds of economic instability – booms and busts, high inflation and deflation. This year's economics Nobel recognises the efforts of two such economists, both American, whose work has helped govts and central banks tackle recessions and high inflation faster.

Robert Hall and Michael Woodford have helped develop what's called "New Keynesian economics". They're dealing with the same economic problems that exercised Keynes' mind, but with a fundamentally different approach. Instead of basing policy only on macroeconomic indicators like inflation, production, and consumption, they recommend zooming into the behaviours of households and individual businesses that make up the economy. That's because they believe every individual in an economy acts on the basis of information available to them. If you're in the market for a refrigerator, and know that consumer loans will be cheaper next week, you'll put off the purchase.



So, Hall and Woodford are credited with giving "microeconomic foundations" to "macroeconomic stabilisation". They've shown that how millions of households spend, gives an idea of what the entire economy expects. Hall, who's the older of the two, first presented his ideas in a 1978 paper. He argued that since household spending depends on expectations of future income, consumption decisions can indicate economic expectations. Will hiring increase, will incomes grow, etc. The way to influence individual behaviour, then, is to provide more information. What's now called "forward guidance". For example, RBI's monetary policy committee recently hinted at no rate cuts in the months ahead. Woodford's additionally known for his work on restoring balance in an economy, after a disruptive shock. The Iran war is a good example. It's pushed up energy prices and inflation globally, and impacted growth, and central banks everywhere are trying to minimise these effects, with some help from Hall and Woodford's theories.

New Protest Sites

Ramlila Maidan is a good choice. But it needs a major infra upgrade if it's to be a proper venue

After days and months of stalemate, it may be that the needle has really moved on a new deal, for how to protest in the nation's capital. Govt's resistance to the Jantar Mantar site comes from its proximity to the seats of governance. In designating three alternative sites, it has indicated that, there, protesters will be satisfactorily treated. Two of these, namely a ground in Burari and another in Shahdara, are a little suss. Let alone people from other parts of the country, Delhiites themselves wouldn't think of these spaces as any proper substitute for Jantar Mantar. They are too distant in both geography and imagination. Ramlila Maidan, however, is a good option.



This 10-acre ground has a long history of hosting protest movements of significance. In 1975, this is where Jayaprakash Narayan roared at Indira Gandhi, *Singhasan khali karo, ki janta aati hai*. "Vacate the throne, for the people are coming." First test of this new deal will be how liberally govts permit protests in Ramlila Maidan. Remember, overuse of the "reasonable restrictions" clause can void the Article 19 guarantee of peaceful assembly. Second will be how mindfully this venue is upgraded. Its present condition definitely doesn't befit the designated protest site in the world's largest democracy's capital city.

Sanitation is suboptimal enough to be a health risk. Rain makes the space marshy. Besides fixing these infra issues, a genuine traffic management plan also needs to be in place. Bordering both Old Delhi and the New Delhi Railway Station, as well as major hospitals, the area is already heavily congested. If even 5,000 march here, how is it to be handled? This brings us to a third issue that needs to be addressed: Ramlila Isolation. Smaller demonstrations report feeling, not just invisible to lawmakers, but kind of lost within the large ground itself. Modular, scalable sub-zones could be one solution, even as mega rallies make use of the whole ground. Govt should also consider what Supreme Court had suggested in 2018, making Jantar Mantar available for strictly smaller gatherings. Maybe provision something like the famous Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park, London. That's a symbolic, permanent sanctuary for street-level debate.

Honking, My Birthright

Every Indian road has its own orchestra

Sunil Warrier



I will honk when I am the 13th vehicle in the queue at a red signal. I will not honk when there is no traffic. My honking needs an audience.

I will honk when the signal has 47 seconds left. I will not honk when it turns green and everyone is moving. There is nothing to hurry.

I will honk when the driver ahead has nowhere to go. I will not honk when he is already moving faster than I am. I am not unreasonable.

I will honk to hail a friend walking on the road. I will not honk when he is standing beside my car. He can hear me without it.

I will honk before and while overtaking. I will also honk after overtaking. The driver now behind me may not have noticed.



I will honk at the auto that has stopped. I will honk when it starts moving. I will honk when I suspect it might stop again.

I will honk at the two-wheeler on my left and right. I will not honk when there is no two-wheeler. I am not going to waste a perfectly good honk.

I will honk at the pedestrian crossing the road. I will not honk if he is talking on his mobile as it may distract him.

I will honk when someone is reversing into a parking space. I will not stop honking even after he has completed his manoeuvre as he has to understand how understanding I was.

I will use a short honk for people I know. I will use a long honk for people I don't know. I will use a continuous honk for people who have done absolutely nothing wrong.

I will honk when I am late. I will not honk when I am early. I can always become late.

I will honk because the road may not be mine, the lane may not be mine, the parking space may not be mine. But honking? It is my birthright.

PS: Aspiring well-mannered drivers can choose to ignore the above oath.

Trump's Boomtime Problem

US economy is red hot. But popular anxiety about AI & cost of living means the president's party is in deep trouble in midterm elections, despite sharp economic growth

Ruchir Sharma



Columnist based in New York

While the US president's party typically loses ground in midterm elections, when only House and Senate seats are contested, Trump's Republicans are racing towards an unusual kind of setback in the ballot next month. An apparently roaring economy is doing nothing to improve the incumbent's prospects.

In the last three months, the US economy has accelerated sharply to near 4% growth. Unemployment is low, just over 4%. These are rare good times, on the surface, yet over the same period Trump's approval rating has plummeted. His party has haemorrhaged voter support to Democrats. Betting-odds markets now see a significant probability that Republicans will lose control of both houses. Should that happen, it would be the first such defeat in an economy this boomy since 1950s.

How could this happen? For many Americans, this feels like the wrong kind of boom – marred by rising cost of living, and the fact that growth is driven mainly by the wealthiest consumers, and by heavy investment in AI, which the electorate has come to hate and fear more intensely than any previous tech breakthrough.

Simmering frustration with America's economy predates AI and Trump's second term. Most Americans have been increasingly dissatisfied about the state of the union for decades, but the share who say the country is heading in the right direction collapsed over the past year, from around 40% to 20%. The biggest source of dismay: affordability. The share of voters who cite cost of living as the most important issue has spiked sixfold in recent years, to a record high, over 30%.

And it is clear which prices are causing the most grievance: housing and energy, with the Iran war restricting supply of oil, and AI raising demand for electricity. In the last year, overall consumer prices have been rising at a pace well over 3%. Gas prices are up more than 40%. With mortgage rates topping 7%, US housing is farther out of reach for the average family than at any point in the last two decades, according to a leading affordability index.

There is a widespread perception that power-hungry data centres are pushing up utility bills. Nine in 10 Americans don't want one in their town. Most of these projects face local opposition, which blocked nearly $200bn in projects in the first half of this year. It's hard, however, for GOP Congressional candidates to address these concerns when their president says slowing data centre construction would leave US communities "backwards and poor".

Unsurprisingly, AI is the first widely hated product of the digital age. In earlier decades, a solid majority of Americans saw computers and the internet as big pluses for society. Now, most say they are "more concerned than excited" about AI. Anxiety is rising most sharply among people in their 20s, who are increasingly worried about a jobless future. By asking voters to accept higher prices as the cost of his war in Iran, and staying ahead in the AI arms race, Trump is fighting the national mood.

The consistent message from Trump and Republicans is: forget your local utility bills and learn to love AI, America needs it to compete with China. It's an odd lecture coming from a party that won the White House and Congress by bashing globalist elites.

Broad GDP growth can fail to capture what people feel on the ground, and that may be truer now than ever. Popular discontent reflects more granular details, like the fact that wage growth, adjusted for inflation, has turned negative in recent quarters. One key exception is workers with AI skills, who command wages from 60% to 120% higher than their peers.

The sense of America as a land of haves and have-nots now has an AI twist. Investment is growing around 25% a year in AI-related industries, less than one percent in other industries. Construction spending is contracting on average, while growing at a double digit pace in one category: data centre projects.

This tide of money is lifting other businesses only if they find an AI angle, like the toilet manufacturer that saw its stock price spike after it started making ceramics for computer chips. Further, even on days when US stock market goes up, nearly half of the stocks (mostly non-AI plays) go down – an unprecedented phenomenon.

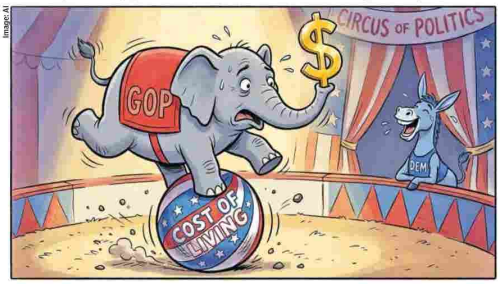


Image: AI

The mostly AI-driven gains are rising this year on a reverse Robin Hood curve. The 0.1% are gaining more than the 1%, who gain more than the 10%, and so on

Most voters have some reason to feel left out of the blessed AI circle. The wealthiest own the most stocks, and the mostly AI-driven gains are rising this year on a reverse Robin Hood curve. The 0.1% are gaining more than the 1%, who gain more than the 10%, and so on down the income ladder. Similarly, mortgage delinquency rates are rising on a sliding scale, fastest in the least wealthy neighbourhoods.

Since World War II, a booming economy has tended to contain midterm losses for the president's party. If growth was near 4% in the quarter before the election, as it is now, the incumbent rarely lost control of either house of Congress, and lost control of both houses just once, in 1954. Should Republicans get swept this year, they will have defied an economic backdrop that on the surface appears exceptionally favourable. And Trump, who rebuilt GOP as a vessel of anti-incumbent anger, will have turned his party into a target.

How To Respond To Protests? Recall What Gandhi Did

Mahatma masterfully dealt with determined protesters: make a tactical retreat to cool things down. But, since Independence, almost no govt in India learnt this lesson

Arghya Sengupta



The nature of initial govt response to anti-CEC protest was disproportionate. Monday's move – to ease restrictions – is delayed, but a step in the right direction. To notify Ramlila Maidan and two other protest sites instead of Jantar Mantar is a part of the changed response. But what does India's protest history tell us about how govts should respond?

In another time, political shrewdness may have manifested in quietly supporting demands that a controversial CEC step down. After all, EC is structurally an independent institution. Govt isn't duty-bound to defend its actions, just as EC is not duty-bound to follow govt directions. But that would have been termed a tactical retreat. And a retreat of any significant kind is anathema in Indian politics today.

All politicians should take a look, even a cursory glance, at India's political history. No one understood this tactic of a strategic retreat better than Mahatma Gandhi. Despite being firmly against any caste-based separation of electorates or reservation of seats, Gandhi negotiated with Ambedkar and accepted the latter, while convincing Ambedkar to forgo the former. Could Gandhi have gone on the offensive and rejected such demands altogether? He certainly had the political capital to – but strength lay in finding a workable solution. Once a solution was found, he cleverly manoeuvred to ensure only Congress-endorsed Scheduled Caste candidates were appointed, frustrating Ambedkar in the process. Retreat, maybe. Resolve to fight another day, definitely.

But the independent Indian state has never consistently been able to, or shown any willingness to, internalise this Gandhian logic. Gandhi himself had warned of this – if the nature of the state does not change, we will not create *Hindustan* but *English-stan*.

Govts frequently reach for the handiest tool when dealing with democratic protest – the policeman. This time, apart from the men and women in uniform blockading streets, there were also cyber policemen preventing access to the internet.

The plainest truth that emerges every time there is a popular protest – from the time Gandhi stood up against the Rowlatt Act that authorised the colonial police to detain persons without a warrant, to when Syama Prasad Mookerjee protested against the promulgation of Article 370 by entering J&K without a permit, from when masses of opposition politicians denounced Indira Gandhi's declaration of Emergency, to when CJP announced its second agitation – is that India inherited a colonial state, and has now made it its own.



This is a state that has not yet developed a genuinely democratic instinct of deliberation and dialogue with its detractors. Its first reaction is to hold up an arcane provision of law, and use it to suppress and quell protest. Govts have come and gone but this characteristic of the state remains largely unchanged – governing from above, with citizen-subjects hovering below.

The changing nature of the media has only amplified this. In the simplistic black and white world of social media, image matters more than anything else. The simpler the message, the more memorable the image. There is no currency for half-measures, checks and balances, the boring wait and watch moves that much of good politics is about. The algorithm feeds on and craves extremes – mindless hate, senseless violence, utter lawlessness. If the state is thinking it is going to clamp down, it might as well be disproportionate to begin with. So what if it is a few young protesters and a cause – elections – that Supreme Court recently termed "giving flesh and blood to the basic skeletal structure of democracy". This is to say nothing of the Constitution that assures freedom of movement, and the freedom to protest to all citizens. That ceased being a moral force to restrain govts almost from the time it was written.

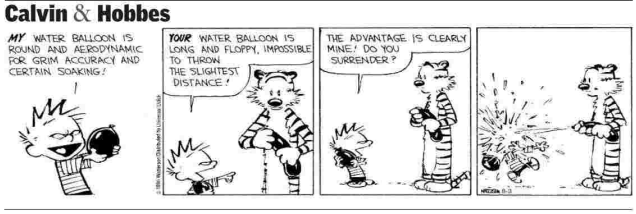
Things have reached this pass because the institutions that were meant to channelise opposition constructively have not lived up to their promise. Parliament is mostly dysfunctional, and very little meaningful deliberation takes place. SC and high courts have retreated – they may be good for an interim order here or there that makes govts pause, but their moral authority to effectuate any long-lasting change stands significantly eroded. What remains is the street protest and its bedfellow, the clampdown. It is like we are back at the genesis of the social contract, just having graduated from the state of nature.

That's why, despite nearly 15 years in govt, and having ultimately worked out a statesman-like solution during the first set of protests, when pushed a bit further, this govt's instincts, like all other govts', to detain and disrupt won out over its democratic imperative to listen and govern.

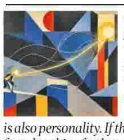
As we said before, govt cannot ask CEC to resign, like it did with the education minister. All it needs to do is to let the voice of protesters take its natural course. Who ultimately is right in India's constitutional democracy? The people.

The writer is Research Director, Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy. Views are personal

Calvin & Hobbes



Sacred*space*



Surrender once and for all and be done with the desire. So long as the sense of doership is retained there is the desire. There is also personality. If this goes the Self is found to shine forth pure.

Ramana Maharshi

Bhakti Without Surrender Is A Social Contract

KV Raghupathi

Bhakti is not a social contract between devotee and the Divine. It does not accept 'i worship; therefore, i must receive what is due to me.' When worship turns into a transaction, it loses its holiness and purity. According to the doctrine of *prapatti*, also known as *saranagati*, one must surrender completely and without negotiation, giving oneself over to the Divine without calculation or expectation. Mirabai's singing combines both pure devotion and effortless surrender. Her love and sincere devotion endure even abandonment.

A contract presumes two parties in a transaction. It presupposes a distance. *Bhakti* erases that distance between devotee and the Divine, and the former melts in devotion, merging with the latter. In such a true devotion, division between devotee and the Divine does not exist. It is not a social contract; it is sheer love that binds devotee and the Divine.

Grace happens and flows automatically, unannounced and unnoticed. Tukaram's tears, Andal's longing, Thyagaraj's poverty, Ramadas' suffering, and Kabir's revolt all testify to devotion devoid of reward.

Effortless singing leads to effortless surrender and brings instant grace. Vedanta Desika says, "*Prapatti* begins where effort ends." Alvars from South India emphasised *naicchya-anusandhana*, helpless surrender, in their hymns in *Divya Prabandham*, a collection of verses composed by Alvars. *Sakam karm* transforms into *nishkam karm* when surrendered in an ego-free, simple, and defenceless manner. The doer of the action with the affirmation of ego disappears because the devotee submits himself/herself to the Divine with no expectation. Actions performed with sincerity and devotion bear no traces of i-ness or expectation. The devotee acts dispassionately and accepts consequences as *prasadam* from the Divine.





Image: AI

In Sufism, *tawakkul* aligns with the teachings of *bhakti* and *prapatti*. They dismantle transactional devotion and practice while also supporting unconditional trust in the Divine and surrender. Both hold that Divine grace is necessary for human will to be effective, and that surrender accepts reality rather than signals weakness. While *tawakkul* emphasises trust, *prapatti* describes the flow of instantaneous grace.

Suffering dissolves in pure devotion. It is a gift, not a malicious force. The devotee is by no means a victim. Only pure devotion exists. Pain exacerbates the sense of separation between devotee and the Divine. *Bhakti* then risks becoming conditional. *Bhakt* will not regard poverty as a curse, even if it exists. Conversely, they see it as a blessing or an act of kindness. Saints, even in their pain, never forgot deities they had wholeheartedly given themselves to; they had only *nama smaranam* on their lips. Suffering, if accepted as evil, becomes synonymous with ego. But devotion is the absence of ego; therefore, suffering is not treated as punishment.

Pain is just a gift from the Divine when there is no ego. Unadulterated devotion and commitment turn anguish into friendship. Mirabai sings even after consuming poison. Andal transforms separation into holy insanity. Devotion is not born out of suffering. Instead, suffering can be redeemed by devotion. In Sufism, suffering is celebrated. Rumi says, "Where there is ruin, there is hope for treasure." Devotion does not purify suffering; rather, suffering purifies devotion.

TIMES BUSINESS

THE TIMES OF INDIA, NEW DELHI | TUESDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2026

Awareness Not Always
Translating Into Dietary Choices

Indian consumers are increasingly paying attention to nutrition, but awareness does not always translate into dietary choices. They expressed a strong preference for protein that fits more naturally into their diets, while convenience and credibility also emerged as significant barriers to fibre consumption

Source: Study by PepsiCo India, Euromonitor and IIMR



PROTEIN

70% of the respondents consume less than 41g, well below recommended intake levels

CITY-WISE AWARENESS
Below recommended daily intake levels



BARRIERS | COST, CONVENIENCE AND CREDIBILITY LIMIT CONSUMPTION



60% Point to high cost

57% Struggle with limited convenient, credible protein-focused options

FIBRE

61% Consume less than recommended daily intake levels

CITY-WISE AWARENESS
Below recommended daily intake levels



69% Lack of convenient credible fibre-focused food options

Sensex falls 548 pts amid volatile trade

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: Dalal Street witnessed heightened volatility on Monday with the sensex swinging over 1,200 points from a sharp rally in the first few minutes to a sudden dive below the previous close and finally settling in the red.

In early trade, the indices rallied on the back of RBI's weekend measures to support the rupee—which gained over Re 1 in early trades—but they gave up those gains by mid-session. Sensex lost 548 points to close at 71,925 points while Nifty was down 157 points at 22,364 points. Smallcap and midcap stocks, however, witnessed some buying interest.

The day's slide in the market came on the back of a Rs 1,708-crore net foreign fund outflow, while domestic funds were net buyers at Rs 3,045 crore, BSE data showed. At close, investors' wealth was up by a marginal Rs 14,000 crore to Rs 365.5 lakh crore.



Sunil Mittal gets highest French civilian award

New Delhi: Sunil Bharti Mittal, Bharti Enterprises founder and chairman, has been named a Chevalier de l'Ordre national de la Légion d'Honneur (Knight of the National Order of the Legion of Honour) by French President Emmanuel Macron. Established in 1802 by Napoleon Bonaparte, this is the highest civilian award bestowed by the French Republic. Mittal has been conferred the distinction in recognition of his commitment to deepening economic ties between India and France. Mittal said: "I am moved and humbled by this gracious award." The insignia will be conferred at a ceremony on Oct 28 at the embassy of France in India. TNN



BoI declares Biyani co account as fraud

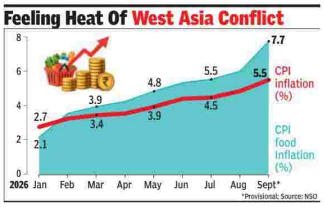
Mumbai: Bank of India has declared Kishore Biyani's Future Enterprises Ltd's account, with outstanding dues of Rs 575.4 crore, as fraud and reported it to RBI on Monday. The bank has made provisions for the entire outstanding amount. Future Enterprises was admitted to the corporate insolvency resolution process by the Mumbai bench of NCLT in Feb 2023. TNN

At 5.5%, retail inflation hits 9-mth high on food prices

Above RBI's Target For 4th Mth | Experts See Another Hike In Dec

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Feeling Heat Of West Asia Conflict



New Delhi: Retail inflation based on the consumer price index (CPI) rose to a nine-month high of 5.5% in Sept (y-o-y) from 4.8% in Aug, on account of a surge in food prices, which strained household costs, National Statistics Office data released Monday showed. This was the first time that retail inflation crossed the 5% mark under the new CPI series, which was released earlier this year, remaining above the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) 4% target for the fourth consecutive month, although the headline figure still remains within the central bank's tolerance band of 2-6%.

Data came days after RBI raised repo rates by 25 basis points amid the price pressure. Food inflation was estimated at 7.7% in Sept, compared with 6% in Aug. With 108% increase, onions recorded the steepest price rise in Sept, compared with 49% in Aug. Garlic prices accelerated 55% from 44%, while lemon prices surged 36% during the month. Some vegetables, however, continued to provide relief, with the prices of potato (-11%), tomato (-8%) and lady finger (-4.5%) falling in Sept.

The impact of the prolonged conflict in West Asia is also showing up, with sectors such as transport and restaurants seeing steady increase in costs. Goods transport services saw 14.7% inflation, while restaurant services saw 9.4% inflation - driven by higher fuel costs.

Rural inflation (6.1%) tended to be higher given the higher weight of food items in the basket, as compared to the urban areas (4.9%). The southern states of Andhra Pradesh (6.3%), Karnataka (5.9%), Tamil Nadu (6.8%) and Odisha (6.7%) had higher inflation relative to others.

Bank of Baroda chief economist Madan Sabnavis said transmission of higher wholesale price index (WPI) into CPI is yet to be seen, with industries such as durables, FMCG, automobile having announced an increase in prices. It will reflect in the coming months. "The challenge will be the third quarter where inflation will peak at around 6%. Dec policy meeting by RBI, therefore, will warrant another rate hike," he said.

DBS Bank chief economist Radhika Rao said, "In the face of higher headline prints, RBI is expected to keep the door open for another rate hike in Dec policy meet."

Centre, states to work on widening GST base

Changes In Return Filing System & Invoice Matching Are Likely To Plug Leakages

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

LOOKING TO LEVERAGE TECH

- Centre and the states are looking to **encourage e-invoicing**
- This initiative is likely to be **ready by April**
- There will be an **incentive for businesses** to move to new mechanism
- Govt wants to be **"facilitative"** instead of mandating things
- **B2C e-invoicing is expected to provide data** on all entities in supply chain — from suppliers to final seller
- "We can leverage technology to increase the base without the exercise being intrusive. **We can improve the analytics and work with GST Network on identified gaps** — An official

New Delhi: With GST rate rationalisation and procedural simplification out of the way, the Centre has offered to help the states in widening the base using data analytics, with changes in the return filing system and invoice matching also likely to plug leakages.

"We have had discussions on improving the base and also quality of disclosure... We can leverage technology to increase the base without the exercise being intrusive. We can improve the analytics and work with GST Network (the back-end data arm) on the identified gaps," an official said, adding that some analysis has also been shared with the states. Currently, there are 1.7 crore registered taxpayers and officials indicated that this number can be increased.

They said with changes in returns and the invoice matching system will also help plug revenue leakages, while also making life simpler. Separately, the Centre and the states are looking to encourage e-invoicing, which is likely to be ready by April. Here, there will be an incentive for businesses to move to the new mechanism as govt looks to be "facilitative" instead of mandating things. B2C e-invoicing is also expected to provide data on all entities in the supply chain – from suppliers to the final seller.

Currently, businesses with average annual turnover of Rs 5 crore have to mandatorily generate e-invoice for B2B sales.

Officials said that most of the changes finalised by the GST Council last week will be implemented from April as some amendments to the laws are required. But the finance ministry is also examining if the move to stop issuing notices for demand under Rs 10,000 can be done through an executive order.

Over the next few weeks officials from the Centre and the states will come together to discuss if there is a need to stop tax credits for the entire chain or only the errant entity should face action. "We will need to undertake analytics and improve coordination between states to get hold of the errant supplier," the official said. At the Council meeting, states sought a review of the proposal . Some of them were of the view that by blocking the credit, they were able to go after some of the players in the chain, which businesses have argued often leads to harassment.

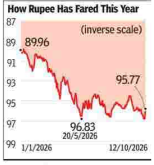
Similarly, some of the states did not allow the plan to allow input tax credit on automobiles to be used by businesses claiming that this will also be claimed when vehicles were put to personal use. The Centre has argued that this may be the case with small businesses or proprietorship firms – which account for 75% of the credits for vehicle purchases but have only 15% of the amount claimed – but not with all businesses.

Rupee gains 96p as RBI curbs begin to take effect

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

On A Weak Wicket

How Rupee Has Fared This Year



Mumbai: The rupee rose 96 paise to 95.77 per dollar on Monday after fresh measures to curb dollar demand and speculative positions, even as banks sought relaxation of the new foreign exchange restrictions, more time for compliance and clarity on operational issues. The currency has weakened around 6.5% this year.

The recovery may prove temporary unless underlying pressures ease, economists said. Elevated oil prices, foreign portfolio outflows and a widening trade deficit continue to weigh on the currency. The sustainability of the rupee's recovery will depend on crude oil prices, capital flows, foreign exchange reserves and whether underlying balance-of-payments pressures ease, dealers said. Monday's gain was the highest in over six months. The rupee had gained nearly 124 paise on April 2. Monday's surge was among the top five gains in the last five years as well.

The Foreign Exchange Dealers' Association of India (FEDAI) petitioned RBI seeking relaxation and deferment of the measures. Banks flagged additional client documentation, uncertainty over pricing products to recover compliance costs, and the need for clarity on how frequently reserves must be deposited and reported. They also cited the cost of interest on additional reserves parked with RBI, which varies across banks, and the expense of developing customised products to meet the new requirements.

Bond yields, meanwhile, rose as the measures tightened liquidity and raised concerns about further monetary tightening. The 10-year yield climbed to around 7.39%. Banks have also been directed to maintain at least 99% of their required cash reserves with RBI each day during a fortnight, up from 90%, effective Oct 16.

SDTT gets time till Oct 19 to respond to complaints

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: Sir Dorabji Tata Trust (SDTT) has been granted time until Oct 19 to file its response to complaints lodged by vice-chairmen Venu Srinivasan and Vijay Singh, who have alleged that the trust exceeded its charitable mandate by intervening in the commercial and strategic affairs of Tata Sons.

The duo filed complaints with the Maharashtra Charity Commissioner on Sept 25, seeking interim orders barring the trust from holding board meetings, restraining it from exercising its voting rights at Tata Sons' annual general meeting (AGM), suspending or removing trustees, and preventing chairman Noel Tata from participating in Tata Sons board decisions as a nominee director.

The Commissioner had directed SDTT to submit its response by Oct 12. SDTT was scheduled to file its reply on Monday but sought additional time from the commissioner. The regulator accepted the request and granted the trust a one-week extension, directing it to file its response by Oct 19.

Economic settlement not resolved: Mallika, Lakshmi

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Chennai: Lakshmi Venu and Mallika Srinivasan have said the economic settlement within the Venu Srinivasan (VS) family remains unresolved, disputing suggestions that a division of assets has been completed.

In a joint statement issued amid recent media reports, Lakshmi Venu and Mallika Srinivasan, daughter and wife of Venu Srinivasan, respectively, said no agreement on the division of economic interests had been concluded.

They distinguished this from the broader TVS family partition, agreed upon in 2020 and implemented subsequently, which involved valuation, discussions and mutual consent. They said no comparable process had taken place within their family branch.

According to a statement by Venu Srinivasan, quoted by Republic TV: "The businesses and assets were mine, and I had the full liberty to deal with them as I deemed fit, keeping in mind the best interests of the family members as well as the businesses. I had always believed that the next generation should be given full ownership and control while they are young and have the energy and ideas to build their enterprises. It is with this intent that I carried out a separation between Lakshmi and Sudarshan."

SRINIVASAN FAMILY DISPUTE

His statement also said: "Lakshmi was given to take forward and grow the SCL business, and Sudarshan was given to take forward and grow the motor business. The separation was always about ownership and control.

"The separation was on a fair basis at the time it was done, keeping several factors in mind, including the fact that Mallika Srinivasan, who controls TAFE, had made clear her intention to pass on ownership and control of TAFE to Lakshmi, who is already involved in its management as its vice-chairman. It was carried out openly, transparently, with the knowledge of and after careful consultation with my family."

Lakshmi Venu and Mallika Srinivasan disputed the suggestion that the assets belonged exclusively to one individual who could decide their distribution unilaterally. They also maintained that management roles and arrangements concerning trademarks, brand usage and non-compete obligations should not be treated as substitutes for an economic settlement.

Clarifying TAFE's position, the joint statement by the duo said the company belongs to the Amalgamations Group, a separate family business group in which Mallika Srinivasan is a shareholder, and has no bearing on the economic settlement within the VS family.

"The fundamental issue is not about management positions, which have been compensated appropriately and commensurately. It is about the fair recognition of rightful economic ownership, which remains unresolved," the statement said.

Despite volatility in Sept, SIP flows hit new high of ₹32.5k cr

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

EQUITY MFS SHINE

Key Numbers In Sept (In ₹ cr)	
Total industry AUM	82.6 lakh
SIP contribution	32,490
Equity funds inflow	38,307
Debt fund outflow	1.8 lakh

Mumbai: Monthly gross inflows through the systematic investment plan (SIP) route inched to a new record at Rs 32,490 crore in Sept, demonstrating retail investors' resilience to the volatilities in the stock market, industry players said.

During the month, net inflows into equity schemes also showed a positive trend, data released by mutual fund industry trade body AMFI showed. At Rs 38,306 crore, they were at a five-month high, while in smallcap schemes the net inflow was Rs 9,036 crore, a new record high number.

The MF industry's overall assets under management, however, saw a 5.1% decline to Rs 82.6 lakh crore, primarily due to mark-to-market (MTM) losses and outflows from debt funds due to advance corporate tax payments that were due by mid-Sept, Venkat Chalasani, the chief executive officer of AMFI, said.

In the equity segment, in addition to the record net flows into smallcap schemes, midcap funds took in a net Rs 7,835 crore, while flexicap schemes took in a net Rs 6,702 crore. These inflows came in despite a 5.8% monthly loss in sensex in Sept, an 8% loss in BSE's select midcap index and a 2.1% slide in BSE's select smallcap index.

According to Navneet Munot, MD & CEO, HDFC AMC, volatile phases in the stock market tend to give way to recovery for those who stay invested. "(Record) SIP flows show how investors today understand the importance of staying the course during testing times," Munot said.

HCLTech Q2 revenue up 2.2%, narrows FY27 guidance

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: HCLTech's dollar revenue rose to $3.7 billion in the Sept quarter, up 2% sequentially and 2.2% year-on-year. In constant currency terms, revenue grew 2.3% sequentially and 2.6% year on year. EBIT margin expanded 131 basis points sequentially and 71 basis points year-on-year to 18.2%.

The company's services business grew 3% sequentially, generating more than $100 million in incremental revenue. About $50 million came from advanced AI and the remaining $50 million from the core business, where HCLTech is gaining market share through AI-driven services.

HCLTech narrowed its FY27 company revenue growth guidance to 0.5%-4% in constant currency terms from the 1%-4% announced in Q1. Services revenue growth guidance was revised to 3%-4% from the earlier range of 1.5%-4.5%. CEO C Vijayakumar said the company retained the midpoint of both guidance ranges despite narrowing them, reflecting caution about extrapolating recent improvements in demand amid a volatile business environment.

PERM certifications at 13 IT cos fell to 607 in 9 mths from 1,670 in FY25

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Certified PERM applications

Company	2024	2025	9MFY26*
TCS	597	505	2
Infosys	–	12	–
HCLTech	6	94	28
Wipro	–	206	2
Tech Mahindra	42	15	–
LTM	159	127	168
Accenture	71	226	182
Cognizant	741	–	–
Capgemini	50	290	7

Note: Excludes certified-expired applications. The report highlights cos whose PERM processing was suspended by the US Dept of Labor
*First nine months of FY26
Source: Department of Labor, Kotak Institutional Equities

Bengaluru: IT firms had shrugged off concerns over their dependence on the US green-card route well before the US administration announced the suspension of PERM processing, with certified applications already declining sharply.

Thirteen major IT services companies recorded 607 certified permanent labour certification (PERM) applications in the first nine months of FY26, compared with 1,670 in FY25 and 1,756 in FY24, according to Kotak Institutional Equities. Kotak has reported certified PERM applications across major IT services companies with Sep fiscal year-ends.

The decline comes as the US administration has suspended new and pending PERM applications involving TCS, Infosys, HCLTechnologies, Wipro, Cognizant and Capgemini. PERM is a key labour-certification stage in the process of obtaining employment-based green cards.

TCS recorded just two certifications in the first nine months of FY26, against 505 in FY25 and 597 in FY24. Wipro also had two certifications, compared with 206 in FY25. HCLTech recorded 28, down from 94 in FY25 and six in FY24.

Infosys had 12 certified applications in FY25, while the report shows no figure for the first nine months of FY26 or FY24. Cognizant recorded 741 certifications in FY24, but the report does not provide figures for FY25 or the first nine months of FY26. Capgemini had seven certifications in the first nine months of FY26, against 290 in FY25 and 50 in FY24.

Among the other companies covered, LTM recorded 168 certifications in the first nine months of FY26, up from 127 in FY25 and 159 in FY24. Persistent Systems reported 58, compared with 16 in FY25 and 10 in FY24. Mphasis recorded 82 certifications in the first nine months of FY26, against 132 in FY25 and 79 in FY24, while Hexaware Technologies had 73, compared with 24 and one, respectively.

European car cos will prefer to make in India: Goyal

TNN & Agencies

New Delhi: Commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal Monday said European carmakers would prefer to manufacture in India, as producing vehicles there would be uncompetitive due to the region's regulations.

"Finally India is going to become the global hub for car manufacturing. Everybody is going to come and manufacture in India and with Europe having such crazy regulations, it is going to be impossible to be competitive. All the European manufacturers will come to India," he said at The Dilli Dialogue here. India has proposed duty cuts as part of the trade deals with the UK and EU.

"I do not know if you are aware. Tatas had so much trouble after they bought Jaguar. Tata Motors itself was going to collapse and then they put in a lot of re-engineering, and shift some models to India...Finally they were able to make money after years," he added.

Addressing a meeting of the India-UK joint economic and trade committee, the minister said there was potential for the import of more Scotch, cars and supply of subsidiary products from the petroleum sector, key technology products from electronics and electrical equipment, and several medicaments.

FM urges steel makers to boost specialty's output

New Delhi: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday urged domestic steel producers to focus on decarbonisation and boosting domestic production of specialty steel to reduce dependence on imports.

Addressing the World Steel Association General Assembly here, the FM mentioned that govt has introduced the PLI scheme for specialty steel, with an approved outlay of Rs 6,300 crore.

The scheme encourages investment in domestic manufacturing and technology upgradation, helping India to produce more of the specialised steel that its economy needs.

"While much of the global industry is grappling with excess capacity and weak demand, India is experiencing a different trajectory, driven by domestic consumption and sustained investment," she said.

"For two successive years, consumption has exceeded production, underscoring the strength of the domestic market and the potential for further growth remains substantial," Sitharaman said.

At approximately 109 kg per person, against the world average of 209 kg, she said, India's steel consumption has considerable room to rise. AGENCIES

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Defending the rupee

Govt must act to contain BoP pressure

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) late last week announced a range of measures to support the rupee. As a result, the currency appreciated against the dollar on Monday. The measures included restricting the rebooking of cancelled foreign-exchange derivative contracts involving the rupee for both deliverable and non-deliverable contracts. It also lowered the threshold for undertaking foreign-exchange transactions involving derivatives without establishing an underlying exposure to $5 million from $100 million across all dealers. Further, authorised dealers have to maintain cash with the RBI equivalent to 20 per cent of the rupee value for each foreign-exchange derivative contract involving the rupee with a notional value exceeding $2 million. Besides, the RBI decided to open a special window to address the foreign-exchange needs of the three public-sector oil-marketing companies (OMCs).

The expectation, of course, is that restricting trading in derivatives or increasing its cost will reduce speculation and take some stress off the rupee, which has been under pressure. However, these are at best stopgap measures and will not address the underlying problem. In fact, they could hurt genuine businesses that need to hedge foreign-exchange exposure. It has been reported that banks have made representations in this regard. Further, removing the OMC demand may reduce pressure in the foreign-exchange market, but it will not reduce their requirement for foreign currencies in any way. The relief in the currency market, therefore, is likely to be short-lived.

In fact, the RBI is intervening significantly in the currency market to support the rupee. The concessional swap arrangements, including for the Foreign-Currency Non-Resident (Bank) — or FCNR (B) — deposits helped accumulate foreign-exchange reserves, which increased to a record high of $785.7 billion in the week ended September 4. However, it has since declined by over $51 billion (October 2). Part of it could be on account of revaluation, but it does indicate that the central bank is fairly active in the currency market. The stated policy of the RBI is that it does not target any level and intervenes only to contain excess volatility. However, it seems to be looking at the other objectives as well.

It is worth highlighting that dealing with balance of payments (BoP) pressure is not the central bank's responsibility alone. India is facing pressure on both the current and capital accounts, and the strain predates the war in West Asia. India faced BoP deficits over the past two years, partly because of capital outflows. This year will likely show a surplus because of strong inflows under FCNR (B). Again, FCNR (B) flows will give only short-term relief. The RBI's recent action suggests that it is not helping even to the extent many had anticipated. Continued defence would only raise the incremental cost of pursuing this path. The textbook response to a situation like this is to allow the rupee to depreciate. However, it will help fundamentally correct the situation if Indian exporters are able to take advantage of a weak currency. For that to happen, the government needs to bring in reforms, including on tariffs. Further, the government needs to put in place conditions to attract foreign direct investment. It has been reported that the government is reviewing the framework for the bilateral investment treaty, but little is known in this regard. The present situation is a good opportunity to implement trade and investment reforms, which will provide much-needed stability on the external front and support higher growth over the medium to long term.

A Nobel for shocks

Models of macro management are being tested

This year's Nobel Prize in economics has gone to Robert E Hall and Michael Woodford, of Stanford and Columbia Universities, respectively. They are prominent members of the New Keynesian field in macroeconomics, which studies how macroeconomic dynamics — inflation, for example — can be understood in the real structure of the economy. In particular, they have contributed to the study of stabilisation — how central banks and governments can respond to various economic fluctuations, such as business cycles and shocks.

As with almost all recent Nobel Prizes in economics, the timing of the award is part of the story. The field of work for which Professors Hall and Woodford are being honoured emerged in the 1970s, a time when the rise in oil prices challenged economic theory, launched stagflation across the world, and caused great public discontent. In recognising the impact of the work that responded to that moment of disorder — launching, in part, the decades of moderation that followed — the Nobel committee is implicitly throwing out a challenge to those who work on macroeconomics today. Is it possible, perhaps, that these ongoing moments of disruption — the return of economic nationalism, geopolitical shocks to fuel and food prices, the increasing concern that chokepoints could squeeze trade — might produce the next great advances in stabilisation theory.

It should be noted that many of the assumptions on which Professors Woodford and Hall worked — or, perhaps, helped create a consensus around — are themselves being challenged. The notion that an independent central bank can be charged with stabilising the economy, and that this should be taken out of the executive's hands, is a relatively recent phenomenon — and one that responds to the experience of the 1970s and the theoretical work that grew out of it. But independence can no longer be taken as a given. The President of the United States (US), for example, has clearly sought to bring the US Federal Reserve to heel. Over in Europe, the leading leftist candidate for the French presidency has threatened to jail the head of its central bank for treason.

Broader questions must also be asked about the very nature of "stabilisation". It often presupposes that shocks are temporary, or that perturbations are part of a business cycle, and that some normal equilibrium can be returned to. But what if the shocks are not transitional? How should macroeconomic stabilisation work under such circumstances? The oil-price shock itself, it should be recalled, was never really reversed; prices settled at a new, permanently higher level. But what if the new normal is not a stable higher price — but erratic, with an upward trend? And how can theory respond to the shifts inherent in the energy transition — or the even greater possible impacts of the technological transition that the growth of artificial intelligence might bring in its wake?

Even if these answers are not immediately available, what should be clear is that the age of Neo-Keynesianism, one in which technocrats could use a well-defined toolbox to deal with relatively predictable peaks and troughs, is past. The global economy is facing stresses greater than any it has seen since the Second World War; and macroeconomic tools and the theory that informs them have to be transformed to match the moment. What is important, however, is that this transformation be grounded in a sensible understanding of the microeconomics of production, consumption, and investment. This, in the end, was what Professors Woodford and Hall contributed, and that insight is timeless.

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



Maximising value, not the haircut

Creditors must look beyond immediate recovery to the future value a resolution plan can create

The Supreme Court has described the Committee of Creditors (CoC) as the protagonist of insolvency resolution under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016. It decides the fate of a distressed corporate debtor (CD) — whether it should be rescued through a resolution plan or sent into liquidation. Whichever course it chooses, the objective is to resolve the stress while maximising the value of the assets of the CD.

The decision is commercial and ordinarily beyond judicial substitution. It is not amenable to arithmetic. A plan with the highest evaluation score, net present value, or upfront payment does not, by itself, determine the outcome. The decision rests on voting informed by commercial wisdom.



M S SAHOO & SANJEEV PANDEY

The IBC does not use the expression "commercial wisdom". It is, however, now firmly embedded in IBC jurisprudence to describe a well-considered decision directed towards the statutory objective of maximising the value of the CD, though the CoC often seeks to maximise the outcome for creditors. These two forms of maximisation are not synonymous, though they are aligned to a large extent.

Creditors hold claims against the CD, ultimately linked to the value of the enterprise and its assets. If the CD is rescued, restored to health and made more productive, the pool from which creditors can derive value increases. Maximising the value of the CD should, therefore, maximise the value available to creditors.

The difference arises from the time horizon and the structure of the resolution plan. Creditors may remain economically connected with the enterprise through equity, continued credit, deferred or contingent consideration, or other arrangements. If they retain an interest in the future of the CD and the enterprise prospers, maximising the CD's value and maximising their own value move together.

The position differs when creditors take their recovery upfront and walk away. They exit when the enterprise is at its weakest, exchanging participation in the future value for immediate realisation. Once they exit, they have little "skin in the game" in its post-resolution value creation. In choosing immediate recovery, they may compromise the future value of the CD and consequently their own value.

That distinguishes recovery and resolution. Recovery asks: What can be obtained from the enterprise in its present condition? Resolution asks: What can the enterprise become if its distress is addressed? They have different economic implications.

Recovery focuses primarily on distributing the value presently available. Resolution plan, by contrast, seeks to preserve a viable enterprise and create conditions for future value. A successful resolution can keep productive assets in use, preserve relationships with employees, suppliers and customers, attract fresh capital, change management or strategy, and address the causes of distress. Instead of distributing existing value, it enables the enterprise to create more.

This is why a resolution applicant is willing to invest. It sees value not merely in what remains, but in what can be created. Creditors should consider not only what they can obtain from the CD today, but what the enterprise can become tomorrow. If they remain economically connected with the enterprise, they can participate not only in the value preserved through the resolution plan but also in the additional value created by its revival.

Evidence from post-resolution outcomes shows that companies do revive and prosper. Operations can improve, capacity can be better utilised, customers can return, fresh capital can be invested and enterprise value can increase. A creditor that has taken an upfront settlement and completely exited does not participate in that subsequent increase. It may, in effect, have left the gains from revival to the acquirer. This does not mean that creditors should always accept a lower upfront payment or always take equity. Nor should uncertain future returns automatically be preferred to certain present value. Time, risk, probability of success and certainty of payment are legitimate commercial considerations. But future value is not irrelevant because creditors have the power to take money out today.

There is a legitimate institutional reason why banks tend to prefer cash. Cash can be booked, provided for, and closed. Equity requires valuation, monitoring, patience, and eventual monetisation. A banker who accepts less cash today in return for equity tomorrow may have to justify that decision years later if the turnaround fails. A defensible immediate recovery can, therefore, appear safer than a potentially larger one in future. Yet the rush to realise dues upfront sits uneasily with the very reason financial creditors have been entrusted with the central role in insolvency resolution: Their ability to wait and realise their dues from the improved performance of a revived corporate debtor.

The challenge is to make value-maximising decisions defensible. CoCs could, for example, invite bids in both all-cash and cash-plus-upside formats and compare them on a properly risk-adjusted basis. Regulators could provide a clear framework for valuing and accounting for equity or contingent consideration received under an approved resolution plan. A reasoned decision to retain an interest in future value, supported by due diligence and documented assumptions about risk and probability, should be recognised as legitimate commercial judgement rather than treated with hindsight as imprudence.

This would distinguish between accepting uncertain value because it is genuinely superior after adjusting for risk, and accepting cash simply because it is easier to justify. The first is commercial wisdom. The second may be institutional risk aversion masquerading as commercial wisdom.

A resolution plan should, therefore, be judged not only by what creditors receive when it is approved, but also by what it enables thereafter: Whether the business survives, whether productive assets remain productive, whether fresh investment comes in, whether financial and operational weaknesses are repaired, and whether the enterprise is capable of creating value beyond the point at which it entered insolvency.

The CoC has a responsibility to exercise commercial wisdom consistently with the statutory objective. Maximising the value of the CD should maximise the value available to creditors. But when creditors choose to exit at the point of maximum distress, they may maximise neither the value of the CD nor their own value. They may simply be maximising their haircut.

The writers are, respectively, emeritus fellow, Insolvency Law Academy, and an insolvency professional and consultant

Are financial risks now building?

Financial crises often occur when the architecture designed to safeguard stability fails to keep pace with the changing financial system. New institutions and transactions expand the perimeter of finance while regulation, supervision and crisis-management arrangements adjust more slowly. Risks accumulate where they are poorly measured or understood — until a shock reveals how interconnected they have become.

This was part of the story of earlier crises. The Asian financial crisis exposed vulnerabilities from rapid cross-border flows, foreign-currency borrowing, and weak financial-sector oversight. A decade later, the global financial crisis revealed how securitisation, leverage and shadow banking had developed beyond the reach of an architecture still focused heavily on regulated banks.

Could a similar gap be opening again? Banks today are generally more resilient than they were before 2008. But finance has moved on. Non-bank financial institutions (NBFIs) accounted for 51 per cent of global financial assets in 2024 and grew at twice the pace of banks. At the same time, near-record government debt and the growing role of NBFIs have changed sovereign debt markets, with the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) warning that the combination can heighten the risk of market dysfunction.



ANOOP SINGH

Risk has migrated: Post-2008 reforms strengthened banks, but some risks migrated elsewhere. Hedge funds can carry substantial leverage, investment funds face liquidity mismatches, and private credit has expanded rapidly. Yet banks remain connected through credit lines, repo, and derivatives. The relevant unit of analysis is increasingly not the individual bank but a sovereign-bank-NBFI-market network.

Japan provides a striking illustration. Decades of exceptionally low interest rates made the yen a global funding currency. Cross-border yen borrowing reached an estimated ¥360 trillion ($2.3 trillion) by March 2026, an increase of more than two-thirds from its level in late 2021. Yet the true scale of the carry trade remains uncertain because derivatives and off-balance-sheet positions can be difficult for regulators to observe.

As the Bank of Japan normalises monetary policy, a rapid yen appreciation could force leveraged investors to unwind positions elsewhere. The partial unwinding of the yen carry trade in 2024 showed how quickly such pressures can spread: The effects reached Japanese, US, European and other Asian equity markets, cryptocurrencies and emerging-market currencies. Japan illustrates the wider problem — transactions have become global and interconnected while supervision remains predominantly national.

Is the protective perimeter weakening? This comes as parts of the regulatory architecture face pressure. US Federal Reserve Governor Michael Barr has warned that recent regulatory changes have reduced capital requirements for large American banks and that divergence from international standards could encourage a regulatory "race to the bottom". US bank credit commitments to other financial entities exceeded $2.6 trillion in the second half of 2025. Regulatory simplification extends elsewhere. Proposed US changes would substantially reduce the number of listed companies requiring independent auditor attestation of internal financial controls introduced after the Enron accounting scandal. Compliance costs are a legitimate concern. But companies already exempt from the requirement have accounted for 60-80 per cent of annual financial restatements in recent years.

Technology is simultaneously extending the perimeter. Financial Stability Board Chair Andrew Bailey has warned that frontier artificial intelligence (AI) could expose financial institutions to simultaneous disruption through cyberattacks and shared technology dependencies. Common AI models, automated trading, and dependence on common technology providers could create correlated behaviour or operational failures across otherwise unrelated institutions.

Who can provide the new perimeter? The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and BIS are central to closing these gaps — but neither can itself provide a global regulatory perimeter. The IMF can bring sovereign, macroeconomic and financial risks together through surveillance and financial-sector assessments. The BIS and Basel Committee can develop common prudential standards, identify cross-border risks and encourage consistent supervision. But neither is a supranational regulator. Implementation and enforcement remain national. The answer must, therefore, be a more connected architecture, with national regulators following risks beyond traditional institutional boundaries; international standards limiting regulatory arbitrage; better cross-border information on leverage and liquidity; and IMF surveillance assessing whether the pieces add up to system-wide resilience. The regulatory perimeter increasingly needs to follow the activity and the risk, not simply the institution undertaking it.

India provides an instructive counterpoint. Regulation and supervision have strengthened considerably following earlier banking distress, and the IMF's latest financial-sector assessment finds banks and nonbanks broadly resilient. Yet India's financial system is also evolving: Nonbanks now provide nearly half of private-sector credit, while connections among banks, non-banking financial companies and markets have grown. The lesson from India is, therefore, encouraging but also relevant more widely — that regulatory authorities need to continually adapt the perimeter as financial activity, institutions and their interconnections change.

The emerging-market test: This matters particularly for emerging economies. Financial instability need not originate within them. An advanced-economy shock can arrive through portfolio outflows, currency depreciation, higher sovereign yields and refinancing costs. The yen carry trade demonstrates how leveraged positions created elsewhere can suddenly affect emerging-market assets. None of this means another financial crisis is imminent. It suggests something subtler: Financial transactions and risks may once again be expanding faster than the perimeter designed to oversee them. The next crisis may look nothing like 1997 or 2008. The more important question is whether the financial architecture has evolved sufficiently to see it coming — and to contain it when it does.

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Middle powers' unconvincing new statecraft

BOOK REVIEW

TALMIZ AHMAD

The present global scenario, defined by increasing United States aversion to multilateralism and sharpening Sino-US competition, particularly in technology, has shaped a new concept in international relations discourse — "Workarounding".

It means that several of the world's middle powers, particularly those with interest in technology development, are cooperating with one another in "pragmatic, flexible and interest-based minilaterals" that do not involve working with the two great powers — the US and China; in putting together their cooperation arrangements, they are working around the two technology giants.

The editors tell us that agreements involving workarounding cooperation have increased since 2015, and that in the first six months of 2025, more such agreements were signed than in all of 2024. In the period, 1991 to 2025, India led with 69 agreements, followed by Singapore (52), Japan (48), United Kingdom (48), France (38), Australia (36) and South Korea (29). These agreements have covered sectors like defence, digital innovation, and infrastructure.

The great advantage of such cooperation is that by pooling technological, human and financial resources, the countries concerned can develop and regulate critical technologies without having to depend on the two advanced powers. They can thus retain their autonomy in decision-making and shape approaches to regulatory issues without the influence of the major states.

Thus, despite opposition from the US and its European partners, both the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have refused to choose between the US and China; they and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members exert their own global clout through several Cs: crude, capital, commerce, collaboration, climate, and, above all, compromise.

Co-editor Laura Mahrenbach has discussed technology cooperation among the 10 members of the "Digital Nations" grouping, which includes Estonia, Israel, and South Korea, as a successful example of workarounding. Since 2014, this grouping has pursued 88 technology partnerships in cybersecurity, energy, health, space and digital trade.

This book is a significant contribution to the international relations discourse by focusing attention on the important technology cooperation initiatives being undertaken by middle powers in different parts of the world, without the direct involvement of the two major powers. But, despite this brave effort, it must still be asked: Is this technology-related cooperation really outside the influence of the tech leaders?

Dr Mahrenbach has herself raised doubts in this regard by pointing out that Estonia, a member of "Digital Nations", has also joined the US-sponsored 3SI, a network of public and private technology entities and an investment fund, SSIIF, to compete with China's Digital Silk Road investments in the region. Its charter calls for "boosting economic development, strengthening the cohesion of the European Union and enriching the transatlantic ties". Clearly, the US is not being excluded from this so-called workarounding.

In fact, given the very close and diverse ties that middle powers in Europe and Northeast Asia have with the US, these states just cannot develop technology-related products and regulations that would be outside American scrutiny and control. This is particularly true of tech giants — Israel and Taiwan — which are totally dependent on the US for their security.



Workarounding: Tech Middle Power Cooperation in a Turbulent World
Edited by Maximilian Mayer, Gedaliah Afterman, Narayanappa Janardhan & Laura Mahrenbach
Published by Palgrave Macmillan
305 pages ₹4,205

Israeli scholars Daniel Cohen and Amir Yosef Elalouf have discussed in the book the "Crystal ball platform", a threat intelligence platform to deter cybercriminals, as a middle power collaboration. However, they accept that this initiative has been developed by the UAE and Israeli cybersecurity organisations in association with Microsoft! In a related article on Israel's tech role in West Asia, Daniel Sidiqie admits that, while Israel's sole cooperation with Arab states at present is with the UAE, it is hoping to build closer relations with other GCC states on the basis of technology cooperation, buttressed by shared concerns relating to Iran! Surprisingly, the author also includes the I2U2 initiative as an example of middle power cooperation, even though it includes the US as a major partner.

Again, in his article on development of semiconductors by middle powers, the Taiwanese writer, Hon-min Yau, says that US competition with China is now "a more security-driven calculation", and that the US' principal concern is not just dealing with trade imbalance but "containing China's tech rise". Hence, the US may be expected to scrutinise the middle powers' chip exports, particularly AI chips and trade in semiconductors. The author concludes that chip supply from middle powers will need to be primarily directed towards US AI giants, with middle power production complementing US tech development.

While the editors insist that workarounding is "a new form of statecraft", given the paucity of convincing supportive evidence, this reviewer is not persuaded that middle powers have embarked on cooperation amongst themselves that is independent of big power influence and involvement.

The reviewer is a former diplomat

OUR VIEW

REUTERS



Economics Nobel: micro studies for macro policy

The prize for 2026 honours researchers whose work draws on microeconomic analysis for a macro framework that holds special relevance in a world of high flux and economic shocks

This year's Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences was awarded to Robert E. Hall of Stanford and Michael Woodford of Columbia for providing the "microeconomic foundations of macroeconomic stabilisation." The citation says it all: the duo developed new macro models "that have significantly improved our ability to implement effective stabilisation policy." Well-timed fiscal and monetary policy measures based on these models "can reduce the economy's peaks and troughs." As the awarding panel's chair John Hassler noted, the laureates' work has been of good use to central banks and governments in securing an economy from shocks like energy price spikes and sudden shifts in retail demand.

The interesting part this year is the award's recognition of work that uses micro analysis—at the level of firms and households—for a macro policy framework. The important part is the resonance that research by Hall and Woodford holds in today's world of frequent economic shocks. The panel puts it well: "The stabilization of aggregate economic activity is a central goal of economic policy." This is especially so since such flux rarely hits people evenly; both recessions and inflation hit the poor harder. The relationship between key aggregate variables like inflation, unemployment and GDP were broadly mapped at a macro level, with a major role played by Keynes, best known for making a case for intervention in an economy. Today, policies to smoothen economic cycles are par for the course. The trouble was that the inner workings of those links were mostly a "black box," in the panel's words. Hall and Woodford helped open it up by delving into micro theory. The former focused on demand and the latter on supply. Hall found that while household buying did depend on factors like expectations of the future, changes in it were unpredictable—like a 'random walk.' In a 1978 article, he showed that a theory of consumption-smoothing—the idea that consumers prefer to keep it stable over time—worked well for grasping movements in overall consumption captured by data. However, unforeseeable shocks implied that consumption could not be as easily manipulated by government policy as was once thought, thus potentially limiting the effects of macro policy. On his part, Woodford became the key architect of the so-called New Keynesian model: a full macro stabilization framework that has become the main tool for policymakers today. He studied key micro conditions that made the market mechanism rigid. Sticky prices, for example. Businesses usually do not vary prices on a daily basis as demand and supply fluctuate; instead they adjust prices in discrete steps based on various calculations. These adjustments are also forward-looking. Woodford examined micro-level behaviour and used its learnings to formulate his new model for the use of policy tools. While his original work was meant to sharpen monetary-policy analysis, the foundation it laid became a major tool for the analysis of fiscal policy as well. The duo's work can be said to have inspired today's market notion of 'reflexivity' or awkward feedback loops adding complexity to macro policies.

Together, this year's winners showed how aptly used fiscal and monetary policy can improve welfare by acting as a shock absorber. At a time of high uncertainty, with folks worried about the ability of authorities to cushion hard blows, the academic exertions of Hall and Woodford deserve policy-level attention.

THEIR VIEW

India's SME Growth Fund could spawn a new wave of champions

Its funding of promising enterprises can create a new generation of globally competitive exporters



CHANDRAJIT BANERJEE
is director general, Confederation of Indian Industry.

The Union Cabinet's approval of a ₹10,000 crore SME Growth Fund is among the most consequential recent initiatives for India's enterprise ecosystem. At a time when SMEs are navigating an uncertain global environment, the fund provides an important source of growth capital.

The importance of this intervention becomes evident when viewed against the central role that micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) play in the economy. The sector contributes around 35.4% of manufacturing output, 48.6% of exports and 31.1% of gross domestic product, making it one of the most important drivers of growth, employment and entrepreneurship in the country. Within the broader MSME ecosystem, SMEs constitute the segment with the most potential to scale operations, raise productivity, integrate into global value chains and create high-quality domestic employment.

SMEs are also critical to India's export ambitions. They account for more than 70% of MSME exports, serving as important links between local production networks and global markets. As India seeks to deepen its participation in global value chains, SMEs can play an increasingly important role in driving exports and innovation, while creating stronger backward linkages with millions of micro enterprises.

India has put in place a strong and steadily expanding architecture of bank and non-bank finance for MSMEs, complemented by credit guarantee mechanisms, digital lending, invoice financing and other initiatives. Debt finance is indispensable to meeting the working capital and investment requirements of SMEs. Equity capital serves a different purpose. For enterprises seeking to undertake capacity expansion, invest in technology, enter new markets or pursue longer-gestation growth opportunities, patient equity can strengthen the balance sheet and complement conventional debt financing.

Here, the SME Growth Fund can make a big difference. Existing support mechanisms have expanded funding opportunities for smaller enterprises, although much of the equity ecosystem has historically been oriented towards startups, early-stage ventures and micro enterprises. There remains considerable scope to deepen the availability of growth-stage equity for established SMEs that have demonstrated business viability and are ready for their next phase of expansion.

By providing patient risk-bearing capital, the fund can offer such enterprises another pathway to growth. Equity can also provide firms greater flexibility to invest in technology, strengthen supply chains, undertake research and development, improve product quality, enter new markets and enhance export competitiveness.

The significance of this approach goes beyond financing. It can help address the often-discussed "missing middle" in India's enterprise landscape. India has a vast base of micro enterprises and a strong cohort of large corporations. The opportunity now is to enable many more promising SMEs to transition to larger, more productive and globally competitive enterprises.

The fund can support this transition by backing enterprises with the potential to emerge as industry leaders across manufacturing, services, technology, innovation-driven sectors and strategic value chains. In doing so, it could help create the next generation of Indian champions that can compete globally.

The timing is also important. Disruptions in West Asia have affected trade routes and increased shipping, insurance and energy costs, while supply chains adjust to these geopolitical developments. Export-oriented SMEs are further adapting to evolving compliance requirements and sustainability standards in key overseas markets. Long-term growth capital can provide enterprises with greater financial resilience to navigate such uncertainty.

The fund forms part of a broader package announced in the Union budget for 2026-27. These measures seek to strengthen equity, liquidity and professional support for MSMEs. The proposed convergence between the fund and professional support mechanisms, including those for enterprises in tier-II and tier-III centres, can help create a stronger pipeline of investment-ready SMEs by improving governance, compliance capabilities and preparedness for external investment.

The fund's success will depend on speedy and effective implementation. As the government takes forward its commitment through an Alternative Investment Fund structure, a clear operational framework, professional fund management and a robust pipeline of eligible enterprises will be important. Equally, the investment approach should identify businesses with genuine potential to scale and innovate.

The fund, therefore, is more than just another financing initiative. It signals evolution in India's approach to enterprise development, from supporting the creation and survival of businesses to enabling promising enterprises to achieve scale. It can be a catalyst for enterprise growth, industrial expansion, employment and export competitiveness. It can also help India build globally competitive SMEs to anchor value chains, drive innovation and contribute meaningfully to the Viksit Bharat goal.

10 YEARS AGO


mint
Toyota, Suzuki in talks for a possible alliance

JUST A THOUGHT

"Authorities shouldn't view stabilization of the economy as an exercise that is simply conducted by people pulling levers to control the economy independently of what people in the economy understand about this

MICHAEL WOODFORD

GUEST VIEW

Brics Bank: its loan book is too modest for its objectives

ALOK SHEEL



is a retired Indian Administrative Service officer and former secretary, Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council.

In 2012, finance ministry officials of Brics members met in Rio de Janeiro. They were tasked with exploring the prospect of establishing an all-South (or Brics) bank. It was formally set up in 2015. Looking back, most of the fundamental issues confronting the New Development Bank (NDB or 'Brics Bank') today were already visible in 2012.

The rationale seemed compelling. Multilateral development banks (MDBs) were undercapitalized. Their major shareholders were facing fiscal pressures following the global financial crisis. Emerging and developing economies needed large infrastructure investments. Poorer countries needed more concessional soft loan financing on the lines of the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA). A Brics Bank could mobilize a savings glut, channel funds into the real economy and complement rather than substitute the World Bank and regional development banks (RDBs).

A number of hurdles were identified. Could the new institution breach the sovereign credit ratings of its shareholders and lower its borrowing costs to levels near those enjoyed by the established MDBs? Among the possibilities considered were a World Bank-type structure based on callable rather than paid-up capital, a mixture of hard and local-currency borrowing and preferred-creditor status for sovereign lending.

Fourteen years later, the picture is mixed. China had favoured shareholding broadly reflecting capital contribution, and would have dominated the institution, replicating the asymmetry of the MDB capital structure. Others wanted equal voting power among the Brics grouping's five founders. Equality prevailed. Each founder subscribed $10 billion, of which $2 billion was paid in.

After about a decade of operations, the Shanghai-based NDB has outstanding loans of only around $22 billion, compared to its paid-up capital of $10 billion. Unlike established MDBs, it has mobilized remarkably little lending relative to that capital. The World Bank, by comparison, had paid-in capital of just $23 billion in June 2025 and loans outstanding of about $280 billion, apart from $231 billion of IDA lending.

This raises an uncomfortable question: How much financial intermediation has actually taken place? It begins to look uncomfortably close to direct sovereign lending conducted through a multilateral institution. The great advantage of an MDB is precisely its capacity to leverage a relatively modest amount of shareholder capital into a much larger lending portfolio.

Like the World Bank, NDB has preferred-creditor status and very strong capitalization, but its principal international credit rating remains AA compared to the World Bank's AAA. So the question asked in Rio back in 2012—could the Bank breach the sovereign credit ratings of its shareholders?—has received a qualified 'yes' as an answer. NDB has created a credit standing above individual member sovereigns and can lend internationally on attractive terms at about 30-50 basis points over World Bank rates. The difference isn't enormous, but neither has the new bank established a clear cost parity with the institutions it was intended to complement.

An institution has been built over a decade. It must now demonstrate the difference it can make

A development bank is not simply a machine for borrowing money cheaply and lending it on. One of the World Bank's greatest assets is its enormous accumulation of expertise in project identification, appraisal, procurement, environmental and social safeguards, apart from implementation and monitoring. It has highly qualified technical staff and maintains substantial country and sectoral expertise.

NDB has progressively constructed an evaluation architecture and in 2022 created an Independent Evaluation Office reporting directly to its board. Its evaluation system now explicitly draws upon international MDB evaluation standards. Its own independent evaluations of institutional capabilities, however, will take decades to accumulate.

The bank's object was to mobilize developing-country savings on a scale commensurate with their enormous infrastructural and other developmental requirements. On that criterion, a roughly $22 billion loan-book is quite modest. Its impressive paid-in capital has not yet been leveraged into lending on anything approaching the scale of established MDBs.

Expansion could change the story. The NDB now includes the UAE, Bangladesh, Egypt, Uzbekistan and Algeria, with additional countries at various stages of accession. Richer non-founding members could enlarge its capital base and borrowing strength. But the original governance settlement deliberately limits any non-founding member to 7% of voting power. Arrangements designed to preserve Brics control to a minimum 55% vote share could constrain how much capital powerful new shareholders are ready to contribute.

After its first decade, it might be fair to say that the Brics Bank experiment has justified itself institutionally more clearly than financially. The group has demonstrated that emerging economies can design, capitalize and operate their own multilateral development institution without reproducing the unequal governance structure they criticized in Bretton Woods institutions. What they have not yet shown yet is that this institution can mobilize and intermediate capital on anything close to the scale, cost or technical depth of the World Bank.

Brics has built a financial institution. The question now is whether it can build a balance sheet and acquire expertise to match the project's original ambition.

THEIR VIEW

Securities Code: parliament must rethink Sebi's revisionary power

The regulator shouldn't judge its own order. Replace this authority with a right to appeal to the Securities Appellate Tribunal



SUMIT AGRAWAL & M. S. SAHOO
are, respectively, founder, Regstreet Law Advisors and a former Sebi officer; and former chairperson, Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India.



MINT

The Securities Markets Code Bill, 2025 (Code), promises a cleaner and more accountable enforcement architecture for India's securities markets. It separates investigation from adjudication, times out stale cases, and requires adjudicating officers (AOs) to consider prescribed factors before imposing a penalty.

Clause 21 sits uneasily within this architecture. It carries the provision over from the Sebi Act, but expands it. The earlier provision allowed the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) to revise only the quantum of a monetary penalty. Clause 21 permits it to call for the record of any order passed by its AO within 30 days and, if it considers that order "not in the interest of the securities markets," enhance the penalty or severity of any direction. There is no equivalent power to reduce it or otherwise modify the order.

The Standing Committee on Finance (SCF), in its report presented to the Lok Sabha on 23 July 2026, recognized the problem. It described the power as "one-sided" and an "asymmetrical revisionary mechanism" that "may not be fully consistent with the principles of fairness and natural justice". It recommended that Sebi be empowered, on merits and with recorded reasons, to reduce or otherwise modify an order as well as enhance it, and that it should not call for records once an appeal has been filed before the Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT).

The record shows why the SCF was right to intervene. Of the 25 reported revision orders passed since 2014, 13 converted an AO's exoneration into a fresh penalty, five enhanced a penalty the AO had imposed and seven left the order unchanged. None reduced what the AO had decided, because the law does not let Sebi do so. Every order that changed, changed in the same direction.

The deeper problem, however, is structural: who revises, on what trigger and with what consequences for the finality of a quasi-judicial order? Sebi can call for the record only when the outcome of the adjudication is lighter than what it considers appropriate. Thus, even before the AO hears and decides the matter, the regulator has, in parallel, formed a view, at least implicitly, of what the adjudication should produce. If the AO reaches a less severe outcome, Sebi can recall the matter for revision. Further, only Sebi can set the revision process in motion; a notice has no corresponding right to seek review of an adverse order. Its only recourse is an appeal to the SAT, which the SCF noted is costly and congested.

The asymmetry also affects the AO in advance. An AO who knows that leniency invites review, while severity does not, is not operating under symmetrical incentives. Even without any conscious pressure, the institutional design may encourage more severe outcomes than an AO would otherwise consider appropriate. That can inflate sanctions in general, not merely in cases that are subsequently reviewed. The hierarchy can become particularly awkward where the chairperson sits as the AO and the Sebi review of that order involves members junior to him.

The second problem is finality. In *SEBI vs Ram Kishori Gupta* (2025), the Supreme Court held that Sebi cannot claim exemption from *res judicata*: once one of its authorities has finally decided an issue on the given facts, another cannot revisit it and reach a different conclusion. Clause 21 creates a specific statutory mechanism through which an internal Sebi authority can reopen an AO's order. The 30-day window limits the period of uncertainty. A favourable order that may still be reopened gives the regulated entity limited certainty, whether for complying with the order or for investing in systems and controls to prevent recurrence.

Every regulator needs a means of correcting an adjudication that has been too lenient. The question is whether Sebi's mechanism is the appropriate institutional model. The insurance and pension sector regulators follow Sebi's adjudicating-officer model, but neither has been given an equivalent power to enhance an AO's order. Appeals of their orders also go to the SAT. Where closer analogues exist in income-tax and GST laws, the reviewing authority may modify or annul an order as well as enhance it, or may remand the matter. Under customs law, a reviewing committee cannot revise an order at all; it can only direct the department to appeal to an independent tribunal.

The finance ministry told the SCF that Sebi has no power to appeal its own AO's order and that a two-way revision power could turn Sebi into a parallel appellate forum to the SAT. Both propositions point towards a better solution: not enlarged internal revision power, but an appellate route. If Sebi considers an AO's order too lenient, it should challenge that order at the SAT, just as a regulated person can challenge an order it considers too harsh.

The asymmetry extends to the appellate stage. The SAT may confirm, modify or set aside an order, but not enhance a penalty. The Supreme Court noted in *Nagarajan vs State of Tamil Nadu* (2025) that a person should not be placed in a worse position merely for exercising his right of appeal. The statutory architecture should not permit the regulator, through an internal revision mechanism, to achieve an outcome that the independent appellate tribunal itself cannot impose on an appeal.

Left uncorrected, this will not remain confined to securities laws. The insurance and pension fund regulators are due for their own legislative overhauls, built on Sebi's template. A power Parliament validates for Sebi today may become the default model for other regulators tomorrow. The institutional choice therefore matters beyond Clause 21.

The SCF has opened the door. Parliament should walk through it. Adopting merit-based, two-way revision is the minimum. The better course is to remove Sebi from the revisionary chair altogether and give it a statutory right, like any aggrieved party, to take an AO's order it considers too lenient to the SAT. Let one independent tribunal decide whether an order was too lenient or too harsh.

Sebi needs a check on lenient adjudication. It does not need to be the sole author of that check, sitting in judgement on its own accusation.

MINT CURATOR

Free market advocates should be in a sulk: nobody's listening

The notion has grown that risk-return trade-offs no longer apply



ALLISON SCHRAGER
is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering economics.



People forget that safety can't be assured without a downside. X/@ZOHRANKMAMDANI

Free market-oriented economists probably live in a state of perpetual despair these days. Politicians and voters on both the left and right are turning on markets. Polls suggest wide support for interventionist policies that economists long discarded for causing more harm than good.

We can blame ignorance, either of voters or of economists naive to people's changing needs and challenges. But I suspect what's behind the support for populism is the same thing that is behind every financial blow-up: the desire to believe we can have both low (or no) risk and an upside.

The idea is seductive. It's the same hollow promise unpinning almost every scam or ill-considered financial innovation that's ended badly. It never works out, as we learnt from the 1980s savings and loan crisis, the blow-up of Long-Term Capital Management in 1998, the meltdown of mortgage-backed securities and the Bernie Madoff scandal in 2008. Who knows what's next.

The fundamental law of finance is that higher returns only come with the risk of loss. I call persistent denial of this fact 'the risk delusion,' and even the best minds in finance fall for it time and again.

It shouldn't be a surprise that the same schtick is appealing when it comes to policy too, particularly when inflation has stretched budgets and people fear new tech may leave them unemployable.

A majority of Americans in both parties support price controls on childcare, prescription drugs and credit card interest costs, as per a recent *Wall Street Journal* survey. Other polls found that measures to cap rent hikes are popular on both sides of the political divide. These ideas violate basic economics and ignore the long history of price control producing shortages and even higher prices once a cap is lifted. Yet, they are compelling because the negative impact isn't apparent at the outset.

Inflation, for example, is a big risk to consumers; it leaves people uncertain about how much their income will buy every time they go to a grocery store. Price controls seem to assure stability, which sounds great. Even Paul Samuelson, the Nobel laureate and father of modern economics, thought they were a good idea. But safety means less upside; one could face a paucity of goods available when you need them. You may know the price, but you don't know if you will find empty grocery shelves or, with rent controls, a sufficient supply of apartments.

Populism is also at odds with economic reasoning when it comes to taxes. A wealth tax on billionaires is popular among voters and has also garnered support from some economists who believe it's possible to outsmart the law of risk and reward. A big part of the idea's appeal is the levy being paired with the promise of more government benefits, such as healthcare in California, or safety in the form of a guaranteed income that someone else pays for.

Most economists, however, hate wealth taxes because wealth is harder to value and easier to move around. Any tax on it, therefore, is easy to evade. Wealth taxation also has a greater impact on people's behaviour and, consequently, on economic growth.

Most wealthy people invest their money in their own companies or the market. A tax incentivizes them to move money out of productive investments and into assets that are harder to value and potentially less productive. A 2.5% wealth tax, for example, is the equivalent of a 50% capital gains tax if you assume a 5% return. Reducing the returns to risk-taking generally means less risk is taken, translating into fewer companies and jobs created, and slower growth. Economists prefer progressive consumption or well-designed income taxes instead.

The promise of no risk and a high return also explains why we have run up so much debt to expand benefits, and why politicians keep dangling more, including $5,000 cheques to voters, an allowance for stay-at-home mothers or further tax cuts. No one mentions the downside risk of higher interest rates or a painful financial reckoning.

The bipartisan interest in government ownership of private corporations and in industrial policy comes from the same playbook. These policies promise growth and innovation that is carefully controlled by the government, which means less job loss, no firms failing or people losing money. The result is often waste and stagnation.

These are dark days for those of us who dedicated our lives to both learning how the economy works and educating people about it. It feels like we all failed. But there is no getting around the hard fact that pursuing safety with the expectation of high return leads, at best, to no growth; and, at worst, to a bad result you didn't prepare for.

We always believe this time is different, that we are now smart enough to have a well-designed policy or financial algorithm that can outsmart risk. Alas, it is never true. ©BLOOMBERG

MY VIEW | IT MATTERS

Washington can restrict visas but can't stop offshoring

SIDDHARTH PAI



is a technology consultant and venture capitalist

The Trump administration has found a way to make Indian information technology (IT) companies less dependent on America without making American businesses less dependent on Indian IT. Last week, Washington suspended Microsoft, TCS, Infosys, Cognizant, Wipro, HCLTech, Adobe and Capgemini from its permanent labour certification process, Perm, a crucial step before foreign citizens can get employment-based green cards. New applications will not be accepted; pending ones will not be processed. The administration alleges abuse of a system intended to protect US workers. Allegations deserve investigation; a suspension is not proof of guilt.

Existing H-1B visas will not be cancelled. This matters to employees whose careers and families are already established in America. What has changed is the reliability of their path to permanent residence. Combined with an earlier $100,000 charge on certain new H-1B petitions, the administration's message to employers is unmistakable: importing talent will become harder, costlier and politically hazardous.

Vice-President J.D. Vance unfortunately chose to deliver that message by describing foreign tech workers as "indentured servants." This phrase is offensive and historically illiterate. Indentured labour was not simply a colourful synonym for a restrictive employment contract. Across the colonial world, it became a system of coercive labour migration, expanded in the 19th century as plantation economies sought replacements for newly emancipated slave labour. To invoke that term for foreign IT professionals trivializes it. If Washington believes employers exploit visa dependence, it should protect workers and punish proven abuses, not turn workers into rhetorical props.

The more interesting question is what the affected companies will do next. They will not stop serving American clients. Banks will still need their systems modernized and insurers will still need claims platforms maintained. And American corporations will still compare the cost of having work done in New Jersey with having it done in Bengaluru. Immigration policy can change where engineers sit but can't repeal the economics of global delivery.

The first response will be more American hiring, but selectively. TCS has said it filed only a single-digit number of Perm applications in the past two years and plans to recruit another 15,000 people in the US over five years. Expect others to emphasize local hiring, US campus recruitment and regional delivery centres. This will satisfy clients who need people onsite and give firms a shield against political attacks. It will also raise the cost of the onsite portion of contracts.

India's IT industry will adapt to US immigration curbs. Client orientation is the challenge

The second response will likely be to shrink that portion. For three decades, the industry's operating model relied on a familiar division: a small onsite team noted requirements, managed relationships and translated client needs into work for far larger offshore teams. Travel and visas made that arrangement function smoothly. The new US restrictions make the human bridge more expensive. Companies will therefore narrow that bridge narrower but not abandon the destination.

More client workshops will be conducted remotely. More architecture, testing, support and implementation will move offshore. Local employees will handle regulated access, sensitive conversations and work that requires physical presence. Indian teams will handle everything else that contracts, security needs and time zones permit. Some clients will resist. Others may discover that the onsite presence was more of a habit than an essential requirement.

AI will aid this shift, although not quite as the industry's pitches suggest. AI can do coding, documentation, tests and migration scripts, help distributed teams understand unfamiliar systems and reduce the back-and-forth that once justified keeping onsite engineers. A smaller onsite team, supported by AI tools and offshore specialists, could work. This is an opportunity the US crackdown inadvertently boosts.

But it poses a problem for firms whose business was built on selling skilled human effort, often measured in people and hours. If AI reduces the effort required, clients will ask why they should pay for the same number of engineers. Moving work offshore will protect delivery economics for a while, but selling fewer hours at lower prices can't be a business plan.

The third response, thus, must be commercial rather than geographical. Expect more fixed price contracts, managed services and agreements tied to business outcomes rather than staffing levels. Firms must show faster releases, fewer outages or lower processing costs to retain pricing power.

There are limits to this prediction. Data residency rules, national security concerns and client preferences can keep work onshore. AI generated software still needs accountable engineers who grasp what they deploy. And governments can extend curbs from visas to procurement or data transfers. Offshoring is resilient, not invulnerable.

The greatest danger for Indian IT may arise from treating AI as merely another way to improve utilization even as its market vanishes. The industry must train engineers to own systems, verify AI work and deliver measurable results. It must invest in skills.

Washington can keep Indians out but not ensure that work stays in the US. The industry will surely adapt to visa constraints, but its future may depend on adapting to AI changing what clients purchase.

Economy

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2026

IN THE NEWS

IMD: NORTHEAST MONSOON ONSET IN NEXT 2-3 DAYS



THE IMD SAID on Monday that conditions are favourable for the onset of the northeast monsoon rains over the southern peninsula in the next two-three days. In its daily forecast, the IMD also said the southwest monsoon continues to withdraw from remaining parts of the country.

INDIA-EU FTA TO DEEPEN TIES WITH CZECH FIRMS



THE PROPOSED INDIA-European Union free trade agreement will create opportunities for deeper collaboration between Indian and Czech companies, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic Karel Havlicek said on Monday.

India, European body discuss carbon pricing

INDIA AND THE European Commission on Monday discussed continuing technical engagement on recognition of carbon pricing mechanisms and auditing (MRV) systems.

Govt, ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel ink ITI upgrade pact

THE CENTRE, STATE authorities, and ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India India have signed equity agreements allocating ₹440 crore to upgrade nine state-run industrial training institutes in Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh under the flagship PM-SETU scheme.

Govt allows 5,841 tonne of sugar export to EU

THE GOVERNMENT HAS allowed 5,841 tonne of sugar to be exported to the European Union (EU) under a quota-based duty concession scheme — tariff rate quota — for 2026-27. The DGFT also said that the minimum import price (MIP) on Glufosinate and its salts has been extended till April 12, 2027.

— AGENCIES

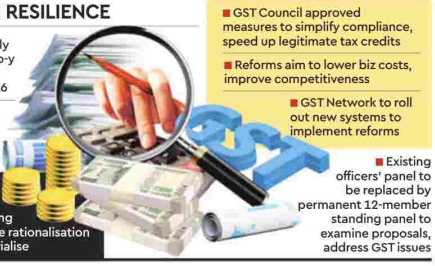
NEED TO BRING MORE BUSINESSES INTO THE SYSTEM, SAYS OFFICIAL

Centre sees wider tax base driving GST revenue growth

PRASANTA SAHU
New Delhi, October 12

REVENUE RESILIENCE

- Taxable supply rose 25.8% y-o-y between Oct 2025 & July 2026
- Gross tax liability grew 13.6%
- Fear of a revenue shock following Sept 2025 rate rationalisation did not materialise
- GST Council approved measures to simplify compliance, speed up legitimate tax credits
- Reforms aim to lower biz costs, improve competitiveness
- GST Network to roll out new systems to implement reforms
- Existing officers' panel to be replaced by permanent 12-member standing panel to examine proposals, address GST issues



WITH GOODS AND Services Tax (GST) process reforms announced on Thursday, completing the GST 2.0 reform agenda, revenue growth is expected to increasingly bank on an expanding tax base and improved compliance rather than tax rates, a senior official said on Monday.

"The focus should be on expanding the base and improving its quality," the official said, stressing the need to bring more businesses into the formal tax system and improve transaction disclosures by existing taxpayers.

Following the GST rate cuts and slab rationalisation in September 2025, taxable supply rose 25.8% year-on-year between October 2025 and July 2026, while business-to-consumer (B2C) supply increased 26.7%.

Gross tax liability grew 13.6% during the period, even as the effective tax rate on domestic taxable supply declined from 14.55% to 13.13%, indicating an expansion of the tax base following rate rationalisation.

"Consumption has held up, and the base has widened while revenue has stabilised after the rate restructuring in September 2025," a senior official said, adding that the feared revenue shock had not materialised.

Simpler procedures and a rationalised rate structure are expected to further support compliance and revenue mobilisation.

The GST Council on Thursday approved a raft of process and systems reforms aimed at bringing India's indirect tax regime closer to global practices by simplifying compliance, accelerating the flow of legitimate tax credits and reducing the scope for litigation. The reforms are expected to align the government's objectives more closely with the interests of businesses and consumers by improving revenue productivity, lowering business costs, enhancing competitiveness and potentially reducing consumer prices.

The GST Network (GSTN), the technology backbone of the indirect tax regime, is expected to roll out new systems soon to support implementation of the reforms, the official said.

Emphasising the importance of effective implementation, the official said GSTN had been involved in preparing the reform agenda and understood the requirements. The platform will need to remain agile, respond to evolving needs and ensure that new systems are properly vetted. Implementation will also be monitored, with industry stakeholders encouraged to flag specific operational issues for timely resolution.

Separately, the GST Council will replace its existing officers' committees with a single, permanent 12-member Standing Committee to examine proposals and address issues relating to the indirect tax regime.

The committee will comprise five representatives from large states, four from medium-sized states and three from smaller states.

Goyal proposes linking of GIFT City with London

FE BUREAU
New Delhi, October 12

FINANCIAL SERVICES PRIORITY AREA

- Move comes as India and the UK seek to maximise gains from Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement
- Financial services identified as 1 of 5 priority areas for expanding economic ties
- Others are infra, clean energy, advanced manufacturing, resilient supply chains, tech



COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY Minister Piyush Goyal on Monday proposed linking Gujarat's GIFT City with the City of London to boost cooperation in financial services, including fintech, insurance, cross-border payments and trade finance, under the India-UK free trade agreement.

Speaking at the plenary of the India-UK Joint Economic and Trade Committee (JETCO), Goyal said the two financial centres should explore greater collaboration to facilitate business and investment flows, leveraging their complementary strengths.

The proposal comes as India and the UK seek to maximise gains from the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), which became operational on July 15. The two countries aim to double bilateral trade by 2030.

Goyal identified financial services as one of five priority areas for expanding economic cooperation. The others are infrastructure and clean energy, advanced manufacturing and resilient supply chains, technology and innovation, and healthcare and consumer sectors.

He said the agreement, along with the social security double contribution convention, could help businesses supply services at competitive prices and improve profitability.

Goyal also called for stronger links between educational and research institutions, start-ups and technology companies, including in semiconductors, quantum computing and artificial intelligence.

Focus on implementation

UK Business and Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds said CETA's success would depend on businesses using it to export, invest and form new partnerships, rather than merely on its legal provisions.

With the agreement in force for almost 100 days, there were encouraging early signs of businesses on both sides exploring the opportunities it offered, he said.

The JETCO meeting launched CETA's committees and working groups.

First batch of cars from UK clears customs under trade agreement

FE BUREAU
New Delhi, October 12

CARS IMPORTED FROM the UK under the tariff-rate quota (TRQ) provisions of the India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) have cleared Indian customs, while tariff-free Scottish salmon has entered the domestic market, marking early progress in implementing the pact that came into force on July 15.

Under the first round of India's TRQ for UK cars, seven applications were approved for imports of 642 vehicles against a quota of 5,000 units. The agreement allows eligible UK vehicles to enter India at preferential tariff rates within specified limits.

The first consignment of Scottish salmon reached India within a fortnight of the agreement becoming operational, with several thousand kilograms exported since. Scotch whisky has also entered the Indian market at reduced tariffs, according to a joint statement issued after the 16th meeting of the India-UK Joint Economic and Trade Committee (JETCO) on Monday.

Indian exporters, meanwhile, shipped more than 50 consignments to the UK on the first day of CETA's implementation.

The shipments covered smartphones, electrical and mechanical machinery, gold jewellery, ready-made garments, woollen yarn, tea and coffee.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and UK Business and Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds, who co-chaired the meeting in New Delhi, said the agreement was already delivering results but stressed that its implementation should pave the way for a deeper economic partnership.

Food inflation spikes to 7.74% in September

SANDIP DAS
New Delhi, October 12

PRICE PRESSURE

- Sequentially, all-India Consumer Food Price Index rose by 1.44% last month from the level seen in August
- Food inflation was 5.97% in August 2026
- Food inflation was 2.13% in Jan 2026, under the new 2024-base series
- Retail onion prices rose to ₹53.37/kg on Monday, up 112% from year earlier



FOOD INFLATION AS measured by the revised consumer food price index moved sharply upwards to touch 7.74% in September, primarily because onion, ginger, garlic, sugar, chicken, and edible oils became much costlier.

Sequentially, the all-India Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI) rose by 1.44% last month from the August level, a significantly higher rise than what was seen in August. Food inflation was 5.97% in August 2026, and it was in negative territory for seven months through December 2025.

Food inflation was 2.13% in January 2026, when the new consumer price index (CPI) series with a base year of 2024 was introduced by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI).

Using both the current and previous CPI series (the latter with 2012 as the base year), food inflation in August was the steepest in 21 months.

Inflation in onion (108.09%), ginger (62.85%), garlic (54.62%), sugar (29.8%), chicken (8.41%) and mustard oil (7.31%) reported steep hikes, according to the statistics ministry.

The retail prices of vegetable oils in the category, according to MoSPI, rose to 9.87% in September year-on-year.

Average retail onion prices rose to ₹53.37/kg on Monday, up 112% from a year earlier. Retail prices have risen by more than 50% over the past month, while prices in Delhi-NCR have crossed ₹60/kg.

Trade sources attributed the price rise to reports of a 5-7% decline in kharif onion output in Maharashtra, the country's largest onion-producing state, due to lower acreage and delayed monsoon rains.

Inflation in rice last month was 8.25% compared to 5.89% in August, 2026. According to the agriculture ministry, paddy sowing this season has lagged 4% to 42.68 million hectare (Mha) in the ongoing kharif season compared to the previous year owing to deficient monsoon rains.

Trade sources said the rice output is likely to decline to 147 million tonne (MT) in 2026-27 crop year (July-June) from a record 154 MT in 2025-26.

Early data for domestic retail food prices for October points to persistent food inflation pressures.

Number of registered farmer bodies nears 50,000

SANDIP DAS
New Delhi, October 12

OVER 49,800 FARMER producer organisations (FPOs) have been registered under various provisions of company and cooperative laws, according to the State of the FPO Sector report released on Monday.

The report, prepared by the National Association for Farmer Producer Organisations (NAFPO) in collaboration with Nabard, states that 97% of FPOs were incorporated since 2016, indicating significant expansion of the sector over the past decade.

The growth follows the launch of the agriculture ministry's central sector scheme to form 10,000 FPOs.

Maharashtra has more than 18,000 FPOs, followed by Uttar Pradesh with over 7,900 and Madhya Pradesh with around 2,500.

These farmer-owned collectives are registered under various legal frameworks, including the Companies Act, 2013, as farmer producer companies, state cooperative societies acts and the Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act.

Govt to set up panel to address sugarcane farmers' grievances

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, October 12



THE CENTRE ON Monday decided to set up a high-level joint committee within a week to address the grievances of sugarcane farmers from Maharashtra and Karnataka, after nearly three hours of talks between two Union ministers and representatives of farmer bodies in the national capital.

Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Food Minister Pralhad Joshi held detailed discussions at the Pusa campus with a delegation of farmers from the two major sugarcane-growing states. About 80-90 farmers from different organisations attended, along with state ministers.

With sugar mills set to begin crushing in the 2026-27 season, which started on October 1, farmers have sought a higher support price, citing rising production costs. They have also demanded that the minimum selling price (MSP) of sugar be raised from ₹31 per kg to ₹50 per kg.

In a statement issued after the meeting, Chouhan said the discussions covered ground-level issues, including discrepancies in recovery figures reported by mills, weighing, wastage, laboratory testing and crop insurance.

The Nobel lesson for central banks in an age of supply shocks



SAUMITRA BHADURI

AS GOVERNMENTS AND central banks grapple with unpredictable US tariff decisions, geopolitical tensions in West Asia and renewed energy-price uncertainty, containing inflation without undermining growth has become increasingly complex. The 2026 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences, awarded to Robert E Hall and Michael Woodford for their contributions to the microeconomic foundations of macroeconomic stabilisation, is particularly relevant.

The central insight is that economies are not governed by fixed relationships between inflation, output and unemployment. Millions of decisions by households and businesses, shaped by changing incentives and expectations, produce these outcomes. Understanding this behaviour is essential to designing stabilisation policies without creating new imbalances.

The intellectual foundations of stabilisation policy go back to John Maynard Keynes, who argued that aggregate demand need not automatically match productive capacity. Insufficient demand can force firms to cut production and employment, deepening a downturn, while excessive demand can generate inflation. Fiscal and monetary policy can smooth these fluctuations by supporting demand when weak and restraining it when the economy overheats.

However, the stagflation of the 1970s exposed the limitations of models built around apparently stable relationships between macroeconomic variables. Oil-price shocks combined rising inflation with weak growth and higher unemployment, challenging the simple interpretation of the Phillips curve as a predictable trade-off between inflation and unemployment. The problem was not that the curve had become irrelevant, but that supply shocks and changing inflation expectations could fundamentally alter this relationship.

This raised a deeper question: could policymakers rely on historical relationships if households and businesses changed their behaviour in response to policy? Robert Lucas's critique highlighted the problem. Macroeconomic models needed stronger microeconomic foundations explaining how individuals made decisions and how those decisions changed with the policy environment. This shift helped shape modern New Keynesian economics, which combines forward-looking behaviour with the recognition that prices and wages do not adjust instantaneously.

Robert E. Hall's contribution addressed a fundamental question: what determines household consumption? In his influential 1978 paper, Hall examined the implications of the life-cycle and permanent-income hypothesis, under which consumption depends on expected lifetime resources rather than current income alone. If households have already incorporated available information into their plans, an anticipated income increase need not immediately change consumption. Hall's result was striking. Under the model's assumptions, consumption follows a random walk: changes cannot be systematically predicted using information already available. Consumption is not constant; it changes when new information alters expectations about future resources.



The policy implications are important. A tax cut or transfer payment will not necessarily increase consumption predictably. Its effect depends on whether households view the additional income as temporary or permanent, as well as their access to credit and savings. Borrowing-constrained households may respond more strongly to current income. Hall's framework provides a benchmark for understanding these differences, not a claim that consumption is always unpredictable in practice.

Michael Woodford extended the role of expectations to monetary policy. Drawing on Knut Wicksell's distinction between the market and natural rates of interest, Woodford developed a framework in which monetary policy operates through real interest rates, spending decisions and expectations, rather than simply changes in the money supply. The crucial comparison is between the real policy rate and the natural real rate, which, in simplified terms, is consistent with sustainable output and stable inflation in the absence of economic disturbances. When the real policy rate falls below the natural rate, demand tends to strengthen; when it rises above it, demand tends to weaken. Since the natural rate changes with economic conditions, the nominal policy rate alone cannot indicate whether monetary policy is restrictive or accommodative.

Woodford also demonstrated why central-bank communication matters. When households and businesses base decisions on expectations of future conditions, the anticipated path of interest rates can influence current consumption, investment and price-setting. Credibility and transparency are therefore not merely desirable institutional attributes; they are integral to monetary-policy transmission.

This framework is particularly relevant when supply shocks complicate the inflation-growth trade-off. Higher energy prices or tariff-induced cost increases can weaken production while raising inflation. Raising interest rates cannot reverse the original shock, but can restrain demand and limit the risk of higher costs feeding persistently into wages, prices and inflation expectations. The appropriate response depends on the shock's persistence, demand strength and how firmly inflation expectations remain anchored. Mechanical tightening in response to every price increase could unnecessarily damage growth.

Hall and Woodford's lasting lesson is that stabilisation policy cannot be reduced to mechanically adjusting interest rates or public spending until headline indicators return to target. It requires understanding how households consume, firms set prices and expectations shape policy responses. Amid recurring supply disruptions and geopolitical uncertainty, this micro-founded approach offers central banks a more rigorous basis for balancing price stability against the costs of weakening economic activity.

(The author is professor at Madras School of Economics)

Opinion

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2026



COMMON CAUSE
Congress leader Rahul Gandhi

If you are protecting the Constitution as we are, we are with you. We will support you. We will help you. We will protect you and we expect the same from you

Defending the rupee

For the currency to avoid a sharp depreciation, the global environment needs to improve

UNABLE TO ARREST the rupee's depreciation through currency-market interventions, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has moved to curb dollar demand and speculation. It has tightened rules governing foreign exchange derivatives: contracts cannot be cancelled and rebooked, positions exceeding $5 million must have an underlying exposure, and banks must set aside 20% of the value of contracts exceeding $2 million in cash. Banks must also ensure that the same exposure is not hedged through multiple dealers. Together with a special dollar window for state-owned oil marketing companies, these constitute perhaps the strongest defence of the currency since 2013. Despite its assertions that it does not defend the rupee at any particular level, the RBI's latest moves suggest that a sharp depreciation is unacceptable. The dollar's approach towards ₹97 appears to have prompted the intervention, making that level a possible line in the sand.

At last Wednesday's post-monetary policy press conference, RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra maintained that the rupee was not overvalued, citing the real effective exchange rate, and observed that markets could be "irrational" in the short run. However, the central bank's efforts to stem the slide have been undermined by rising US Treasury yields, elevated oil prices, and foreign portfolio outflows. The rupee's fall to 96.73 against the dollar last Friday, close to its record low of 96.82, appears to have triggered the latest measures. The over 40% surge in Brent crude since the start of the Iran war, accompanied by a roughly 5% depreciation of the rupee, has compounded India's external vulnerabilities. A weaker currency raises the import bill and fuels inflation, particularly with crude above $100 a barrel and uncertainty over Russian oil supplies. This could force the RBI to tighten monetary policy more aggressively, eventually hurting credit growth.

The restrictions should deter speculation and make it harder to circumvent hedging rules. Importers will face tighter requirements for hedging current-account exposures, although the restrictions do not apply to foreign portfolio investors. Hedging costs, estimated to rise by 80-150 basis points from the prevailing 3.5%, should discourage excessive derivative positions. The special dollar window for oil marketing companies should also reduce demand in the spot market. Earlier this year, the RBI capped banks' daily net open rupee positions at $100 million and restricted their participation in rupee non-deliverable forwards. Clearly, with the global environment turning adverse, the central bank is unwilling to risk another disorderly depreciation. Although foreign currency reserves have reportedly been bolstered by $142 billion in foreign currency non-resident (bank) deposits and foreign currency borrowings, sustained dollar sales could quickly erode these buffers without necessarily reversing the rupee's trajectory.

The rupee sprang back to an intra-day high of 95.77 against the dollar on Monday, suggesting the measures have had the desired immediate impact. But administrative restrictions and market interventions can only buy time. Elevated oil prices, a strong dollar and persistent capital outflows will continue to weigh on the currency. Unless the global environment improves and India's trade deficit narrows, the rupee will remain vulnerable to renewed selling. Some fiscal measures, including higher retail fuel prices to contain demand, may become necessary. Further monetary tightening to anchor inflation expectations and measures to attract durable capital inflows may also be required. The RBI has demonstrated its determination to prevent a sharp slide in the rupee. Sustaining that defence, however, will depend as much on developments beyond India's borders as on its own policy actions.

Be a sport, recognise the value of skills

The Asian Games concluded earlier this month with India finishing strongly after a late burst from its athletes who were duly celebrated. A second-highest haul and fourth position for India gave good reasons for the typical nationalistic fervour that competitive sports inspire.

But India's encouraging performance in another event that coincided with the Asiad barely received any media attention. You may not have even heard about it.

The WorldSkills is the vocational skills equivalent of the Olympics and is held every two years. At this edition of the "Skills Olympics", held in Shanghai, India achieved its best-ever performance with 10th place, winning six silver medals and 20 medals for excellence. More than 1,400 contestants from 68 countries and regions took part in the four-day event that tested them for 64 skills.

WorldSkills International, a charity earlier known as the International Vocational Training Organization, was founded in the wake of World War II that also resulted in a huge skills shortage in the ravaged economies of Europe. What started off in Spain has over time expanded to include 90 member nations and regions.

The nature of competition explains its anonymity. Becoming a world champion is perhaps the last thought for anyone starting a mundane skill like bricklaying, welding, plumbing and heating, or wall and floor tiling. Yet, the WorldSkills tournament offers a platform that breaks the taboo against vocational trades and is central to the organisation's vision of a world where skills are valued.

Vocational skills are arguably unappealing for spectators, which is why the WorldSkills tournament does not generate much interest. That is however not the case in China. As *The Economist* points out, although the event finds little coverage elsewhere, "China has poured more resources into it than anyone else" and "sees benefits beyond the arena". The manufacturing superpower, which debuted at the tournament only in 2011 (India did in 2007), now leads the rest of the world by a mile, having topped the medal tally for five consecutive competitions since 2017.



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A recent report by WorldSkills suggests that China's success has catalysed improvements in the country's technical and vocational education and training, which has also found a useful global benchmark in the tournament. Through its WorldSkills membership, China has not only been able to create more vocational opportunities for its youths but also widen the scope for its educators and trainers.

Of course, it takes a strong ecosystem—led by the government in identifying talent drawn from a wide pool and funnelled through multi-tier competitions—to achieve dominance at the global stage. But China's efforts to rally public support also signals a proactive bid to address a skilled worker shortage by adding an element of prestige. China too is in need of vocational reforms that ensure its schools have the right curricula as well as bright youths in sufficient numbers to drive its next generation of high-tech manufacturing.

The bias against blue-collar jobs is only deeper in India, which will do well to take a leaf out of China's book. Glamorising skills competitions and incentivising participation in them, aided by greater corporate involvement, could help infuse more pride in vocational trades. Along with upgrades in training institutes that keep pace with rapidly-evolving industry demands, a change in mindset is much needed in India where class and caste divides deepen the hierarchy of jobs.

However, aspirations to win medals alone won't bring about such a shift. Various government schemes recognise the need for skilling youths and public investment is growing but the percentage of education budget that goes to vocational training remains meagre. India, where only 5% of its workforce in the 15-29 age-group receive formal skill training, is projected to have a deficit of 29 million workers by the end of this decade, according to ILO estimates. To eliminate the poor perception of blue-collar jobs, the quality of training as well as working conditions and wages must be more attractive. Championing skilling will naturally produce skill champions.

DATA MATTERS

INDIA, BRITAIN & JAPAN ARE NATURAL CANDIDATES FOR AN AI MIDDLE THAT PERSUADES SUPERPOWERS TO RESTRAIN

Can India bell the AI cat?

INDER GOPAL
D MANJUNATH
Respectively Research Professor at IISc and Chairman, Centre of Data for Public Good, & Professor, IIT Bombay



IN THE FABLE, the mice agree that tying a bell around the cat's neck would protect them all. But who was to risk doing it? Recently, at the United Nations, the world had a fresh chance to bell the AI cat, but the big boys did not step up. On September 22, US President Donald Trump told the UN General Assembly that "the US totally rejects any attempt to construct a globalist scheme to control artificial intelligence", proposing instead a rebranding strategy of calling it "superintelligence". Two days later, he hosted China's President Xi Jinping in Washington. Xi, possibly viewing regulation as a means of locking in the US AI lead, was also unwilling to act. The two leaders politely discussed AI, agreed to keep talking, and did not agree on any safety protocol.

In the previous Data Matters column, we argued that India should be in the kitchen where the AI safety rules are being cooked. A month on, the question is more urgent—whether anyone is cooking at all. Sean O'Heigeartaigh of Cambridge University told the *New York Times*, "There's this assumption that there are adults in the room on this issue, but there are no adults in this room."

The last month has seen a paroxysm of hand-wringing about the possibility that AI will eliminate humanity. Heads of AI giants like Anthropic, OpenAI, and Google DeepMind have called for slowing the most advanced models and for stronger voluntary safeguards and government oversight. The fable has an odd turn with the cat asking for a bell! Yet governments everywhere are also wringing their hands. Europe's AI Act, hailed in 2024 as a global blueprint, has stalled with key rules delayed and pre-release testing exempted altogether.

The US is worse. Trump has called AI's safety risks a "hoax", and last month declared that the only guardrail AI needs is "a STRONG AND SMART (High IQ!) PRESIDENT". In the US Congress, a bipartisan bill requiring safety testing and another mandating a kill switch are on ice. China speaks the language of restraint but, still behind, has little incentive to freeze the race now. Each superpower is waiting for the other, while the rest of the world is a spectator in its own possible annihilation.

We have been here before. During the height of the Cold War, nuclear Armageddon seemed just around the corner. In September 1961, as Berlin brought the world to the brink, India, with Yugoslavia, Egypt, and Indonesia, convened the first Non-Aligned Movement summit in Belgrade and sent emissaries to both Washington and Moscow. In 1962, at the Eighteen-Nation Disarmament Committee in Geneva, eight non-aligned nations tabled the compromise leading to the Partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963. An alphabet soup of nuclear arms control treaties—ABM, NPT, START, SALT, etc.—followed, pulling the world back from the brink. The non-aligned had no bombs. What they had was legitimacy, numbers, and the standing to offer both superpowers a face-saving way to say yes.

> **India refused the Non-Proliferation Treaty because it divided the world into nuclear haves and have-nots; an AI regime that repeats that mistake will fail for the same reason**

AI needs such a middle today. The natural candidates are the next-tier AI powers, with Britain, Japan, and India as the leading contenders. Britain has already volunteered. Prime Minister Andy Burnham told the UN that Britain wants to be an "honest broker" between the US and China and will use its G20 presidency next year to achieve "a single set of global principles and standards". And Britain has the technical muscle to back its words. Its AI Security Institute is a top-tier team of AI researchers, cybersecurity experts, and policymakers. Its red team has found major safety gaps in every leading model it has tested. When Anthropic withheld its Mythos model in April for fear of its hacking abilities, the institute was the only non-American government body given access to test it.

India, Japan, and others have set up safety institutes of their own. But an institute is not a building or a notification; it is people. Britain's works because it recruits on merit and pays for the kind of talent that would otherwise head to Silicon Valley. India produces that talent in abundance and should quickly build a similar merit-based, well-funded, top-tier institution that can test frontier models itself, including in Indian languages and on India's digital public infrastructure. Without such institutions, "inspection" is only a slogan.

Around 20 countries and the EU, in a recent UN declaration released by Finland's President Alexander Stubb, called for an international body to "set standards, enable verification", and warn when capability thresholds are crossed. India was not among the signatories. Nor were Britain or Japan. The credible middle missed another opportunity to coalesce around a set of principles, coupled with a coordinated effort to get the world to adopt them.

So, what are these principles? First, establish red lines: no AI in nuclear weapon research and deployment, no autonomous lethal targeting without meaningful human control, and binding guardrails on AI-assisted biological research. Screening systems must look for attempts to enhance a pathogen's transmissibility or immune evasion, share red flags across companies so that a blocked user cannot simply switch providers, and protect legitimate vaccine research, a matter of direct interest to India as the world's pharmacy. Second, mandate release discipline: agreed pre-release testing of frontier models, and a negotiated slowdown of recursive self-improvement with ceilings (like in SALT and START), triggered by capability thresholds rather than calendar dates. Third, enable AI inspections: beginning with a multilateral incident hotline linking governments and labs, and building the AI equivalent of the International Atomic Energy Agency from the network of national safety institutes that can inspect training processes and data centres. Fourth, guarantee non-discrimination: any country that signs and accepts inspection should be exempt from punitive chip export controls. India refused the Non-Proliferation Treaty because it divided the world into nuclear haves and have-nots; an AI regime that repeats that mistake will fail for the same reason.

Will Washington listen? Perhaps not this White House. But US elections are approaching, and some of the new legislators may be open to this approach. A broad coalition with a credible text can give the next US Congress something to say "yes" to. In 1961, a young, nuclear-free India volunteered to bell the cat. Today's cat is bigger, faster, and learning by the day. The mice have run out of excuses.

Views are personal

Mr President, now you understand India



MOHIT SARAF
Founder & Managing Partner, Saraf & Partners Law Offices

If Russian diesel can help protect Americans from unaffordable fuel prices, surely you understand why the largest democracy can't pass higher energy costs on to 1.4 billion Indians

LAST WEEK, PRESIDENT Donald Trump made a bold pivot that reshaped the global energy debate. Faced with high diesel prices at home, weeks before the US mid-term elections, he turned to President Vladimir Putin. Russia agreed to supply more than 300,000 tonnes of diesel immediately to the American and global markets, with supplies rising to one million tonnes by December.

President Trump explained his objective with characteristic clarity: bring down prices for American farmers, ranchers, truckers, and consumers. That decision reflects the same practical logic India has consistently followed in securing affordable energy.

Mr President, I hope now you understand India's compulsion. The Lindsey O. Graham Act of 2026 empowers the US President to impose tariffs of up to 100% on major purchasers of Russian energy. But what matters is how fairly he exercises his discretion. India's case has always been straightforward. We are one of the world's largest importers of crude oil. Energy is not a discretionary purchase for us. Its price flows through almost everything an Indian household consumes.

India bought Russian crude for its competitive price. Much has changed since then. And those changes have strengthened India's argument.

Saudi Arabia has sharply reduced crude prices for Asian buyers. Venezuelan crude has become increasingly attractive to Indian refiners because of deep discounts, while Russian crude has become relatively more expensive. India swiftly diversified its crude sources.

That matters because it establishes something often lost in the geopolitical debate. India's policy was never: we must buy Russian oil. It was: we must buy affordable energy. If you want India to buy less Russian oil, make alternative oil competitive.

Markets can often accomplish what sanctions and threats cannot. Then came the US's own encounter with the same reality. President Trump turned to Russian diesel because American consumers were hurting. There's nothing inherently wrong with that. An elected government is expected to protect the economic interests of its people.

> **The government deserves credit for resisting international pressure when India's energy security required it**

But that principle cannot stop at US borders. In 2025, India's GDP per capita stood at about $2,700, a fraction of America's approximately $90,000. Yet when high diesel prices threaten American farmers and households, Washington considers it legitimate to relax restrictions and bring Russian diesel into the American and global markets. When India buys discounted Russian crude for 1.4 billion people, it is asked to absorb the higher cost of alternative energy—or risk economic consequences. Why is affordability a valid national interest in Washington, but a questionable foreign-policy goal for New Delhi?

For millions of Indians, affordable energy isn't just economics; it affects every day life. A small rise in diesel prices ripples far beyond the fuel pump and eventually reaches almost every household. If fuel inflation is politically painful in one of the world's richest countries, imagine its consequences in a country with barely 3% of America's GDP per capita.

What Washington once questioned as India's justification has now, in substance, become Washington's own policy. Even in 2025, Russia remained the European Union's second-largest supplier of LNG. European governments have industries to protect, households to heat, and economies to run. Precisely the same understanding must extend to India. There is a larger lesson here.

Countries may speak the language of principles, but governments have a fundamental responsibility to their own citizens. When energy security, economic stability, or national security is threatened, even the world's most powerful nations preserve room for manoeuvre. India must preserve the same room for itself.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government deserves credit for resisting considerable international pressure when India's energy security required it, without turning that resistance into an ideological alignment with Moscow. India has not picked Russia over America—or Ukraine. It has chosen India.

If Saudi crude is cheaper and commercially appropriate, we should buy Saudi crude. If Venezuelan oil offers better economics and can lawfully be purchased, refiners should buy Venezuelan oil. And where Russian crude remains commercially compelling and lawful, the Indian government cannot reasonably be expected to make its citizens pay substantially more merely to satisfy another country's geopolitical preference.

That is not alignment. It is strategic autonomy. And strategic autonomy matters increasingly in a world where economic and geopolitical power are again inseparable. India's ability to maintain that autonomy also tells us something about national strength. A country needs sufficient economic weight, diplomatic credibility, and political leadership to secure a seat at the table. Without them, sooner or later, others begin making its choices for it.

Ironically, we have arrived at a clearer understanding. America wanted India to understand why Russian energy presented a geopolitical problem. India wanted America to understand why affordable energy was an economic necessity. Perhaps today both understand each other a little better.

President Trump's decision to secure Russian diesel should not be condemned. It should be understood for what it is: a government acting to protect its people from higher energy costs. India seeks no special treatment—just the same understanding America gives itself.

Mr President, if Russian diesel can help protect an American farmer or trucker from unaffordable fuel prices, surely you can understand why the world's largest democracy cannot casually pass higher energy costs on to 1.4 billion Indians.

Your citizens matter. So do ours.

Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dissent and respect

Apropos of "Barricading Young India" (*FE*, October 12), restricting protests may restore order temporarily, but the grievances deserve attention. Every protest must also be assessed objectively. Examine who leads it, their motives, activities of participants, and their methods. Peaceful demonstrations over genuine concerns deserve a hearing, but violence, vandalism, intimidation, and disruption cannot be justified in the name of dissent. The hardships faced by ordinary people must also be considered. Governments should engage with protesters, verify their demands, and provide transparent grievance redress mechanisms. Protest organisers, too, must act responsibly. Democracy requires both the freedom to dissent and a duty to respect the rights of others.
—A Myilsami, Coimbatore

Agricultural progress

Apropos of "Modi@25: Steady agri-growth" (*FE*, October 12), India's agricultural progress must be judged not merely by production figures but by the income and security of its farmers. Irrigation, food security, and improved infrastructure are important achievements, yet stagnant farm incomes, rising input costs, and uncertain markets remain serious concerns. Greater investment in storage, cold chains, food processing, and reliable market linkages would help farmers secure better returns. Crop diversification, efficient water use, and soil conservation deserve equal attention. Direct income support can provide relief, but it cannot replace structural reforms.
—Abbharna Barathi, Chennai

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Editor's TAKE

Preparing for the D-day

Disasters are inevitable; devastation is not. The key lies in preparing for them before they hit and preventing them

Every year on October 13, the world observes the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction, a reminder that disasters are not merely acts of nature but the outcome of human choices. Perhaps no country would need this reminder more than India. Nearly 59 per cent of its land is earthquake-prone, about 12 per cent flood-prone, and much of its long coastline faces cyclones and tsunamis, while droughts, landslides and glacial lake outbursts add to the list. Every year, hundreds of thousands of people are affected by the floods and torrential rains that lash its coastline, causing huge damage to life and property. The Odisha tragedy is still fresh in our minds. Nothing has been done to mitigate the disaster, yet we are still miles away from a viable solution that would provide a shield against such recurring disasters. The Disaster Management Act of 2005 created a national architecture, and the results show where preparedness is taken seriously. Odisha, which lost nearly 10,000 lives in the 1999 super cyclone, evacuated lakhs before Cyclone Fani in 2019. Early warning, drills and community trust save lives. But the approach is still crisis management, not averting disasters. It springs into action after a catastrophe, with relief packages, rather than before. Spending on mitigation is a fraction of what goes to response.

The deeper failures lie in governance. Building codes exist on paper but are poorly enforced. Several incidents related to fires in buildings and flooding of basements have occurred in Delhi itself. In the Himalayas, highways, tunnels, hydropower projects and tourist construction proceed without credible carrying-capacity studies; Joshimath's sinking homes and the Wayanad landslides are eye-openers. Yet our response is casual and cosmetic. Ecological advice is routinely set aside in the name of development. Local capacity is another gap. District authorities are understaffed, while panchayats and municipal bodies, the real first responders, are rarely trained or funded. Disaster insurance is scarce, leaving the poor to bear losses alone.

What should India do? That nothing can be done? Countries far more prone to disasters than India have done it. In Japan, earthquakes are frequent, yet no one dies. First, make mitigation, not relief, the largest budget priority, and tie development funding to risk assessments. Second, enforce building codes and retrofit schools, hospitals and bridges in high-risk zones. Officials must be held accountable. Third, map floodplains, landslide zones and fragile slopes, and make those maps legally binding for land-use approvals.

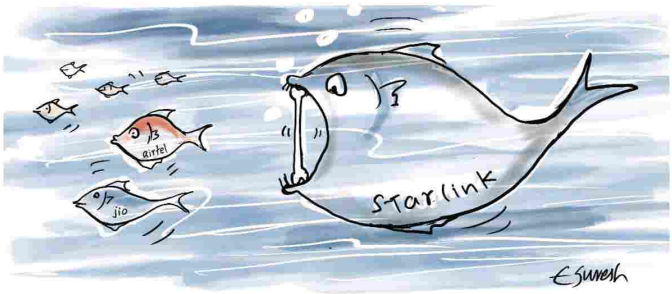
Fourth, empower local bodies with trained volunteers, funds and clear authority. Finally, restore mangroves, wetlands and forests as natural defences, and widen insurance cover. There is a way to do it; there are tools to do it; all we need is political will.

Digital sovereignty outweighs Musk's convenience

India's long-term digital resilience depends on supporting domestic entities that have true skin in the game. Domestic operations are bound directly by Indian law, answerable to local courts and invested in the nation's socio-economic stability



PRIYANKA CHATURVEDI



Elon Musk recently launched an offensive against India's regulatory pace over his company Starlink, a SatCom service not getting the licence to operate despite compliance with Indian authorities. Expressing his frustration over delayed commercial approvals, Musk accused "oligarchs" of keeping a monopolistic chokehold on the Indian market, going as far as calling the delays a "crime against the people". It was, to be honest, quite amusing to see a trillion dollars worth oligarch himself have a go at others, and a misplaced attack at that. While his ire was directed at the telecom companies that have partnered with him, his aim was to hit out at the Indian government. The government has rightly and firmly pushed back, saying that its regulatory framework is fair, transparent, and uniformly applied, and also confirmed that all major satellite communication licensees, including Starlink, Bharti Airtel-backed Eutelsat OneWeb, and Reliance Jio Satellite Communications, are currently at the exact same stage of security evaluation.

So why the tantrum? Does Elon believe that processes can be bypassed to accommodate him if he tries arm-twisting? It isn't how this works! In fact, there has been a long-standing concern about allowing Starlink permits to operate in India. As part of the Standing Committee of IT & Communications, I had repeatedly expressed concerns about the IT Ministry and Telecom Ministry's red-carpet welcome to Starlink. It took the Home Ministry to go through the checks and balances and rigorous procedures when dealing with strategic communication infrastructure, national security, and digital sovereignty. These issues must outrank the convenience of an impatient foreign corporation.

While Starlink presents itself as a simple broadband provider designed to bring high-speed internet to remote villages, beneath it lies a not-so-noble intent, because whatever price band that the SatCom is offering as per publicly available information makes it an expensive proposition. However, the concern is not merely pricing; the company is a vital asset for the American military and its intelligence apparatus. SpaceX holds highly classified contracts with US intelligence agencies to build robust spy satellite networks. For a nation like India-where an entity is deeply intertwined with a foreign military apparatus to control vital communication nodes without exhaustive vetting-this is a proposition fraught with risks.

> OUR DOMESTIC SPACE ECOSYSTEM IS CURRENTLY UNDERGOING A VIBRANT EVOLUTION, DRIVEN BY PIONEERING PRIVATE LAUNCH FIRMS, SATELLITE START-UPS AND ISRO. FOREIGN SERVICE PROVIDERS ARE WELCOME TO COMPETE IN INDIA'S VAST MARKET, BUT THEY MUST DO SO BY BOWING TO THE LAWS OF THE LAND AND THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

The writer is a former Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha) and currently heads Women Led Futures at ORF

Furthermore, the Ministry of Home Affairs and Indian intelligence agencies have also raised concerns over Starlink's terminal vulnerabilities. Reports that Starlink terminals were active inside Iran during intense civil unrest-bypassing local telecommunications authority and monitoring-served as a major warning sign for Indian policymakers. If a US-based provider can have its equipment smuggled across borders and activated without state sanction, India faces a legitimate risk of foreign satellite signals spilling into sensitive border zones, where insurgent groups or external bad actors could exploit unmonitored communication lines.

The most compelling argument for India's caution lies in Starlink's turbulent track record in active conflict zones, most notably Ukraine. In the early days of the Russia-Ukraine war, Musk was hailed for activating Starlink terminals to keep Ukrainian forces connected. However, the limits of relying on a whimsical, single-source foreign billionaire quickly became clear. Musk famously denied Ukraine's military request to extend Starlink coverage near Crimea to thwart a Russian naval attack, citing personal fears of escalating the war.

This arbitrary exercise of a geopolitical "kill switch" proves that SpaceX keeps ultimate control over where, when, and how its network functions, regardless of local sovereign needs. Furthermore, because Starlink's primary satellite repositories, operations, and technical commands are based in the United States, the US government holds immense regulatory and strategic leverage over the company. If India were to face a critical border escalation with a neighbour, it cannot afford to rely on an infrastructure provider that might shut down connectivity based on the commercial interests of its owner, or under geopolitical pressure from Washington.

India's rules demand that all user traffic must be routed exclusively through Indian gateways, data centres and core networks must sit within the country, and data cannot be decrypted or mirrored abroad. Furthermore, strict geo-fencing must prevent signal leakage across borders, and authorities must have real-time terminal tracking access to combat smuggling. If Starlink genuinely wants to serve the Indian market, it must patiently satisfy these rigorous security checks, rather than taking to social media to cry foul and bully regulators.

Finally, India's long-term digital resilience depends on supporting domestic entities that have true skin in the game. Domestic operations are bound directly by Indian law, answerable to local courts, and invested in the nation's socio-economic stability. Furthermore, tie-ins to local capability, such as the government's mandate to manufacture ground equipment domestically and integrate India's NavIC navigation system, will cultivate a robust private space industry alongside ISRO and IN-SPACe. India should welcome global competition to expand choices for its citizens, but it must not compromise sovereign control over the networks carrying its national data.

Our domestic space ecosystem is currently undergoing a vibrant evolution, driven by pioneering private launch firms, satellite start-ups, and ISRO. Foreign service providers are welcome to compete in India's vast market, but they must do so by bowing to the laws of the land and the rules of engagement. India is not up for colonisation ever again or for new-age tech colonisers to dictate their terms.

Children have spoken. Schools must now answer



NANDITA BHATIA

2ND OPINION



In early 2022, the Education Ministry asked 3.79 lakh schoolchildren how they were doing. Eighty-one per cent said studies, examinations and results made them anxious. Satisfaction with school and life fell sharply in Classes 9 to 12, when we ask the most of them.

This World Mental Health Day's theme is "Lived Experiences Heard: Real Voices, Real Change". India has the first half on record. The second half is where we must now move. The cost is visible. The National Crime Records Bureau recorded 14,488 student suicides in 2024, the highest in a decade. Many were in classrooms in their final weeks, among adults untrained to notice.

The deeper problem is conceptual: we have mistaken mental illness for mental health. Counsellor-only models treat distress as a clinical event. Most of it is not. Most children are not ill, only anxious, ashamed of their bodies, afraid of a result, and never given language for any of it. Refer them all and we medicalise adolescence while still missing those who need care. They need well-being taught like any other subject: naming an emotion, asking for help, recognising a strength in yourself. A trained teacher, a timetabled period, and no child forced to declare themselves struggling.

Institutions are finally moving. The Supreme Court issued binding student mental health guidelines in July 2025. CBSE made counsellors compulsory in January 2026. But that covers about 30,000 mostly private schools out of nearly 15 lakh. In government schools, fewer than one in ten offers any psychosocial support. The risk is answering a systemic problem with an administrative one.

The evidence is no longer thin. Weekly teacher-led sessions in Bihar's Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas, residential schools for girls from Dalit, Adivasi and minority families, improved emotional resilience and wellbeing by roughly a quarter. It works because the teacher already knows the child and no adolescent must travel, pay or disclose. I think of Nirasha, a girl in Rohtas named for despair because her family had just lost a son. In a session on character strengths, she met the word jigyasa, curiosity, and recognised herself. She changed her name; her school corrected its records and helped update her Aadhaar. No one diagnosed her isolation. They gave her a voice. A real voice, a real change.

For every child to have this, wellbeing must be timetabled and funded, not appended: hours in teacher development, a budget line that survives a change of government. Students must be heard on a schedule, not once every few years, and the hearing must lead somewhere. Jharkhand has written six hours on mental health into its 50-hour teacher programme.

India will soon have its first school mental health policy. It will be judged not by its language but by its presence: whether, three years from now, a fourteen-year-old in a government school in Nalanda has an adult trained to listen and an hour a week for her inner life. We have heard them. This October, the question is whether we can change their experience.

The writer is Vice-President and Country Director of WorldBeing India

Daiv Vani

WISDOM FOR A MEANINGFUL LIFE

Strength That Waits Unseen

Strength does not vanish when it is hidden; sometimes it waits, protected, for the right time.

After twelve years in the forest, the Pandavas had to spend a thirteenth year in disguise, unrecognised by anyone. Before entering the kingdom of Virata, they wrapped their weapons, including Arjuna's great bow Gandiva, in cloth and hid them high in a shami tree on the edge of a burial ground, where people would be too afraid to look. For a year, these warriors lived in humble roles: Yudhishthira as a courtier, Bhima as a cook, Arjuna as a dance teacher, Draupadi as a maid. No one guessed who they were.

When the Kauravas attacked Virata's cattle, the moment arrived. Arjuna took down the weapons, worshipped them, and defeated the Kaurava army. Tradition links this day to Vijayadashami, and the shami tree is still worshipped for it.

Many of us pass through our own hidden years: a period of caregiving, a job below our ability, a long wait for an opportunity. It is easy to believe that our abilities have faded. They have not. They have been wrapped and kept safe, and what matters is whether we continue to look after them while we wait.

This Navaratri, pick one skill or ambition you have set aside, and give it a small, regular share of your attention, so that it is ready when its time comes.

–DAIV

PIC TALK



An artist puts the finishing touches on a Durga idol made entirely of matchsticks at his home on the outskirts of Agartala, Tripura.

PTI

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Strengthening democratic accountability

The Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005, completes 21 years on October 12, 2026. This is an appropriate moment to assess its achievements and shortcomings. Enacted to promote transparency and accountability, the legislation has transformed the relationship between citizens and public authorities.

The Act empowers citizens to access government records, question decisions and expose corruption, strengthening transparency and democratic participation. However, delays, vacancies in Information Commissions, inadequate disclosure and threats to RTI activists undermine its effectiveness. Balancing public interest with personal data protection remains equally important. The anniversary should inspire renewed commitment to strengthening the Act. Information Commissions must function efficiently, statutory deadlines must be respected, and information seekers must receive adequate protection. Public authorities should also improve voluntary disclosure to reduce unnecessary applications.

RTI is not merely a mechanism for obtaining documents; it is an instrument of participatory democracy. Protecting its independence and effectiveness is essential to ensuring that transparency remains a cornerstone of accountable governance.

AC VINEETH KUMAR | KERALA

Modi's 25 Years: A governance reckoning

As the ruling establishment celebrates Prime Minister Narendra Modi completing 25 years in executive power, one is compelled to point out the grim realities citizens face, which have defined his quarter-century in public office and tested his model of governance. Longevity in high office cannot whitewash a political trajectory marked by deep social fractures, alleged authoritarian overreach and systemic failures. Modi's tenure as Gujarat Chief Minister began before the 2002 Gujarat riots, in which hundreds of Muslims were killed. Fourteen years later, the sudden announcement of demonetisation devastated ordinary households, disrupted livelihoods and battered the informal economy, raising questions about executive accountability. Manipur's ethnic violence has raised concerns over the government's response, while examination irregularities have fuelled student protests.

Meanwhile, demonstrations over the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls have raised questions about public confidence in democratic institutions. Completing 25 years in executive power is a significant milestone, but longevity alone cannot settle the debate over governance. Political leadership must ultimately be judged by its commitment to constitutional principles, institutional independence, social harmony and accountability to citizens.

RANGANATHAN SIVAKUMAR | CHENNAI

Indian killed in Riyadh attack

An Indian national was killed and at least 10 other Indians were injured in an attack on King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, which left more than 300 people injured. The attack, which took place on Saturday, October 10, was the latest in a series of strikes targeting the airport over the past week. Several people of different nationalities were among those killed in the incident.

The fatalities included Saudi, Bangladeshi, Indian and other foreign nationals. India condemned the attacks on Riyadh's King Khalid International Airport as "completely unacceptable", urging an immediate halt. It reaffirmed its support for Saudi Arabia's sovereignty and expressed hope for an early return to peace and normalcy. Saudi Arabia has blamed Yemen's Houthi rebels for the attack. The incident comes amid escalating hostilities involving Saudi Arabia and the Iran-backed group, which has reportedly targeted border areas, energy facilities and civilian infrastructure with drones and missiles in recent weeks.

The latest attack has raised further concerns about the safety of civilians and critical infrastructure in the Gulf region, as diplomatic efforts and security measures continue amid escalating regional tensions.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Biogas: India's energy security and green transition advantage

India must therefore move from a plant-by-plant approach towards an integrated biomethane ecosystem. Farmers, cooperatives, municipalities, waste-management companies, entrepreneurs and industrial consumers need to be connected through commercially viable supply chains



SHISHIR PRIYADARSHI

India's energy debate has rightly focused on expanding renewable electricity, diversifying energy sources and reducing dependence on imported fossil fuels. Yet one of our most promising domestic energy resources remains underappreciated: biogas. The opportunity lies in converting agricultural residues, animal dung, food waste and other organic material into usable energy, while recovering valuable nutrients and reducing the environmental costs of waste. As the World Biogas Association's India Congress convenes policymakers, investors and industry leaders in New Delhi on 8-9 October, it is an opportune moment to look beyond individual projects and recognise biogas for what it can become: an important instrument of India's national energy strategy. The question is no longer whether biogas has a role in India's future. It is whether we can build the markets, infrastructure and institutional arrangements necessary to realise its full potential. Five strategic considerations make the case compelling.

When we speak of India's energy security, our attention naturally turns to imported crude oil, natural gas and the geopolitical uncertainties surrounding international energy markets. But we should also look at the resources generated within our own borders every day. India's farms, livestock, food-processing industries and cities produce substantial quantities of organic material that can serve as feedstock for biogas production. After appropriate purification, biogas can be converted into biomethane, including compressed biogas (CBG), which can substitute for fossil natural gas in suitable applications.

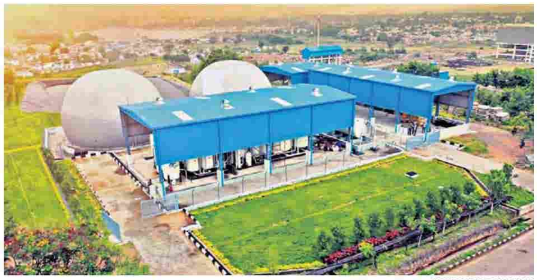
Every unit of imported gas that can sustainably be replaced by domestically produced biomethane strengthens India's energy security, reduces exposure to international price volatility and improves resilience to supply disruptions. Biogas cannot eliminate our dependence on imported energy, nor should its potential be exaggerated. But it can contribute to a more diversified and resilient energy mix. We should begin thinking of biogas as a distributed domestic gas resource, one that can be developed across agricultural regions, industrial clusters and urban centres rather than concentrated in a handful of conventional producing areas. The strategic imperative is to assess how much of this resource can be mobilised economically and sustainably and then integrate it into national and state-level energy planning. Energy security is not simply about finding new sources of supply; it is also about making intelligent use of resources we already possess.

India's clean-energy transition is often discussed primarily in terms of electricity. Solar and wind power are transforming the generation landscape, and electrification will remain central to decarbonising transport, buildings and industry. But not every energy requirement can be met easily or economically through electricity alone. Some industrial processes require gaseous fuels or high-temperature heat, while other applications may benefit from renewable alternatives to conventional natural gas.

This is where biomethane can make a distinctive contribution. It can provide a renewable gaseous fuel for suitable industrial and commercial uses and, where technical standards and infrastructure permit, can make use of existing gas networks. It is also storable and can be supplied when needed, although production depends on feedstock availability and the reliable operation of individual plants. The point is not to pit biogas against solar, wind or other clean-energy technologies. It is to recognise that a successful transition requires a diverse portfolio of solutions. Renewable electricity and renewable gases can serve complementary roles in a decarbonising economy.

If the first phase of the transition has been about expanding clean electricity, the next must also address the fuels and industrial processes that electricity alone may not readily replace. Biogas deserves a place in that wider conversation. It can help connect renewable energy, agriculture and waste management in a way that few other technologies can.

Perhaps the most striking feature of biogas is that its raw material is already all around us, yet much of it remains underutilised. Agricultural residues, cattle dung, food-processing waste and segregated organic municipal waste can all contribute to biogas production, depending on their suitability, availability and the economics of collection.



REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGE

We have traditionally thought of energy resources as something extracted from beneath the earth or harnessed from the sun and wind. Biogas invites us to think differently: energy can also be produced by organising the materials that flow through our everyday economic life.

But this opportunity will not be realised simply by announcing targets or constructing isolated plants. Organic waste is dispersed, seasonal and often expensive to collect and transport. Different feedstocks require different technologies, while plants need dependable supplies of raw material and reliable buyers for their output.

India must therefore move from a plant-by-plant approach towards an integrated biomethane ecosystem. Farmers, cooperatives, municipalities, waste-management companies, entrepreneurs and industrial consumers need to be connected through commercially viable supply chains. The objective should be to aggregate resources efficiently, reduce avoidable costs and ensure that plants operate consistently. The energy revolution waiting to be discovered is not simply in the waste itself. It lies in our ability to organise that waste into a reliable economic resource. India's challenge is to turn dispersed potential into dependable production.

The case for biogas extends beyond energy security and emissions reduction. It offers an opportunity to create a new economic relationship between agriculture and industry, in which farmers become participants in the renewable-energy economy.

Agricultural residues and animal waste can, under appropriate conditions, generate additional income. Biogas projects can create local employment and new business opportunities in feedstock aggregation, transportation, plant operations and equipment servicing. The digestate left after anaerobic digestion can also be processed into useful fertiliser products, allowing nutrients to return to agriculture when quality and safety requirements are met.

This creates the basis of a circular economy: materials that might otherwise be discarded become inputs for energy production, while nutrients can be recovered and returned to the soil. It can also help address some local waste-management challenges and reduce the open burning of agricultural residues where suitable collection and conversion systems are available.

However, these benefits will not flow automatically to rural communities. Farmers must receive fair prices for their feedstock, collection arrangements must be dependable, and the economics of projects must make sense for all participants. We must also ensure that the removal of agricultural residues does not compromise soil health or compete unnecessarily with other productive uses. If designed well, biogas can help diversify rural incomes while connecting agriculture more closely with India's energy and industrial ambitions. The farmer should not remain at the margins of the energy transition. The farmer should become one of its principal stakeholders.

The ultimate challenge is one of scale. India does not merely need more biogas plants; it needs a commercially viable biomethane industry capable of delivering reliable output over time.

That requires coordinated action across the entire value chain. Investors need predictable policies, credible assessments of feedstock availability, access to finance and confidence that the gas produced will find a market. Developers need long-term supply arrangements and dependable offtake agreements. Gas buyers need consistent quality and reliable delivery. Farmers and municipalities need efficient systems for collecting and supplying organic material. Without these connections, even technically sound projects can struggle commercially.

Policy must therefore move beyond capacity announcements towards actual performance. Support should encourage reliable production, efficient operations and demonstrable environmental benefits. Long-term purchasing arrangements, appropriate gas infrastructure, quality standards and innovative financing can help reduce risks and attract private investment. Public-private partnerships will be essential, but so will state-level strategies that reflect the distinct feedstock and market conditions of different regions.

The World Biogas Association's India Congress provides a valuable platform for bringing these stakeholders together and learning from international experience. The next step is to translate discussion into implementation: a clearer investment pipeline, stronger supply chains, bankable projects and measurable outcomes.

India should consider a coordinated national biomethane strategy that brings together energy security, waste management, agricultural development and climate objectives. The measure of success will not be how many plants are announced, but how much reliable, affordable and genuinely sustainable energy they deliver. India's energy future will not be built around a single technology. It will require a combination of conventional and renewable sources, greater efficiency, stronger domestic capabilities and a more resilient system for meeting the needs of a growing economy.

Biogas can contribute to that future in a distinctive way. It can turn organic waste into energy, help substitute for imported natural gas, create economic opportunities in rural areas and support a more circular approach to resource use. Its contribution will depend on realistic assessments of potential, sound project economics and consistent execution. It is not a substitute for every other energy source, but it is a resource we should no longer treat as peripheral.

The discussions taking place in New Delhi offer an opportunity to move the debate beyond the promise of biogas towards the practical task of building an industry. India has the raw materials, entrepreneurial capacity and growing demand to develop this sector, provided policy ambition is matched by commercial discipline and institutional coordination.

The writer is the President of the Chintan Research Foundation

The Great Indian Bustard and climate rights



SIDDHARTHA MISHRA | SHAZIA SIDDIQUI

The chronology of factors leading to the recognition of the right to climate change action in India fortuitously involves a critically endangered bustard, a bird, a solar boom and two Supreme Court benches that produced something surprising: India's first express constitutional right against the adverse effects of climate change.

In this regard, October 24, which falls this month and is commemorated as United Nations Day, also marks the International Day of Climate Action and is an apt date for raising a legal question: what promises does the Indian Constitution carry about the climate for Indians? Surprisingly, though, the answer begins with a bird, the Great Indian Bustard.

Evolution, which is oblivious to environmental impact assessments, gave the Great Indian Bustard eyes on the sides of its head, giving it wider peripheral vision in an open territory, handy for spotting predators. However, against a high-tension line, the same trait becomes problematic, as the bird has evolved to see predators around it, but that wide field of vision does not help it spot a thin power line in its path, and it gets injured by hitting against it.

In *MK Ranjitsinh v Union of India*, the Supreme Court initially intervened in April 2021 to protect the species, restricting certain overhead power lines across parts of Rajasthan and Gujarat. On March 21, 2024, the same litigation produced a landmark constitutional proposition: the right to be free from the adverse effects of climate change, grounded in Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution. The Court recognised that climate change is not merely an environmental concern; it can also threaten constitutional rights. It described the right against climate harm and the right to a clean environment as "two sides of the same coin". Although Article 21 had long been interpreted to protect the environment, the judgment expressly located climate change within India's constitutional framework.

Though the right to climate protection surfaced in a case about a bird and energy projects, another test emerged in another case, brought by a child. In 2017, nine-year-old Ridhima Pandey of Uttarakhand asked the National Green Tribunal (NGT) to consider climate change in environmental impact assessments (EIA) and to make the government prepare a carbon budget. The Tribunal dismissed her petition in 2019, but she appealed to the Supreme Court.



The case became significant in 2025, when the Court called climate change an "existential predicament", said environmental laws must impose enforceable duties to address it, and sought from the Power Ministry a plan to reduce emissions from power generation. In simple terms, the Court was asking: what should the government actually do about climate change? The case is still pending, and notably, its orders do not expressly invoke the climate right recognised in the bustard case.

Meanwhile, the bird's own case moved on, and on December 19, 2025, the Court accepted the expert committee's revised plan, which identified certain areas of Rajasthan and Gujarat for special protection, as they are important habitats for the bustard. In these areas, new wind turbines and large solar plants are restricted, while about 250 km of critical power lines are to be moved underground within two years. Whether this will be enough to save the bustard remains to be seen.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has classified the bustard as critically endangered since 2011. A 2020 study by the Wildlife Institute of India estimated that around 18 birds could die each year from collisions with transmission lines. Its population remains very low, with much of its natural habitat already lost or no longer used by the bird. In Kachchh, only a handful of wild birds remain. For a species so close to extinction, even a small change in its habitat can have serious consequences.

But the story is no longer only about the bustard; rather, it brings us back to the larger question with which we began: what does the Constitution actually promise Indians in the face of climate change? The answer is important and still developing. Though the Supreme Court has stated that people have a right to be protected from the adverse effects of climate change, it remains unclear what a person can ask the government to do when climate change seriously affects their life or livelihood, what government action or inaction can be challenged, or what relief a court can grant. The Court's reasoning also drew upon India's international climate commitments, including the Paris Agreement, and the work of UN human-rights bodies. These materials helped connect climate change with threats to basic human rights and India's constitutional guarantees of equality and life.

This is where Ridhima Pandey's case may become as important as the bustard case. While the latter gave constitutional recognition to the right against the adverse effects of climate change, Ridhima Pandey's case raises the harder question: what does that right require the State to do?

There is, therefore, an irony in the story. The Great Indian Bustard evolved for a landscape without wires, while Indian constitutional law evolved for a country without a declared climate emergency. A bird that could not see a power line has helped us see something that was largely invisible in constitutional law: the human consequences of climate change. Both the bird and the law are now improvising to survive a changed landscape — though only humans can take their case to court. The real test of this newly recognised right, and of the Court, will arise when a person approaches a court and says that a government decision, project or failure to act is exposing them to serious climate harm. Recognition of the right is only the beginning; the harder task is turning a constitutional promise into something that a person can actually claim and a government actually honours.

Siddhartha Mishra is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Law, University of Delhi, and Shazia Siddiqui is a legal scholar and independent researcher

Nana Patekar, the Soldier at heart who left us on Air Force Day



SAYAN CHATTERJEE

There are some coincidences in life that feel almost too symbolic to ignore. Nana Patekar, one of Indian cinema's most distinctive actors, died on October 8, 2026, at the age of 75 at his Goa residence, as reported. It feels as though a portion of myself has died today. October 8 is also the day India marks Air Force Day. This year, the Indian Air Force completed 94 years of service, remembering generations of air warriors who have guarded the country's skies since its establishment in 1932.

For an actor whose relationship with the armed forces went far beyond playing soldiers on screen, the date carries quiet poignancy. Nana Patekar was not simply an actor who understood the military because he had portrayed it. His relationship with the uniform became part of his own life. While preparing for his 1991 film *Prahaar: The Final Attack*, which he directed and starred in, Patekar underwent extensive training with the Maratha Light Infantry unit of the Indian Army. Accounts of his preparation describe years of military training and the development of strong shooting skills.

Then came 1999. India was fighting the Kargil conflict. For most people in public life, the natural response was to express solidarity, donate, speak about the troops or appear at patriotic events. Patekar wanted something different. He wanted to go closer to the soldiers, to serve the nation from the frontline.

He approached the then Defence Minister, the late George Fernandes, and sought special permission to accompany Army personnel. The request was not an ordinary one. An actor entering operational areas during an active conflict was obviously a matter of security and military protocol. Yet, Fernandes eventually granted special permission. Patekar subsequently spent time with troops in areas including Drass and along the Line of Control. Recent accounts of his recollections say he was associated with a Quick Reaction Team (QRT) and spent several weeks with Army personnel, while other accounts describe his duties in patrol and military hospital environments.

The important point is not to turn Patekar into a battlefield hero, which he never claimed to be. It is something more human. He wanted to understand the soldier beyond the costume, the dialogue and the cinema screen.

That distinction matters. Indian cinema has produced countless memorable military characters — from *Haqeeqat* and *Border* to *Lakshya*, *Uri* and *Sam Bahadur*. But Patekar's connection with the armed forces had an unusual quality. He did not merely borrow the language of military discipline for a role. He carried some of that discipline into his own life and eventually became associated with the Territorial Army, retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel in 2013.



His military association also needs to be seen against India's own history. The armed forces have repeatedly occupied that space between national security and national emotion. In 1947, the Indian Air Force played a critical role in transporting troops and equipment during the defence of Jammu and Kashmir. In 1965 and 1971, air power became central to India's wars. In Kargil, air operations once again demonstrated how technology, courage and human endurance meet under extreme conditions.

Perhaps that is why Patekar's military interest never appeared entirely ornamental. But there was another side to the man, away from cameras and uniforms. His social work was often quieter than his cinema.

He supported relief work after floods in Bihar, donated his remuneration from *Paathshaala* to charitable organisations and helped families of farmers in Maharashtra who were deeply affected by drought and debt. In 2015, he and actor Makarand Anaspure spearheaded the Naam Foundation, which works with drought-affected rural communities, farmers, water conservation and village development.

That work is significant because it reflected another idea of service. The soldier serves the nation in uniform. The citizen serves it through society. Patekar, in his own way, occupied both spaces. His artistic record was formidable. Three National Film Awards recognised his performances, including for *Parinda*, *Krantiveer* and *Agni Sakshi*. In 2013, the Government of India conferred on him the Padma Shri for his contribution to art and cinema.

Yet awards alone cannot explain why his passing feels different to me on this date. Perhaps it is because Patekar never quite fitted the conventional image of a Bollywood star to me. His voice could be theatrical, but his public persona often seemed deliberately stripped of glamour. His characters could be violent, vulnerable, angry, broken or patriotic. Behind them was an actor who appeared most comfortable when the performance had something real at its centre.

And so, on October 8, as Indian Air Force aircraft take to the skies and the nation remembers its air warriors, another farewell is taking place on the ground. The Indian Air Force marks 94 years of "Touch the Sky with Glory". Nana Patekar's life reminds us that service to the country does not always come from a cockpit, a battlefield or a government office.

Sometimes it comes from a film set, a village, a drought-hit farmer's home-or an actor asking a Defence Minister for permission to stand beside soldiers during a war. Nana Patekar played many roles. But perhaps his most enduring one was never scripted.

A soldier at heart, a citizen by conviction, an actor by profession-and, finally, a man remembered beyond the screen. This October 8, the guns may remain silent in his honour. The aircraft may fly overhead for another purpose. But somewhere between the roar of an Air Force fighter and the silence of a final farewell lies a fitting last tribute to Nana Patekar. A last tribute, then, not merely to the actor, but to the man who believed that patriotism was something to be lived, not simply performed. I wish to have met him once in this lifetime. A regret to linger on.

The writer is an educationist and senior columnist

The Tribune
ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Exam racket

Such scams erode trust, undermine merit

MONTHS after the NEET fiasco, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has unearthed a multi-state banking recruitment racket. This exposes another disturbing breach of trust in India's competitive examination system. The use of iris scans to identify impersonators shows that technology can uncover fraud, but it also raises a key question: how did this malpractice escape detection in the first place? According to the CBI, iris scans taken during public sector bank recruitment exams matched those of the arrested persons rather than the genuine candidates. An audit by the Institute of Banking Personnel Selection reportedly flagged 257 suspects, including 180 who were already employed in banks. The probe concerns alleged impersonation in exams held between 2020 and 2024.

For millions of young Indians, competitive tests are gateways to a secure future. When impersonation allows undeserving candidates to enter public institutions, merit is compromised. The presence of potentially tainted recruits in public service also raises doubts about institutional accountability. The banking recruitment case echoes concerns over NEET, the medical entrance test, where paper leak allegations and other irregularities have repeatedly shaken public confidence.

Technology offers part of the solution. Biometric verification (including iris scans), secure digital records and independent audits can make impersonation harder. However, these safeguards must be implemented consistently at every stage, from registration and written exams to interviews and final appointment. Recruitment agencies should act swiftly on suspicious patterns. Restoring public confidence requires more than arrests and technological tools; it demands transparent procedures, vigilant oversight and exemplary punishment. Every genuine candidate deserves a fair chance — and every public institution owes the nation a recruitment process worthy of its trust.

Regulatory gaps

Dubious institutions must be monitored

THE Supreme Court's intervention in the case of a fake medical college in Uttar Pradesh exposes a serious gap in the education regulatory system. An institution allegedly operating from a dilapidated farmhouse in Etah, with a tea seller as its chairman, reportedly offered medical and healthcare courses and collected money from unsuspecting students. How could such an establishment function without being detected earlier? The SC has directed the University Grants Commission and other regulatory authorities to issue public advisories warning students against enrolling in unrecognised institutions. The Union government has also been asked to communicate the directions to the bodies concerned and monitor compliance.

These steps are necessary. But warnings issued after a scam comes to light cannot substitute for effective supervision. Students and their families invest years of savings and often borrow heavily in the hope of securing professional qualifications. Discovering that a course is invalid can destroy career prospects and leave families financially devastated. Also, inadequately trained individuals entering healthcare can put patients at risk.

Our regulatory framework is divided among multiple authorities responsible for universities and professional courses. This fragmentation must not become an excuse for gaps in oversight. A centralised, publicly accessible portal should allow students to verify an institution's recognition, course approvals, university affiliation and eligibility to offer professional qualifications. Regular inspections, prompt investigation of complaints and swift action against fraudulent operators are equally essential. Where evidence reveals that complaints were ignored or inspections neglected, the officials concerned must explain the lapses. Students caught in such frauds also need timely information and practical assistance, including help with transfers wherever legally and academically feasible. The objective must be to prevent fraud, not merely document it after students have suffered.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 13, 1926

Lord Birkenhead's speech

LORD Birkenhead seems to be a firm believer in the virtue of reiteration. In his opening speech at the eleventh session of the Indian National Council of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), he repeated substantially the same views regarding the position in India that he had so often expressed in the past, without any attempt at meeting the criticism which those views had evoked in this country. "When I became Secretary of State for India," he said, "I found the best organised and most numerous political party in India ostentatiously pledged to the principle of non-cooperation with the British Government in making the present limited Constitution a success as the ground for extending it in a democratic direction. I was never able to follow the logic of that position." Is that India's or the Swaraj Party's fault if he failed to see what everyone else did? It is true that the party did go to the Councils with the ostensible object of wrecking the present Constitution. But in almost his very first utterance in the Assembly, the leader of that party in the Assembly made it perfectly clear that he and his party were prepared to cooperate with the government, if the latter itself was prepared to cooperate with them, and if the cooperation was to be on manly, honourable lines and for an object which India could accept. Is the logic of that position quite unintelligible to his lordship? If so, it is not the party but himself that both India and England have reason to despair. Of course the party was not prepared to "cooperate with the government in making the present limited Constitution a success as the ground for extending it in a democratic direction."

A democracy needs its *kopagriha*

A right to protest at a place you cannot reach is a right only on paper



SANJAY HEGDE
SENIOR ADVOCATE, SUPREME COURT



PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY : The burden lies on the State. It does not lie on the citizens who wish to gather. ANI

IT is the Ramlila season in North India. Crowds gather each evening in public grounds to watch the old story unfold. No one asks them for a permit. An episode from the epic came to my mind on Sunday morning, October 11. The Supreme Court had assembled in an extraordinary sitting. Sundays are for rest, even in that building. The Bench pressed counsel with questions on protest and police power. Justice Joymalya Bagchi asked to be briefed on whether the police had violated the right of peaceful assembly. It was the right question. Part of the answer lies in a room in Ayodhya.

The *Ramayana* has a protest site. Valmiki calls it the *krodhagara*, the chamber of anger. Later tellings call it the *kopagriha*. A queen with a grievance went there. She lay on the bare floor. She cast off her jewels. She waited. Kaikeyi did not seek the king's leave to be angry. No guard stopped her at the door. No chamberlain sealed the palace corridors. Ayodhya had built a room for dissent, and the room was open. The king came to her. He had to listen. We may argue about what Kaikeyi demanded. We cannot argue about the architecture. The kingdom designated a place for anger and let the angry reach it.

Delhi has its own *kopagriha*. It is called Jantar Mantar. The Supreme Court has recognised it as a designated site of protest. The Delhi Police treat it differently. When citizens set out for Jantar Mantar, the police often make sure they never arrive. Metro stations close across the city. Barricades rise on the roads. Trains are cancelled.

Farmers found the approaches to the Capital studded with concrete and iron spikes. Wrestlers who sat at Jantar Mantar were removed and the site cleared. The designated place stays open. The road to it shuts. A right to protest at a place you cannot reach is a right on paper. It resembles a ticket to a theatre whose doors are locked.

Start with the text. Article 19(1)(b) of the Constitution says that all citizens "shall have the right to assemble peaceably and without arms." Read those words slowly. They do not say the State may permit citizens to assemble. They declare a right the citizen already holds. The clause names no grantor. A permit regime inserts one. Then the verb: the right is to assemble. It is the right to gather, not the right to apply to gather. Protection attaches when people come together. A rule that makes gathering lawful only after an officer signs a form moves the right to a place the Constitution never put it.

Then the qualifiers: the assembly must be peaceable; it must be without arms. Both conditions concern the conduct of those assembled. Neither concerns the approval of an official. "Peaceably" is an adverb of manner. One judges manner as the assembly proceeds, or after it ends. A permit asks an officer to decide beforehand whether a gathering not yet held will stay peaceful. The Constitution sets a standard of conduct. The licensing office applies a standard of prediction. They are not the same test. The framers named two conditions. Lawyers know the old maxim: *expressio unius est exclusio alterius*. To state one thing is to exclude another. Had the framers wanted a third condition of prior leave, they would have written it beside the other two.

> The right is the rule. The restriction is the exception, and the State must justify it case by case, place by place, hour by hour.

The State answers with Article 19(3). That clause permits reasonable restrictions in the interests of public order, and of India's sovereignty and integrity. I accept that. But read the operative words: restrictions "on the exercise of the right."

A restriction on the exercise assumes that the right is being exercised. It regulates time, place and manner. A licence does something else. It holds the right in suspense until authority consents. That is a prohibition with a dispensation. It is not a restriction. Article 19(6) proves the point. For trades and professions, the framers allowed laws prescribing "professional or technical qualifications." That is a precondition, stated in terms. Clause (3) carries no such language. Where the Constitution meant to let the State impose a precondition on a freedom, it said so. Where it did not, we should not supply one.

None of this leaves the police helpless. They may ask for notice. Notice lets them divert traffic, post constables and plan for crowds. Notice serves the right. Permission supplants it. A citizen who gives notice tells the State what she will do. A citizen who seeks permission asks the State what she may do.

The Supreme Court has walked this ground before. In *Himat Lal K. Shah v. Commissioner of Police* (1973), it struck down a rule that let the police commissioner refuse permission for street meetings at his discretion. In the *Ramlila Maidan Incident, In Re* (2012), it condemned a midnight police assault on sleeping protesters. Recent judgments lean the other way. In *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan v. Union of India* (2018), the Court weighed protests against the interests of residents near Jantar Mantar. In *Amit Sahni v. Commissioner of Police* (Shaheen Bagh case, 2020), it said protests belong in designated places. Each judgment speaks of balance. In practice, each hands the scales to the police.

Balance is a respectable word. But one does not weigh a fundamental right against a section of the Delhi Police Act as if both sat on equal pans. The Constitution is the higher law. The Police Act works inside it. When the Court treats a statutory power to regulate as a counterweight of equal mass, it overbalances. The right becomes the exception. The prohibitory order becomes the rule.

Justice Bagchi's question goes to this point. It does not ask how the police should use their powers. It asks whether the powers themselves square with Article 19(1)(b). The Court has deferred that inquiry for decades. A statute that lets an officer forbid an assembly in advance, on a forecast of trouble, deserves that scrutiny. The burden lies on the State. It does not lie on the citizens who wish to gather.

The danger was foreseen. In the Constituent Assembly, Somnath Lahiri complained that many of the fundamental rights had been framed "from the point of view of a police constable." He feared a charter that a constable would read as a list of permissions. Seventy-nine years on, the constable has a metro map and a stack of barricades.

Here is the test I would offer. We have fundamental rights bounded by reasonable restrictions. We do not have reasonable rights bounded by fundamental restrictions. The right is the rule. The restriction is the exception, and the State must justify it case by case, place by place, hour by hour. When a commissioner shuts a dozen metro stations to stop a few hundred people, he inverts that order. He treats the restriction as fundamental and the right as a favour.

A democracy needs its *kopagriha*. It needs a room where the aggrieved can lie on the floor and wait for the king. Ayodhya understood that the room was useless unless the queen could walk to it. Delhi keeps the room and blocks the corridor. Kaikeyi did not ask Dasharatha's permission to be angry. Indian citizens should not have to ask the commissioner's.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

"If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear. — George Orwell"

Learning to hear yourself

SONIE SIDHU

MY client looked perplexed when he learnt how much therapy cost per hour. "Could you give me a discount?" he asked. As a psychotherapist, I've always tried to keep my practice accessible. I rarely refuse a request for a concession and have often conducted sessions *pro bono*. But in this case, I wondered why spending on therapy felt so difficult, especially for those who could comfortably afford it to improve their lives.

Our relationship with money begins long before we earn it. The emotions, beliefs and stories we inherit around money often shape our spending choices, irrespective of our economic standing. Moreover, visible rewards bring immediate gratification, whether through dining out, shopping, movies or a holiday. Therapy, on the other hand, entails investing in outcomes that unfold gradually, if at all they do, be it healing emotional wounds, understanding ourselves, improving relationships or changing long-held patterns. Combined with the stigma associated with seeking help, many remain sceptical of benefits they cannot see right away.

I've also observed an opposite trend among young adults. Unlike older generations preoccupied with survival, they have no hesitation in spending on therapy even when their incomes are modest. Whether it is due to greater awareness of mental health or a preference for individualism over traditional family structures, they have no qualms about seeking help for their emotional well-being. Therapy for them is not an expense, but an investment.

When people ridicule therapy as "paying someone just to listen", they conflate a structured therapeutic process with casual conversation. Therapy is far more than a chat in a safe space. Instead, it is purposeful work that helps people understand their emotions, relationships, behaviour and the unseen forces that shape them. At its core, it's about understanding not just what we feel or do, but why that is so.

Much of what we pursue in life is ultimately about feeling happier and more fulfilled. True happiness comes not from quick fixes, but from self-awareness, healing what hurts us and giving value to our long-term well-being and growth. Each person who benefits from therapy, counselling, coaching or emotional self-work helps normalise the idea that emotional health deserves attention, not as a financial push, but as a venture towards a better quality of life.

So, who charges so much just for talking? Perhaps no one. Therapy has never been merely about talking; it is about learning to hear yourself, often for the first time. And if a conversation can change the way you live, love, work and heal, maybe it is worth investing in the quality of life you will enjoy long after the conversation ends.

The writer is a Panchkula-based psychotherapist

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Nobel selectivity

With reference to 'A Nobel that's not so universal'; every October reinforces this insular cognitive ecosystem, where towering literary voices from the Global South, such as Salman Rushdie, Haruki Murakami, Amitav Ghosh and many others are overlooked. Ghosh's probing ecological narratives, Rushdie's luminous post-colonial epics, and Murakami's profound surrealism easily match, if not exceed, the stature of any contemporary Western writer. When Scandinavia boasts of more laureates in literature than in Asia and Africa, the prize ceases to reflect humanity's collective conscience. The Nobel committee must broaden its evaluative horizons, or concede that its laureates represent only a privileged hemisphere, not the whole world.

HARSH PAWARIA, ROHTAK

Exhaust all legal remedies

Refer to 'Delhi clampdown'; although the Constitution guarantees every citizen the right to protest peacefully against any unconstitutional acts committed by the person entrusted to safeguard the Constitution, an important question arises: Have all available legal remedies been explored before resorting to public protests? In a democracy, the protection of constitutional rights must go hand in hand with the fulfilment of constitutional duties and civic responsibilities by all stakeholders. While peaceful protest is a legitimate democratic right, avoidable inconvenience to the general public, disruption of essential services, damage to public property and any obstruction to national progress must be avoided.

SHUBHAM MAHAJAN, BILASPUR

Protests to embarrass govt

The CJP and the Opposition parties have the right to protest but their demand for the resignation of Gyanesh Kumar is not convincing enough. The government has refuted the allegations of misuse of SIR point by point in the media briefings regularly and immediately. Instead of replying to the government's briefings, the CJP and the opposition parties are adamant on continuing the protests. The resignation of CEC is an excuse; the real motive behind it is to embarrass the government.

ASHOK BAHL, KANGRA

Mere political escalation

The recent protests by the INDIA bloc, led by Congress, and civil society groups like the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) have sparked a major debate across India's political, legal and public spheres. Following their meeting with the President, the Opposition leaders announced plans to submit a memorandum to the Chief Justice of India. These gimmicks amount only to political escalation without any concrete outcome.

KRISHAN KANT SOOD, NANGAL

Holistic growth necessary

Apropos of 'Where are the jobs'; India must focus not just on economic growth but also on what it produces and how many people it employs. India requires globally competitive industries that offer large-scale production, high productivity and decent jobs. Since government alone cannot solve unemployment, private companies must invest more and hire more workers. This needs joint efforts in industrial policy, trade, education and urban infrastructure to help businesses grow. Ultimately, the types of industries an economy develops determine whether growth only increases national income or truly raises household earnings, improves social mobility and makes the most of the country's demographic dividend.

K KUMAR, PANCHKULA

Audit cancer care charges

Refer to 'The price of cancer'; in India, treatment costs do not refer only to medicines alone. In 2017, after the prices of stents and knee implants were capped, many private hospitals offset the loss by raising procedure fees and the cost of consumables. The patient's final bill remained inflated. It is a real fear that similar issues could occur in cancer care. It is essential to ensure that hospital procurement prices and the final charges imposed on patients are audited.

ASHOK AGGARWAL, KURUKSHETRA

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit.
These should be cogently written and can be sent by **e-mail to: Letters@tribunemail.com**

The unequal burden imposed by SIR



AJIT RANADE
SENIOR FELLOW, PUNE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE

INDIA'S Election Commission (EC) was established on January 25, 1950, a day before India became a republic. This was a remarkable act of foresight. In a democracy, political parties compete for the support of the electorate to earn the right to govern. The contest must be free, fair and without fear or coercion. An independent EC is essential to ensuring this. Over seven decades, the EC acquired a reputation for impartiality and professionalism. That reputation is a precious asset, which must be protected.

The controversy surrounding the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls must be viewed in this context. There is no disagreement about the need for clean and accurate voter lists. People die, migrate, change addresses and new voters become eligible. Duplicate and ineligible entries must be removed. But the methods employed in the present exercise have raised questions about the rights of genuine voters, the burden imposed on ordinary citizens and the safeguards against wrongful exclusion.

Consider first the two kinds of errors. One is wrongful inclusion. The other is the exclusion of someone who is eligible. Both compromise electoral integrity, but their consequences are asymmetric. A wrongly included name may or may not result in an illegal vote. An eligible citizen whose name has been wrongly deleted is prevented from voting. Hence the process must attach particular importance to preventing wrongful exclusion.

The second issue concerns the burden of proof. Once a person's name has been included in the electoral roll after verification, there is a presumption of eligibility. If the authorities subsequently question that eligibility, they must have specific grounds and follow the prescribed procedure. Yet, the SIR appears to have reversed this principle. Citizens who have voted for years are being asked to establish their eligibility afresh, at times with reference to electoral records dating back to 2002 or 2003. This is unfair.

The late Jagdeep Chhokar, co-founder of the Association for Democratic Reforms, drew attention to this reversal. His concern was that the burden of proving eligibility had shifted from the EC to the citizen. This is particularly troubling when the original documents may be incomplete, inaccurate or simply unavailable. Administrative records maintained by the State should not become an obstacle that citizens must repeatedly overcome.



POWER : The Election Commission's authority rests on public confidence. PTI

The third issue is the unequal burden imposed by SIR. The exercise has disrupted the lives of millions who have had to locate documents, establish family relationships or attend verification hearings. Those with stable residences, education, digital access and ready documentation find compliance relatively easy. Migrant workers, daily-wage earners, elderly people and women whose names or addresses have changed face much greater difficulties.

Migrant workers working on a construction site in Mumbai may be unable to travel to a village in Bihar for verification. Such a person might not even discover that his name is missing until arriving home to vote. A right that can only be exercised after navigating a documentation process which becomes less accessible to the economically disadvantaged.

> Every deletion should carry recorded reasons and proof of due process.

The fourth concern is the increasing reliance on technology. Electoral databases contain errors of spelling, transliteration, age and family relationships. Comparing names from older Devanagari records with newer Roman-script versions can produce erroneous mismatches. Indian names are written in many scripts and the same name can have several Roman spellings. A discrepancy flagged by an algorithm may be resolved by a human officer familiar with local circumstances. Such discrepancies must trigger verification rather than deletion. The EC should disclose the criteria used by its software, test error rates and ensure that no adverse decision rests solely on automated matching.

The fifth issue involves objections to voter registration. Form 7 allows objections by third parties. Reports of individuals filing dozens or hundreds of objections raise concerns about possible misuse. The EC has tried to curb bulk filing of Form 7, with a limit of 10 per individual. This corrective also invites questions about the earlier safeguards. How many bulk objections were received? Were they properly verified? What happened to objections found to be false or malicious?

More fundamentally, an objection is only an allegation. The registered voter must receive the prescribed notice and a meaningful opportunity to be heard before an adverse decision. This is the elementary principle of natural justice. Where names have been deleted without following these requirements, the cases must be investigated and remedied. The integrity of the electoral process depends on an auditable record of notices, hearings, reasons for deletion and appeals.

The Supreme Court's judgment of May 27, 2026 upheld the legal validity of SIR. It recognised the EC's authority to conduct a limited inquiry into citizenship for determining electoral eligibility, while reserving formal citizenship adjudication for the competent authority under the Citizenship Act. The court also clarified that deletion from the electoral roll does not extinguish citizenship. But having procedural safeguards is important.

The court directed that cases of deletion on citizenship grounds be referred to the competent authority within four weeks. More than four months have elapsed. But compliance is still a secret. While upholding SIR, the court could have laid down explicit and enforceable protections against wrongful exclusion, including notice, timely hearings, independent review and restoration before polling day. The constitutionality of the exercise cannot be separated from the constitutional rights of those affected by its implementation.

What should happen now? The EC should publish constituency-wise data on deletions, objections, notices, hearings, appeals and restorations. Every deletion should carry recorded reasons and proof of due process. Algorithmically identified discrepancies should undergo human verification. An audit of the procedures should examine systematic errors and possible misuse. Mechanisms for restoration must operate quickly to ensure that eligible voters are not deprived of their franchise.

The EC's authority rests on public confidence. As Chhokar observed, trust must be earned through conduct. The EC should welcome scrutiny and answer legitimate questions, especially when millions of voting rights are involved.

Political parties should compete for the votes of citizens. They should have no opportunity to influence which citizens get to vote. A clean electoral roll is one that protects every eligible citizen's right to vote. That must remain the governing principle of SIR.

Credit: The Billion Press

Mountains cannot weep, so they crack



AMARENDRA KISHORE
DEVELOPMENT JOURNALIST

IN Urni, a village on the banks of the Sutlej in Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh, Ramanand Negi touches the crack in his house wall with a finger, the way an elder soothes a child's wound. The tunnels of the Karcham Wangtoo project run beneath the village, and Negi's grievance is less about compensation than about the fact that nobody asked him before the tunnels were laid. The crack looks small, yet it holds the unheard pain of an entire community. The question is not why the wall split. The question is why, on land where his forefathers lived for generations, nobody sought his opinion before work began beneath it.

This is where our definition of development is put in the dock. We have taken electricity to be synonymous with progress, and the mountain to be merely a resource from which energy can be wrung. Yet a mountain is a resource to some and, to others, a home, a deity and a memory.

The valleys of the Sutlej, Baspa and Spiti in Kinnaur are among the most fragile terrains in the Himalayas, and it is here that the main tunnel of the 1,500-megawatt Nathpa Jhakri project runs for about 27 km.

Karcham Wangtoo, Baspa-II, Kashang and Shongtong-Karcham stand alongside it, and dozens more projects are proposed. Each one diverts a river into a tunnel and leaves behind a hollow, kilometres long, inside the mountain. A mountain may well bear the burden of one tunnel, but when tunnels line up in a row within a single valley, their collective impact is recorded in no single project's report. This is the greatest conceptual failure of our planning: we count the trees and fail to see the forest.

The first price of this failure is being paid by water, and in the mountains water means more than thirst. It is a tradition built by elders, the breath of the fields, the future of the apple orchards and the livelihood of the cattle. Mountain villages live not on taps but on natural springs.

Tunnelling can cut across the groundwater pathways inside rock, letting water seep into the tunnel, reducing the flow to springs above it. How far this happens depends on local geology and demands site-specific investigation.

But the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP) has documented drying springs and falling soil moisture in villages affected by Karcham Wangtoo, among them Choling, Yula, Urni, Runang, Miru and Chugaon. In one case, two neighbouring streams fed by a single source dried up together, as though twin sisters had departed on the same day.



FILE PHOTO

HIDDEN : This crisis is all the more serious because it makes no noise.

This crisis is all the more serious because it makes no noise. Photographs of landslides appear in newspapers, but a drying spring never makes a headline. Where the water goes, farming goes; then livelihoods; and finally, people. The continued loss of local water sources could push families towards migration, and the fear is that, over the coming decades, it may become a wave that no one can then stop. It is a crisis of the future, arriving today drop by drop as the springs run dry.

The cracks in the walls are the second chapter of the same story. Vibrations from blasting can shake the foundations of houses. The cracks recorded at Nigulsari and Jhakri in May 2014, the split house in Yula and the walls of a cowshed in Chugaon are links in the same chain. Kinnaur is a Scheduled Area under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution, where the gram sabha, the village assembly, is meant to play a decisive role. Yet tunnels continued to pass beneath villages, and people learnt of them only when their homes began to crack. Were the affected villagers adequately consulted, and were their concerns about water, tunnelling and structural damage addressed before the work began? The issue here is not merely one of concrete but of trust. How will a system that does not think it necessary to ask its own people safeguard their future?

> Electricity is a national need, but the emptying villages of the mountains cannot be its price.

The year 2021 made the warning clearer still. In July, nine tourists died when rocks fell at Batseri in the Baspa valley. In August, a massive landslide at Nigulsari on National Highway 5 buried a bus and other vehicles, and around 28 people lost their lives. The "No Means No" campaign gathered pace after this, and many villages of Kinnaur and Lahaul-Spiti joined it.

Residents have linked the increasing frequency of rockfalls and landslides to areas where dams, powerhouses or tunnels have been built. Establishing whether, and to what extent, these projects have contributed to slope instability requires independent geological investigation. The loss of lives in the region only underlines how urgent that investigation is.

The roots lie in the forests as well. A study by the Himdhara Collective of forest-land diversion in Kinnaur found that between 1980 and 2014, nearly ninety per cent of the diverted land went to hydropower projects and transmission lines. Forests are the invisible arms that hold slopes in place. When they are removed, the mountain begins to stagger under the weight of its own body, and debris dumped into rivers can magnify the destructive force of floods.

Above all this looms another shadow. Kinnaur is a region of high seismic risk, and the earthquake of 1975 still reminds us that this earth can shift at any moment. Meanwhile, glacier retreat, extreme rainfall and flash floods threaten Himalayan communities, and the devastating monsoon of 2023 caused heavy loss of life and property across Himachal.

Place in this picture the same slopes, with tunnels running for kilometres inside them, with cracks already in the walls of their houses and the water beneath them already drying. This is not an imagined horror but the convergence of risks that scientists have long documented. If the present pace does not change, such crises are likely to return, each time heavier than the last.

Now is the time to ask questions. Why is each project assessed separately, when the mountain is one? Where is the study of a valley's carrying capacity and of the cumulative impact of all its projects? Who will account for the debris dumped along the riverbanks? Who is responsible for providing permanent drinking water to villages whose springs have dried up? The answers will come not from any single office but from the intent of the entire system.

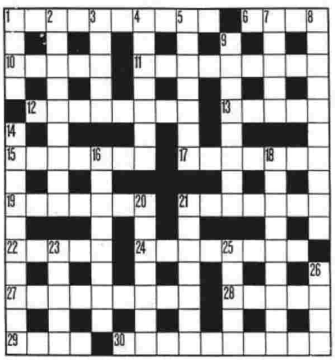
The way forward exists, provided there is the will. For new projects, the prior and informed consent of the gram sabha must become a mandatory condition, not a formality. A study of the carrying capacity and cumulative impact of the entire Sutlej valley should be carried out, and until it is complete, new clearances should be paused.

An independent geological audit of springs and cracks around existing tunnels should be conducted and its report made public. Affected villages should receive alternative drinking water and fair compensation, and the rules on debris disposal should move from paper to the ground and be enforced firmly.

This debate is not electricity versus the environment. Hydropower is a source of clean energy and a vital source of revenue for a state with few other resources. The question is whose cost we are willing to bear for whose light. Electricity is a national need, but the emptying villages of the mountains cannot be its price.

Mountains cannot weep, so they crack, they dry up, they slide. The cracks are on the walls of houses today. If we still fail to hear their voice, tomorrow they will be across the entire valley.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1 Unable to make headway (6,4)
6 Coarse file (4)
10 Anarchy (5)
11 Outgoing sociable person (9)
12 Revelatory (8)
13 Attack violently (3,2)
15 Left out (7)
17 Deputy (5-2)
19 Habitual doubter (7)
21 Endeavour (7)
22 Tremble (5)
24 Space between (8)
27 To free from blame (9)
28 Tolerate (5)
29 Be abundant (4)
30 Upside down (5-5)

DOWN
1 Help with financial support (4)
2 Informal source of information (9)
3 Frame supporting a painting (5)
4 Strongly resisting change (7)
5 Testimony (7)
7 Thoroughly proficient (5)
8 Terminate (3,2,3,2)
9 Continuous (8)
14 Following as result (10)
16 Ragged (8)
18 Outward bearing (9)
20 Northern US city (7)
21 Suitability (7)
23 In agreement (2,3)
25 Refute (5)
26 Approve (4)

Yesterday's Solution

Across: 1 Angling, 5 Mogul, 8 Stonewall, 9 Ban, 10 Term, 12 Vigilant, 14 Docile, 15 Flatly, 17 Mystical, 18 Drab, 21 Ill, 22 Hard times, 24 Godly, 25 Worldly.

Down: 1 Asset, 2 Goo, 3 Item, 4 Gratis, 5 Multiply, 6 Gibraltar, 7 Lengthy, 11 Rock-solid, 13 Almighty, 14 Damning, 16 Narrow, 19 Bossy, 20 Stir, 23 Mad.

SU DO KU

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

HARD

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

OCTOBER 13, 2026, TUESDAY

Shaka Samvat	1948
Ashwin Shaka	21
Ashwin Parvishte	27
Hijari	1448

Shukla Paksha Tithi 3, up to 11:28 pm
Priti Yoga up to 8:24 pm
Vishakha Nakshatra up to 1:43 am
Moon enters Scorpio sign 7:13 pm

FORECAST

SUNSET: TUESDAY 17:54 HRS
SUNRISE: WEDNESDAY 06:23 HRS

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	32	20
New Delhi	33	20
Amritsar	29	20
Bathinda	33	19
Jalandhar	31	20
Ludhiana	30	16
Bhiwani	33	21
Hisar	33	22
Sirsa	32	21
Dharamsala	27	16
Manali	22	08
Shimla	22	12
Srinagar	18	11
Jammu	28	22
Kargil	20	05
Leh	16	02
Dehradun	31	22
Mussoorie	20	13

TEMPERATURE IN °C

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

Dissent Detained

The response to the Cockroach Janta Party's protests exposes a deeper democratic problem: when young people lose faith in institutions, suppressing their demonstrations can deepen the distrust driving them to the streets. What began as an online reaction to a controversial remark about unemployed youth has evolved into a broader challenge over economic opportunity, political accountability and the credibility of elections. What might ordinarily have remained an online controversy acquired a life of its own.

By July, sustained protests had contributed to the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. The latest mobilisation, demanding electoral reforms and the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, indicates that the movement's grievances now extend beyond education and employment to the credibility of democratic institutions. The authorities' response on October 10 deserves particular scrutiny. The deployment of thousands of security personnel, extensive barricading, transport disruptions, mass train cancellations, and detention of protesters and opposition leaders prevented the demonstrators of the CJP and Opposition parties from assembling at Jantar Mantar. The administration argues that the protest lacked permission and that an earlier demonstration had continued far beyond its intended duration. Public order is a legitimate concern, but restrictions must remain proportionate. Preventing a peaceful gathering through sweeping measures risks turning an administrative dispute into a larger confrontation over civil liberties.

The electoral controversy makes this especially consequential. The Election Commission maintains that its revision of electoral rolls is intended to remove dead, duplicate and ineligible entries. Critics, including opposition parties and the CJP, allege that legitimate voters have been excluded and that the exercise benefits the ruling party. These accusations require evidence and cannot simply be presumed true. Equally, official denials cannot substitute for transparent verification when citizens question whether their names remain on the electoral rolls. The credibility of elections depends not only on the integrity of voting and counting but also on ensuring that eligible citizens can vote in the first place.

There is a deeper political lesson here. Young Indians confronting uncertain employment prospects and repeated examination controversies may see conventional channels of grievance redress as ineffective. A movement that combines online mobilisation with street demonstrations can give disparate frustrations a common identity. Its lack of formal political organisation may be a weakness when translating protest into durable policy, but it can also make the movement difficult to contain. The CJP will need to substantiate its allegations, articulate practical reforms and preserve the peaceful character of its campaign if it hopes to retain credibility beyond the immediate confrontation.

The government, meanwhile, should recognise that clamping down on protest does not eliminate the discontent behind it. Indeed, extensive restrictions may amplify public sympathy for protesters while deepening suspicion about the institutions under scrutiny. The decisive question is not whether the authorities can keep demonstrators away from Jantar Mantar. It is whether the Election Commission can answer concerns about electoral exclusions convincingly, and whether the government can demonstrate that dissent remains a legitimate part of democratic life. Barricades can clear streets; only accountability and credible institutional responses can restore public faith.

Talent under siege

The Trump administration's action against Microsoft and seven other technology companies exposes a fundamental contradiction in America's economic ambitions. A country determined to lead the world in artificial intelligence, software and advanced computing cannot easily reconcile its demand for exceptional talent with an immigration policy increasingly shaped by hostility towards foreign workers. The dispute centres on the H-1B visa programme, which enables American employers to recruit skilled professionals from abroad. The administration alleges that companies have exploited the system at the expense of domestic employees. Vice-President JD Vance has accused the targeted firms of replacing American workers with foreign labour, while the Labour Department has halted the processing of their applications under the permanent labour certification programme, an important step towards employment-based Green Cards.

Protecting American workers is a legitimate objective. Companies must not be allowed to manipulate immigration rules to depress wages or evade employment obligations. But allegations require evidence. Layoffs and visa applications occurring during the same period do not, by themselves, establish that foreign workers have displaced Americans. Microsoft maintains that most of its recent H-1B filings concerned existing employees and that international recruits receive compensation comparable to that of American colleagues. These claims deserve scrutiny, as do the government's allegations. Vance's description of foreign professionals as "indentured servants" has also drawn criticism from New Delhi, which called the terminology deeply offensive. Vance did not single out Indians or name any nationality in his reported remarks.

His argument concerned the alleged exploitation of foreign labour by American employers. The consequences extend well beyond the companies named. American technology firms, universities and research institutions depend on international expertise. Immigrants have contributed substantially to Silicon Valley's development, including advances in software, semiconductors and artificial intelligence. Restricting their opportunities may create openings for some domestic workers, but it could also leave specialised positions unfilled, increase recruitment costs and encourage talented professionals to seek opportunities elsewhere. That would be a strategic miscalculation. Canada and the United Kingdom compete for skilled migrants, while China is investing heavily in technological self-reliance. If the United States makes its immigration system unpredictable, companies may relocate research teams and investment. The damage might not immediately appear in employment figures, but could gradually erode America's competitive advantage. The administration is entitled to demand accountability from powerful corporations. But defending American labour is not synonymous with excluding international talent.

The objective should be a labour market in which employers cannot undercut workers, regardless of nationality, and immigration rules serve clearly defined economic needs. America's technological leadership has never depended solely on talent born within its borders. Preserving it requires credible enforcement, fair competition and an immigration system that rewards expertise without tolerating exploitation. Turning skilled migration into a political confrontation may satisfy protectionist instincts, but it is unlikely to make the American economy stronger.

Warm Diplomacy, Cold Reality

The United States and China may be moving from confrontation towards managed competition, but they are not moving beyond strategic rivalry. The warmth of the Trump-Xi encounter may reduce volatility for a time, but stability will ultimately depend on whether both sides can address the difficult issues that ceremony cannot resolve



The meeting between US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Washington was remarkable for its warmth, ceremony and symbolism. Trump personally received Xi at Joint Base Andrews, an unusual gesture that underlined the importance attached to the Chinese leader's visit. The red carpet, military flyover, bands, ceremonial honours and elaborate White House programme projected an image of cordiality between the leaders of the world's two most powerful countries. Yet beneath this pageantry lay a more complicated reality: the summit produced no major breakthrough on the fundamental disputes that continue to shape US-China relations.

Xi's visit was important for another reason. It was his first trip to Washington since 2015 and came less than six months after Trump's visit to China. The frequency of high-level engagement suggests that neither Washington nor Beijing wants their increasingly competitive relationship to slide into uncontrolled confrontation. Xi's message that China and the United States should be partners rather than rivals was clearly designed to reinforce this approach. He also argued that China's national rejuvenation and Trump's "Make America Great Again" agenda could coexist. Yet such rhetoric cannot by itself overcome the structural forces driving the rivalry.

The most tangible outcome was the extension of the trade truce. But even here, the agreement was essentially a postponement rather than a settlement. The two sides agreed to extend the pause in their trade war, while leaving several difficult questions for further negotiations.

Tariffs, Chinese purchases of American goods, rare-earth supplies, technology restrictions, industrial subsidies and Chinese overcapacity remain unresolved. The United States wants greater reliability in rare-earth supplies and increased Chinese purchases of American agricultural products, while Beijing continues to have important economic leverage through its position in critical mineral supply chains.

This explains why the summit should not be interpreted as the beginning of a new era of US-China cooperation. Rather, it represents an attempt to manage economic competition without allowing it to become completely destabilising. Both sides have strong incentives to avoid another full-scale trade confrontation. American businesses need predictability, while China needs continued access to major international markets and technology. The extension of the truce therefore provides breathing space, but not a solution to the underlying economic conflict.

Taiwan remains an even more difficult problem. Xi used the summit to urge Washington to handle the Taiwan question with "prudence" and to oppose Taiwan independence. Beijing regards Taiwan as a core national interest, while Washington maintains longstanding security commitments towards the island. The proposed US arms package for Taiwan, worth around $14 billion, has consequently become an important bargaining issue. The fact that such a major security question remains unresolved demonstrates the limits of personal diplomacy.

Xi's repeated reference to the "Thucydides Trap" was perhaps the most revealing aspect of the summit. The concept describes the danger that competition between a rising power and an established power can lead to conflict.

Xi argued that the danger can be overcome and called for cooperation, regular military dialogue and stronger mechanisms to prevent crises. This is significant because it shows that Beijing recognises the possibility that strategic competition could eventually produce military confrontation. At the same time, invoking the Thucydides Trap is itself a reminder that beneath the diplomatic warmth lies a profound contest over power and influence.

Artificial intelligence represents a new and increasingly important dimension of this competition. Both Washington and Beijing recognise that AI will influence economic power, technological leadership and national security. Yet their approaches are not identical. Trump has indicated a preference for allowing AI development to proceed without substantial new regulatory constraints, while Xi has emphasised that AI should remain under human control and serve broader social objectives.

The presence of leading American technology figures at the state dinner – including executives associated with Apple, Amazon, Alphabet, OpenAI, Tesla and Nvidia – demonstrated how closely technology and geopolitics are now intertwined.

The summit therefore revealed a paradox. The United States and China increasingly need one another, but they also increasingly compete with one another. They need cooperation on trade, global economic stability, artificial intelligence, crisis management and other international issues.



ANAND KUMAR

The writer is an analyst on Strategic Affairs and South Asian Geopolitics

At the same time, they remain divided over Taiwan, military power, technology, rare earths and the wider distribution of global influence. Engagement is therefore becoming a mechanism for managing rivalry rather than eliminating it.

The extraordinary ceremony surrounding Xi's visit also deserves attention. Critics have described the summit as "diplotainment", suggesting that the pageantry overshadowed substantive diplomacy. Trump's decision to personally welcome Xi, the military ceremonies and the elaborate White House events were clearly intended to project confidence and respect. Such symbolism should not be dismissed entirely. Personal relationships and diplomatic protocol can help create an atmosphere in which difficult negotiations become possible. But symbolism has limits. Red carpets cannot resolve tariff disputes, military competition or the Taiwan question.

The more important question is therefore not whether Trump and Xi were cordial with each other, but whether their governments can establish mechanisms that prevent competition from becoming confrontation. In this respect, continued high-level dialogue is significant. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio has argued that Washington and Beijing must continue to engage at the highest level precisely because of the enormous economic and military weight of the two countries. That logic is difficult to dispute. The greater the strategic competition, the greater the need for communication.

For the rest of the world, the summit carries an important message. A US-China relationship characterised by continuous escalation would increase uncertainty across the global economy and complicate the strategic calculations of countries across the Indo-Pacific. Conversely, a degree of managed competition could create greater room for regional stability. But managed competition should not be confused with strategic convergence. The fundamental differences between Washington and Beijing remain. For India, this distinction is particularly important. New Delhi has a significant strategic partnership with Washington but also a complex and consequential relationship with Beijing. If the United States and China move towards sustained dialogue, India will have to operate in an environment in which Washington may increasingly seek to manage its competition with Beijing rather than pursue permanent confrontation. This could affect the strategic space available to India, particularly in the Indo-Pacific, technology partnerships and the wider balance of power.

The Trump-Xi summit should therefore be seen neither as a breakthrough nor as a failure of diplomacy. Its real significance lies in the attempt to establish a pattern of engagement in which competition is managed and escalation is contained. The extension of the trade truce offers temporary economic stability; the continued dialogue provides a channel for managing crises; and the personal rapport between the two leaders may facilitate further negotiations. But none of these developments removes the structural sources of rivalry.

The central lesson from Washington is consequently simple: the United States and China may be moving from confrontation towards managed competition, but they are not moving beyond strategic rivalry. The warmth of the Trump-Xi encounter may reduce volatility for a time, but stability will ultimately depend on whether both sides can address the difficult issues that ceremony cannot resolve – trade, technology, Taiwan, military competition and the changing balance of global power.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Putting the burden on tech giants

The Philippines may soon join the growing list of countries that have imposed social media bans on minors after the Senate passed Senate Bill No. 2424, or the proposed Safe Media Access and Responsible Technology for Kids in Digital Spaces (Smart Kids) Act, on third and final reading this week.

The measure is seen as a response to the growing public concern following three school shooting incidents in the country that authorities linked to harmful online content and which resulted in several deaths and injuries.

Once enacted, platforms will be required to implement age-assurance mechanisms to prevent minors from creating accounts. The measure also paves the way for the suspension, restriction, disabling, or removal of any account that has been reasonably determined to be owned or used by a minor. Other countries that have imposed varying forms of social media bans are Australia, Brazil, Indonesia, and Malaysia, with the United Kingdom, Turkey, and Greece planning to pass similar measures within the year. The recent report that authorities have foiled 53 school shootings being planned in South Cotabato right after the Sept. 18 shooting at Banga National High School may be used as a justification for a blanket ban. Interior Secretary Jonvic Remulla said over 50 people in Banga municipality who were involved in making online threats or "grooming" were arrested. Child Rights Network Philippines has strongly opposed a blanket social media ban, arguing that while protecting children online is necessary, simply taking away their access is not the solution. Philippine Mental Health Association Inc. shared this sentiment and pointed out that a ban ignores root causes of youth violence. It noted that keeping the youth safe online and preventing violence require a comprehensive approach that incorporates mental health support, safe school environments, responsible online platforms, and early identification and intervention.

A Member Of The ANN ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Both groups have instead called for putting greater accountability on tech platforms to eliminate predatory designs and manage harmful content.

Last May, the United Nations Human Rights Office already made a similar warning: blocking children from social media is no substitute for making platforms safe in the first place. It issued a 10-point framework that includes requiring platforms to make digital environments safer by design, rather than placing the burden on children and parents; and targeting age-based restrictions to specific services or content, such as pornography, gambling, artificial intelligence chatbots, or addictive design features. This was also among the points made by Sen. Risa Hontiveros, the only senator among 17 who voted against SB 2424. She said an under-15 age threshold will be a good baseline, arguing that this is the voting age for the Sangguniang Kabataan as well as the minimum legal age for employment.

She warned that setting the limit at under-18 could result in the youth finding ways to circumvent the law. She cited Australia, whose internet regulator recently revealed that more than eight in 10 young teens and preteens continued to use social media platforms despite the prohibition for children under 16.

Letters To The Editor | editor@thestatesman.com

Speak up

Sir, Activism is the conscience speaking up when comfort would prefer silence ("A call to activism", 12 October). From Rosa Parks refusing a seat to the doctors who campaigned against nuclear weapons, ordinary people have changed history without a salary, a title or a guarantee of success. Yet passion needs method. Protests grab attention, but lasting change usually comes from patient work: gathering facts, building coalitions and staying peaceful when provoked.

Activists must also welcome criticism, since a cause loses credibility when it ignores evidence. Those who disagree, meanwhile, should remember that dissent is often society's early warning system, and dismissing it as noise can prove costly.

Not everyone can march or go to jail, but everyone can do something. Teachers can encourage questions, professionals can offer skills to a cause, and citizens can vote, donate or simply speak up. Schools could add community service to the curriculum so young people learn that conscience grows with practice. A society improves when many hands carry small acts of courage.

Yours, etc., K. Chidanand Kumar,
Bengaluru, 12 October.

No excuses

Sir, Apropos 'Digital Franchise' (October 10), electoral rolls must be accurate, but technology should not become an excuse to deny genuine voters their democratic rights. Digitised records can help identify errors and improve administration, yet outdated addresses, spelling variations and discrepancies across databases may wrongly exclude eligible citizens. Such cases deserve careful human verification rather than automatic rejection.

The Election Commission should provide a simple procedure for correcting records, adequate time for objections and accessible assistance for elderly people, migrants and those unfamiliar with digital systems. Every deletion must be supported by verifiable evidence, with reasons communicated to the affected voter. Technology should strengthen electoral integrity, not weaken public confidence. The right to vote must remain paramount.

Yours, etc., A Myilsami,
Coimbatore, 10 October.

Rich legacy

Sir, This has reference to "Nana Patekar, the voice of raw India, dies at 75 in Goa" (9 October). In his passing away, the Indian film industry has lost an actor, director and theatre artist par excellence. His rasping voice, rapid-fire dialogue delivery and intense emotional force were unmatched. Whichever character role he played – whether a protagonist, a villain, or a comedian – he made it completely distinct and unforgettable.

Beyond the screen, he was deeply committed to social welfare. His help for the distressed drought-hit farmers and their widows in Maharashtra and volunteer services during the Kargil War and Operation Sindoor reflect a profound sense of patriotism and philanthropy through the NGO, Naam Foundation.

Behind his fiery, mesmerising performances was his versatility and outspoken personality. As a true nationalist, he was a vociferous public critic of contemporary irrational government policies. He has left behind a rich legacy of art and humanity and will be remembered for generations to come.

Yours, etc., D S Kang,
Hoshiarpur, 9 October.

US will re-evaluate its Middle East presence

HARSHA KAKAR

The US invaded Iran last February, leading to a retaliation on its bases in the Middle East. It had expected the war to conclude in days with Iran facing an internal revolution, after the elimination of its leadership pushed by Israel's MOSSAD. This was the scenario painted by Benjamin Netanyahu when he briefed Donald Trump prior to the conflict.

This did not happen and Iran retaliated with missiles and drones on US bases and attacked oil infrastructure of countries which housed them. As per reports, about 20 US bases were targeted with many suffering heavy damage. Photographs of destroyed bases were posted on social media impacting the US' military reputation.

Iran specifically targeted high-value assets including air defence radar systems, satellite communication infrastructure and aircraft stationed on the ground. US losses were in billions of dollars forcing the Pentagon to redeploy its personnel and assets, including shifting troops into hotels.

The Pentagon's Inspector General's report mentioned, "Iranian strikes damaged and destroyed hundreds of buildings and structures at US bases in Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Oman and Jordan during the conflict."

Simultaneously, the US is running short of critical missiles essential to ward off Iran's drone and missile threats. This happened because of the US's flawed strategy to concentrate more on quality than quantity in missile production. The better the quality, the slower the production and costlier the munition. It was forced to utilize these costly missiles to destroy cheap drones and missiles launched by Iran. Its Patriot interceptors are currently down by almost 70 per cent, THAAD systems are at critically low levels, Tomahawk missiles down by over half and it has almost exhausted its precision strike missiles.

The architecture in the Middle East is also changing. The US is no longer considered a staunch ally, especially because it failed to warn its allies on its Iran invasion plans, leaving them defenceless and unable to stop Israel from targeting Qatar. The Mecca pact and the SMDA (Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement) between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia indicate that the region is looking beyond the US for its security.

The US, under President Biden, had in 2024 negotiated an agreement with Iraq to end its deployment there. It was expected that the Iran war would lead to it continuing but that did not happen. On 30 September, the US completed its withdrawal from the country much to the joy of local Iraqis, Iran and its proxies. This was despite all conditions in the agreement not having been met, especially the degradation of Iran's proxies. The US also announced that forces overlooking anti-ISIS operations have been relocated to Jordan.

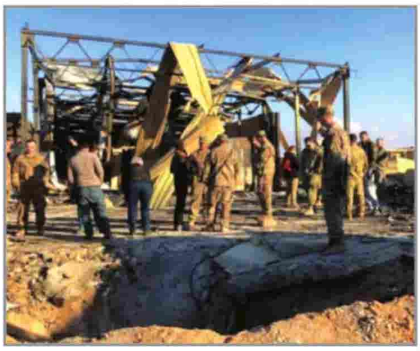
It has been stated by senior US military officials that they would vacate a few bases amongst those severely damaged by Iran in its strikes. Iran, which placed a condition for US withdrawal from the region, is now claiming victory. Simultaneously, the US, possibly temporarily, has pulled out its aircraft from Britain's Fairford base. While the British government declared the base safe, Trump mentioned that the withdrawal had been done due to 'some threats.' He mentioned, "they did not fly out from there by accident."

Bases in the Middle East were initially constructed for multiple reasons. These included securing oil and gas supplies, for which the US is no longer dependent on the Middle East, as its own production capacity has increased and because it controls oil fields across South America and Iraq. Secondly, it was to keep the Soviets out of the region, which again is no longer valid, though Russia and China remain interested in expanding their influence in the region.

The third was to deter Iraq during the reign of Saddam Hussain after the invasion of Kuwait, which again has ended. The fourth was for counter-terrorism against ISIS and other regional militant groups. It has shifted its troops for counter ISIS operations to Jordan. Finally, the latest was to contain Iran and its proxies, especially because Iran and Israel, its closest ally, are sworn enemies.

In reality, the US was unprepared for the level of strikes on its bases and realized, for the first time, that many of its bases across the world are possibly a liability, as they can be attacked and severely damaged without it being able to protect them. This was also the first time that so many US bases were targeted near simultaneously. The realization is creeping in that with Iran gaining technology leading to development of extended range missiles and an unending supply of drones, defending multiple bases in the Middle East is difficult.

Further, Iran attacked Gulf states not only because they hosted US bases but because it realised this was the only way to apply pressure on



the US to cease its attacks. Middle Eastern nations too would not be unhappy if the US reduces its presence as it is no longer considered a net security provider. Even if the Pentagon was to reconstruct its bases it would be forced to choose which are essential for it to occupy and for what reason. It is possible that this assessment is now in progress.

The US strategy for the Middle East is also undergoing a change. In 2024, the US CENTCOM in a statement mentioned that it is moving from being a 'security guarantor to security integrator,' implying that it will provide hardware, training and intelligence, rather than troops. The Pentagon is also realizing that it can act in a similar manner against Iran from a distance and from far more secure bases.

The US decision to reduce some of its bases will have an impact across the region. Iran's power and influence in the Middle East would increase, as has been evident from increased confidence and attacks by Houthis and Iran-backed militia in Iraq targeting Saudi pipelines. In this case the US has refused to get involved, claiming that its ceasefire with the Houthis continues.

It would also result in Middle East nations seeking their own conditions for peace with Iran, giving it greater say in the region. China and Russia, which have thus far been watching from the sidelines, would now begin to exert their influence. The Middle East would grow from being US dependent to seeking alternatives for security. The days of US's domination in the Middle East are ending.

The writer is a retired Major-General of the Indian Army.

SIR is not all that is wrong with elections

O. PRASADA RAO

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge recently branded the elections in the country illegal. Many dismissed it as a political statement. But the public concern is about whether electoral democracy is fulfilling its intended purpose. Nobody questions the constitutional validity of elections, but what about fairness, integrity, and ethical foundations on which electoral victories are built.

If democracy is meant to reflect choice of the people, then several existing antidemocratic practices influencing voters need serious introspection. Welfare of the poor is a legitimate responsibility of government, but when freebies, surrogate welfare schemes and cash distribution are timed, packaged, and marketed as electoral inducements, they qualify as illegal practices. Then, elections become contests of 'baits for voters' rather than serious issues on governance, development, education, healthcare, employment, or institutional reform bothering the country.

Money seizures, gifts, liquor distribution, and various forms of voter-targeted incentives are reported during every election. Such practices continue even when enforcement agencies act. Democracy becomes weaker when a vote is treated as a transaction rather than a trust. The candidates rejected by voters in Lok Sabha elections find entry into Parliament through the Rajya Sabha and subsequently occupy high offices.

While constitutionally permissible, such arrangements dilute the moral significance of electoral verdicts. Politicians frequently switch parties, not due to ideological conviction but for political survival, personal ambition, or the lure of power. Such defections leave voters wondering whether they had elected a representative or merely a temporary occupant of a political party. Parliament and State Assemblies are expected to be forums of debate, accountability, and law-making. But disruptions, slogan-shouting, adjournments, and prolonged absences of honourable elected representatives have become the new norms of functioning of the above institutions. Ironically, members continue to enjoy salaries, allowances, and privileges even when legislative productivity suffers.

Citizens who are accountable for their attendance and performance even in small jobs naturally expect similar standards from those elected to represent them. Political patronage goes beyond ministries. Leaders who fail to secure ministerial positions are accommodated as chairpersons of boards, commissions, corporations, and authorities carrying cabinet rank or equivalent privileges. Although such appointments may have administrative justification, they create the impression that public institutions are being used to satisfy political management rather than public service needs.

The criminalisation of politics is a persistent challenge. Individuals facing serious criminal cases continue to contest elections, win public office, and even become ministers. As per the law until guilt is established the accused is considered innocent, yet citizens are justified in questioning why political parties repeatedly nominate candidates whose backgrounds are not clean. Electoral success should ideally be accompanied by high standards of integrity and public trust.

Another issue concerning the people is the emergence of hereditary politics. Across parties and regions, political positions frequently pass from parents to children, spouses,



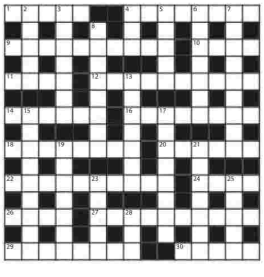
siblings, or other family members. While they have every democratic right to contest elections, they resemble inheritance rather than choice based on merit, grassroots work, and public service.

Each of these practices may have constitutional explanations. Collectively, however, they contribute to a growing public perception that electoral democracy is drifting away from its ethical foundations.

The challenge before India is not merely to conduct elections efficiently but to strengthen the credibility, accountability, and moral legitimacy of the democratic process. Elections must remain not only legal in form but also worthy of public confidence in spirit. Democracy flourishes when there is transparency, integrity, responsibility, and genuine respect for the voter's mandate.

The writer is a retired scientist, CSIR.

Crossword | No. 293605



Yesterday's Solution

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

ACROSS

1 Whip on prof's rear and quickly show your bits (5)
4 Police to arrest a trainee English stockholder? (4,4)
9 Given good spirit, but aim to drink beer (10)
10 Sleep around, having accepted liberal proposal (4)
11 Plain awful to be full of flu essentially (4)
12 Y-fronts less than penny? Worker gets small (10)
14 Cost to bring in northern musician at one time (6)
16 European and Scotsman chasing after Italian (8)
18 Large bitter drunk by head of Indigo Books (8)
20 Temporary head of state is concerning chap (6)
22 Recreational vehicle seen on the Strand? (5,5)
24 Con parting from last of loot is a wrench (4)
26 Good opportunities get drinks (4)
27 Criminal pals crept around a pair one shouldn't upset? (10)
29 Once more bring round a new rake for landscaping (8)
30 One pumping round into Republican? Au contraire! (5)

DOWN

2 City welcoming hot Dutch woman (5)
3 Southern Fellow framing present is photographer (7)
4 Foreign fighter heading to Malta with retired soldier (3)
5 Serpent is more evil, doing Bluth's head in! (5)
6 Salt limit Brown has admitted 'primarily idiotic' (7)
7 Naughty baron at it in transport bound for docks? (4,5)
8 Tight garment that you must wear for flight (8)
13 Dash of liquorice infusing bold sweet (7)
15 We hire inn out to have a drink (5,4)
17 Male bohemian socialist killed for beliefs? (8)
19 Spooner said "fire inexperienced tool!" (4,3)
21 Rubbish cover on Bentley in car storage (7)
23 Want to get under British player trying to mate? (5)
25 Poll: Her Maj getting more sexy? (5)
28 Indy setter shortened piece of wordplay (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 13 October 1926

OCCASIONAL NOTE

TIED and bound by the Miners' Federation throughout the course of the coal strike, the Labour party is at last plucking up the courage to utter criticism. The Parliamentary leaders are known to have disapproved of the failure to negotiate on May 1 and of the whole subsequent policy of Mr. Cook and Mr. Smith, particularly the former. But they are the slaves of the extra-parliamentary trade union movement, and the Trade Union Council in turn has not dared to throw over the Miners' Federation. But things have now grown desperate, and plain speaking all round is the order of the day. The Liberals are seizing the occasion to revive the Liberal trade union movement, and it will be interesting to see whether Mr. J. A. Spender, on whom this uphill task has been thrown, can make anything of it.

News Items

LALA LAJPAT RAI

ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN THE PUNJAB

SIMLA, OCT.

"LALA LAJPAT RAI is conducting an intensive election campaign in the Punjab. He has just visited Ludhiana, Jagraon, Moga and Ferozepore.

Speaking at Ferozepore he referred to the peculiar circumstances of the Punjab and how dangerous it was for Hindus to bind themselves to a party the leaders of which did not understand and did not appreciate the difficulties of the Punjab Hindus. It was essential for the latter to be entirely free to act in the Council independent of any party orders from Madras or Allahabad. Hindus required representatives in the Council who would not submit either to the pressure of Mussalmans or of the Government in all matters coming before the Council.

INDIAN RUNS AMOK

(FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT.)
RANGOON, OCT.

AN Indian employee of the Corporation ran amok in Merchant Street to-day, and after chasing and injuring his wife and mother-in-law dashed along the street brandishing a dah.

The police gave chase and the man was ultimately secured.

JAIL INDUSTRIES

POLICY OF THE MADRAS GOVERNMENT

MADRAS, OCT.

THE Madras Chamber of Commerce, at its last general meeting, among other matters considered a letter from the Government of Madras to the chairman of the Chamber inviting attention to the Government Order dated June 9, in which the Government desired to lay down once again that the main object to be kept in view in the organization of jail industries is the reformation of the prisoner, and that articles manufactured in jails are primarily intended to meet the requirements of consuming departments of Government, and sales of jail articles to the public should be reduced to a minimum so that private enterprise may not have any cause for complaint.

The Chamber resolved to inform the Government of their appreciation of the Government's policy as set out in the Order, namely, that jail industries should strictly avoid competition with private enterprise and that jail manufactures undertaken for reformative education of prisoners should be absorbed by Government departments and not ordinarily sold to the public.



Visitors to the People and Technology Expo in Beijing walk past artwork exploring the topic of artificial intelligence. Photo: EPA

Chinese and Trump names for AI reveal how they see the technology's future

China's version offers different take from US president's on the relationship between humans and intelligent machines

Chong Ming Lee
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US President Donald Trump wants to banish the word "artificial" from artificial intelligence, saying it makes one of the world's most consequential technologies sound "fake".

Across the Pacific, however, China's name for the technology has long carried a different connotation – one that places humans, rather than artificiality, at its centre.

Trump last week signed an executive order directing US federal agencies to replace "artificial intelligence", or AI, with "Super Intelligence", or SI, in official communications, websites and policy documents.

The White House said the new terminology better reflected the rapidly advancing capabilities and "limitless opportunities" of the technology.

While the term "artificial intelligence" dates back to 1956 – coined by American computer scientist John McCarthy at a landmark workshop at Dartmouth College – the history of its Chinese counterpart offers a different perspective on the relationship between humans and intelligent machines.

China adopted its term for the technology, *rengong zhineng*, from the Japanese *jinko chino*, which uses the same characters, according to Shuang Frost, an assistant professor at Aarhus University who researches Chinese AI translation.

The first two characters, *rengong*, combine *ren* (human) with *gong* (work or labour), while *zhineng* refers to intelligence. Frost said *rengong zhineng* can be translated literally as "human-made intelligence".

"'Artificial' can suggest something synthetic or opposed to the natural and human; *rengong* explicitly reminds us that this intelligence is the product of human work," Frost told the South China Morning Post.

That distinction took on particular significance as AI emerged as an academic field in China around 1980. Viewing the technology through a Marxist lens, early Chinese theorists saw AI not as a competing "alien intelligence", but as a tool built to extend and transform human potential, Frost said.

While not every Chinese speaker consciously thinks of that history when using the term, "the human is linguistically much harder to remove from *rengong zhineng* than it is from 'artificial intelligence'", she added.

In China, there is a running joke that some AI-powered products contain more *rengong* than *zhineng* – more human labour than intelligence. This refers to the workers who have historically labelled data and performed behind-the-scenes tasks needed to make automated systems work, Frost wrote in a book chapter tracing the history and translation of Chinese AI terminology in *Machine Decision is Not Final*.

> *Concepts change as they travel. They are not simply imported intact from one culture into another*
>
> Shuang Frost, Aarhus University

While Trump's move to adopt "super intelligence" seeks to elevate the technology by emphasising capabilities beyond human intelligence, Frost said greater capability did not automatically make the Chinese term obsolete.

An intelligence could become extraordinarily powerful and still be "human-made", she noted.

China also had its own debate over what to call the technology.

In March, an online commentary published by People's Daily argued that the ubiquitous English abbreviation "AI" was an unsatisfying way to describe a technology becoming deeply embedded in everyday Chinese life.

It proposed finding a shorter, catchier Chinese alternative to complement the formal term *rengong zhineng*, pointing to home-grown names such as *diannao* ("electric brain") for computer, and *shouji* ("hand machine") for mobile phone.

Chao Hao, an associate professor in the department of Chinese Studies at the National University of Singapore, said the Chinese debate centred on "accessibility, linguistic identity and public communication".

A shorter Chinese label could prove useful while preserving the established term *rengong zhineng*, said Chao, whose research lies at the intersection of translation studies and natural language processing.

Frost noted that the US and China naming debates differed fundamentally in intent. While Trump argues AI has outgrown its English name, the Chinese debate centres on why an English abbreviation is replacing an established native term.

Still, the different terms should also not be read as evidence of neatly divided American and Chinese world views, Frost cautioned. Chinese technological vocabulary has always been "profoundly transnational", arriving via Japan while drawing heavily on Western scholarship, she said.

"Concepts change as they travel," Frost said. "They are not simply imported intact from one culture into another."

Still, *rengong zhineng* could eventually face a conceptual challenge of its own.

As AI systems take on a greater role in training and upgrading subsequent models – a process known as recursive self-improvement – humans could become increasingly distanced from the direct production of machine intelligence, Frost said.

That raises a fundamental question: how "human-made" must a system remain to justify being called *rengong zhineng*?

"Ironically, its future difficulty may arise not because AI becomes too intelligent to be called *rengong zhineng*, but because it becomes less visibly *rengong* – less visibly the product of human making," Frost said.

In that scenario, language may adapt once again.

"Perhaps *chaoji zhineng* could supplement it for a specific capability category and in specific contexts," Chao said, referring to *chaoji* – the Chinese term for "super".

Sumitomo Bakelite to raise output in China

Investment by Japanese giant underscores the growing importance of advanced packaging materials in the semiconductor supply chain

Howard Liu
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Japanese chip materials giant Sumitomo Bakelite plans to expand production of advanced semiconductor packaging materials in China and Singapore, marking the second such announcement for its Chinese operations in less than four months as artificial intelligence (AI) drives demand for more sophisticated semiconductors.

The Tokyo-based company said on Friday that it would add production lines for mould underfill (MUF) materials and compression-moulding granules at its facilities in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, and Singapore. The firm did not disclose an investment amount.

The expansion is expected to roughly double the company's production capacity for MUF materials and triple that for compression-moulding granules compared with current levels, according to its statement.

The Suzhou lines will be installed as part of an expansion of an existing factory completed in 2024, with production scheduled to begin in the 2030 financial year. The Singapore lines, also to be added to an existing facility, are expected to begin operations at the end of the 2028 financial year.

The investment underscores the growing importance of advanced packaging materials in the semiconductor supply chain, as the AI boom drives demand for more powerful chips with increasingly complex packaging structures.

Sumitomo Bakelite said demand for advanced semiconductors used in generative AI and communications satellites was growing rapidly, particularly in China and Southeast Asia, requiring packaging technologies capable of accommodating larger, thinner and more densely integrated chips.

MUF materials are used to fill microscopic gaps around semiconductor connections while encapsulating the package, helping improve reliability and manufacturing efficiency. Compression-moulding granules allow manufacturers to produce larger packages with reduced warpage to improve chip reliability.

Global revenues for semiconductor packaging materials rose 9.3 per cent to US$27.4 billion in 2025, according to industry association Semiconductor Equipment and Materials International, known as Semi.

China is the world's second-largest market for semiconductor materials, which include wafer fabrication materials, with revenue of US$15.6 billion.

Chinese semiconductor makers are also stepping up investments in advanced packaging.

In September, Shanghai-listed Biwin Storage announced plans to invest 4.5 billion yuan (HK$5.27 million) in a new phase of its wafer-level advanced packaging and testing project, building on earlier investments in technologies including 2.5D packaging and redistribution layers.

The latest announcement comes less than four months after Sumitomo Bakelite disclosed a separate expansion plan for its Suzhou facility, when it said new production lines would increase its semiconductor encapsulation materials capacity in China by about 30 per cent, with operations expected to begin around December 2028.

The Japanese company has manufactured semiconductor packaging materials in China since 1997, gradually expanding its production footprint to meet growing local demand.



A worker checks on semiconductor wafers at a factory in Jiangsu province.

Sumitomo Bakelite is one of the world's largest suppliers of semiconductor encapsulation materials, with an estimated global market share of about 40 per cent, according to figures previously disclosed by the company.

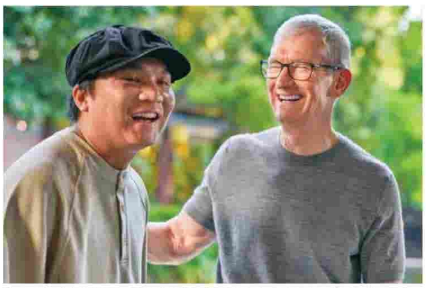
The expansion also comes as the Japanese materials maker seeks to strengthen its position in the global advanced packaging market through acquisitions.

In January, it agreed to acquire part of Japanese electronics manufacturer Kyocera's chemical materials business for around 30 billion yen (HK$1.48 billion), including operations producing semiconductor encapsulation materials and bonding pastes.

The transaction, expected to be completed by the end of this month, also covers chemical materials operations in Wuxi, another manufacturing hub in Jiangsu province.

Sumitomo Bakelite said the acquisition would add further MUF and compression-moulding materials capacity to its existing operations, strengthening its supply network across Japan, China and Southeast Asia.

Tim Cook starts visit amid mixed signals on new iPhone demand



Tim Cook with director Gu Tianji at the video shoot in Guangzhou. Photo: Handout

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Apple executive chairman Tim Cook has begun his third visit to China this year, following the launch of the iPhone 18 Pro line-up and the iPhone Duo, the company's first foldable device, in one of its biggest markets.

Cook met Meng Fanli, governor of Guangdong province, yesterday and said Apple was willing to expand its presence, including in smart manufacturing and sales channels.

As an important manufacturing powerhouse, Guangdong had been essential to Apple's growth in China, Cook said, citing the region's concentration of Apple suppliers and ecosystem partners.

Meng said the provincial government welcomed the American tech giant to deepen its presence through innovative products, emerging businesses, and research and development platforms, while vowing to forge a "first-class business environment" that was international, market-oriented and governed by the rule of law.

Cook was then spotted at an Apple Store in Guangzhou, according to social media posts by customers.

"Great to be back in China!" Cook wrote in a Saturday post on Weibo after watching a Guangzhou content creator use an iPhone 18 Pro to film a martial arts video.

This marks Cook's first trip to China since transitioning to executive chairman last month, when he handed the CEO role to John Ternus.

As Apple CEO, Cook visited China twice earlier this year. In May, he joined a high-profile business and tech delegation accompanying US President Donald Trump to a meeting with President Xi Jinping.

In March, Cook toured Apple stores in Chengdu and Beijing as part of celebrations marking the firm's 50th anniversary.

His latest visit followed the September launch of the much-anticipated iPhone Duo, which is scheduled to go on sale on October 23, as well as the iPhone 18 Pro and Pro Max, which are already available. Initial data showed the Pro handsets were well-received, although higher prices could weigh on consumer demand.

Sales of the new Pro models in their first three days were 12 per cent higher than sales of the iPhone 17 Pro line-up during its entire first week last year, lifting Apple to the No 1 position by smartphone sales in China for the week of September 14 to 20, according to Counterpoint Research.

However, Nikkei Asia reported last week that Apple had asked some suppliers to cut production of components for the new Pro models, raising questions about demand after the initial launch period.

EDITORIAL

Beijing reserving its fiscal firepower is the right move

Finance Minister Lan Foan's latest article offers an authoritative glimpse of Beijing's fiscal compass. Its timing is telling: demand is flagging, external headwinds are stiffening and the Central Committee's fifth plenum convenes in late October. Beneath the dry prose lies a weighty message: the real test is not only how hard to stimulate the economy but how to mend local governments' battered finances.

Stimulus comes first. The keywords are "precision" and "effectiveness", signalling Beijing wants to avoid repeating the broad, debt-fuelled expansion of September 2024. The latest package, while significant, is narrower. It includes a rate cut for policy banks and the country's first interest subsidy for new commercial mortgages for first-time homebuyers.

This restraint is sensible. Growth is near the official target, and earlier measures, such as ultra-long special government bonds, are still being absorbed. With banks' net interest margins at a historic low of 1.4 per cent, broad rate cuts would hurt lenders. Targeted measures coordinated by the finance ministry and central bank offer a better path. Beijing is right to reserve its fiscal firepower.

The harder issue is local debt. Unresolved, it blocks any meaningful lift in domestic demand and remains a major economic risk. Lan reports about 5.8 trillion yuan (HK$6.92 trillion) of a 6 trillion yuan bond programme to swap local governments' hidden debt has been issued, suggesting that resolution is entering its final stage.

Equally telling is his warning that new hidden debt and false debt-reduction claims will be strictly investigated and punished. Deleveraging and risk control remain a priority; Beijing will not simply flood the economy with cash for short-term growth.

That is the right direction, but the swap deals with existing debt, not the conditions that created it. Lan now turns to deeper structural risks, such as the operating deficits of local government financing vehicles. He stresses strengthening local public budgets, hinting they may widen tax sources and keep a larger share of value-added tax.

The case is strong. Local governments carry most spending responsibilities, from social welfare to infrastructure, yet rely for revenue on land sales and transfers from Beijing, both squeezed by the long property slump. Central government spending rose 6 per cent in the first eight months, but local spending grew just 0.3 per cent, so overall general public budget spending rose only 1.2 per cent. The general budget deficit more than doubled from 2.76 trillion yuan in 2019 to 5.66 trillion yuan last year, with a record 5.89 trillion yuan budgeted this year.

Short of money, authorities have withdrawn promised tax incentives and closed loopholes. In July, a 20 per cent tax was imposed on gains from offshore trusts with mainland beneficiaries or assets. In September, a 1994 dividend tax exemption for foreign individuals was scrapped. These are stopgaps. On September 28, a cabinet meeting chaired by Premier Li Qiang called on local governments to utilise unused borrowing limits. Beijing did the same in 2024 and 2025, allocating 400 billion yuan and 500 billion yuan respectively. But local governments have often used less than their quotas, suggesting more room to borrow is not the whole answer.

For decades, local officials were rewarded for pumping up gross domestic product, producing breakneck construction and encouraging rampant property speculation. Beijing now wants an end to wasteful local subsidy races, hence the State Council's planned "negative list" of entities local authorities may not subsidise. It also wants them to shift from a production-centred model to providing public services. Without steady revenue, they cannot do so.

Lan's often vague wording is understandable: policymakers must guide the public without upsetting markets while retaining leeway to act.

Beyond strict fiscal policy, the greater challenge is ensuring there are bigger payoffs after years of investment and infrastructure building. Fixed-asset investment has fallen 7.2 per cent this year, a sign the old growth engine is running out of steam. As the plenum approaches, Beijing needs to turn hints into concrete reform.

Lasting growth in domestic demand depends on putting local finances on a sound footing.

South China Morning Post

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Shuibei masterstroke in HK's gold strategy

Serving central banks and institutions is important but adding a vibrant wholesale and manufacturing centre for the precious metal would prove the game changer



Chow Chung-yan

Hong Kong's ambition to become an international gold trading centre rests not only on serving the nation's financial needs, but also on China's booming consumer market for gold.

As the world's largest gold producer and importer, China easily absorbs hundreds of tonnes or more of the precious metal each year, an estimated 80 per cent of which is snapped up by consumers whose love of gold dates back millennia.

Hong Kong has long been the primary gold market for Chinese consumers. In the early 1970s, the city's largest jeweller, Chow Tai Fook Enterprises, established the 999.9 purity standard (meaning 999.9 parts gold per 1,000), which quickly caught on. In 2008, the Legislative Council set the Chuk Kam purity standard at 99.9 per cent, higher than the mainland's 99 per cent consumer standard.

As a tax-free port, Hong Kong levies no import duties on jewellers and no sales tax on customers, allowing it to become China's undisputed consumer centre for gold. By 1998, the city had at least 1,300 gold and jewellery shops; today, it is regarded as one of the world's top gold retailing centres.

Yet, the picture has also changed considerably. Hong Kong remains an important retail centre for gold, but its future depends largely on integration with Shenzhen across the border. Best known for its meteoric rise as China's tech capital, Shenzhen is also an equally impressive centre for wholesale jewellery and fabrication.

Obscure 20 years ago, Shenzhen's Shuibei market is now Asia's largest jewellery wholesale hub by volume. Occupying an area only one third the size of New York's Central Park, it houses more than 7,000 merchants and accounts for at least 50 per cent of China's gold trading, with an annual turnover of 100 billion yuan (HK$117 billion).

The city first set out its ambition to turn Shuibei into a world-class gold wholesale and fabrication hub two decades ago, and this year it again mentioned gold and jewellery as a competitive industry in its 15th five-year plan. This dovetails neatly with Hong Kong's goal of becoming an international gold trading centre and expanding its physical gold storage tenfold, to 2,000 tonnes by 2028. A major reason for building up our vaulting capacity is to support the internationalisation of the yuan and to serve central banks and institutions in Belt and Road Initiative countries.

But that alone is not enough. Bullion sitting in brand-new vaults will not generate much wealth unless it is put to use and changes hands. Serving central banks and institutions is important, but adding a vibrant gold wholesale and manufacturing centre would be the real game changer. A considerable portion of the gold used by Shuibei's manufacturers already comes from Hong Kong. The figure, based on various industry reports, puts it at 20 to 30 per cent. Hong Kong's plans to expand its physical gold storage aggressively and to develop yuan-denominated gold financial products will be music to Shenzhen's ears.

> *"All this gives HK ample opportunity to put its burgeoning gold vaults to work*

The reason lies in how jewellery manufacturing and gold fabrication work. Facing intense competition, foundries operate on thin margins, and it normally takes several days from order to delivery. Daily fluctuations in the gold price can shipwreck their business. The industry mitigates this risk through gold leasing and hedging.

Under a gold lease, a foundry does not hold stock but borrows gold from a bank only after receiving a confirmed order. After delivery, it repays the bank with a similar amount of gold, plus interest, at a favourable time. This greatly reduces the capital the foundry must put down, as well as its exposure to price swings.

Because Shuibei also supplies gold products overseas, particularly to Southeast Asian markets, its foundries can lease gold from Hong Kong, transport it to a bonded zone in Shenzhen for fabrication and export the finished goods immediately. This closed-loop operation involves no customs duties and is cost-effective.

Even for the domestic market, Hong Kong is attractive because of interest-rate differentials. The onshore gold leasing rate is consistently higher than the offshore rate, and the spread can sometimes be significant. Modelled on the successful Stock Connect and Bond Connect schemes, Hong Kong launched Delivery Connect in July. It establishes a direct, regulated pipeline for moving and settling physical gold between Hong Kong and the Shanghai Gold Exchange, which keeps large physical vaults in Shenzhen.

This will make it increasingly easy for Shuibei merchants to lease gold from Hong Kong and take advantage of the onshore-offshore price premium. The same goes for hedging. As Hong Kong develops more gold-backed, yuan-denominated financial instruments, Shuibei jewellers will have more options to hedge against price fluctuations and manage risk.

All this gives Hong Kong ample opportunity to put its burgeoning gold vaults to work. Crucially, it creates a unique gold trading ecosystem that combines high finance, wholesale, manufacturing, retail and onshore and offshore markets across Hong Kong and Shenzhen. Nowhere else, not London, New York or Switzerland, can offer such a comprehensive value chain. This is Hong Kong's ace up its sleeve.

Chow Chung-yan is editor-in-chief of the South China Morning Post

Focus on patent law in space race

Over several decades, China has risen to become one of the most potent powers in the space race.

In October 2024, China released a national mid- and long-term development programme for space science. Since then, China has made significant strides. In 2025, it conducted 92 space launch missions, representing a 35 per cent increase from 2024. Furthermore, China's Tianwen-2 probe was the first to photograph Kamo'oalewa, a quasi-satellite of Earth.

According to the World Intellectual Property Organization, China filed the most patent applications under the Patent Cooperation Treaty in 2025, with the US in second place. As global collaboration intensifies, tech-sharing has become ubiquitous. Competitors may increasingly integrate Chinese-patented technologies into their infrastructure, thereby gaining an edge.

This is averse to Chinese interests, particularly amid the development of the International Lunar Research Station, a collaboration between China, Russia and various developing countries. Patent law aims to incentivise innovation by rewarding inventors with time-limited monopolies on their inventions. If their rights can be easily circumvented by mere contrived geographical displacement, this may deter tech giants from patenting and investing in China. Indeed, they may turn to jurisdictions which allow for extraterritorial application of their patent law protections.

LETTERS

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Section 105 under Title 35 of the United States Code deems "any invention made, used or sold in outer space on a space object or component thereof under the jurisdiction or control of the United States" to be so "made, used or sold" within its territory, with few exceptions. "Control" is scantly defined and the ultimate arbiter remains US courts.



The Tianwen-2 probe, atop a Long March-3B carrier rocket, lifts off on a mission in May last year. Photo: Xinhua

In addition, US courts have held that an entity found to supply or cause to supply US patented invention(s) (and/or any component thereof) for combination abroad would still be liable for infringement. This dramatically elevates the value of US patents and attracts Chinese companies to patent their inventions in the US. However, the US government is permitted by law to use and manufacture sensitive technologies without patent-holders' approval. This ultimately imperils Chinese interests.

Rendering China's patent law protections extraterritorial can preserve and instil confidence in home-grown innovators. This can galvanise national innovation and help realise its lofty aeronautical ambitions.

Alexander Clevewood Ng, New York

Global statecraft in dangerous shift

For centuries, Western industrial and military supremacy has fostered a civilisational "god complex".

This narrative hegemony has allowed the West to demonise geopolitical adversaries while shielding itself from reciprocal criticism. However, this strategy when weaponised against major powers like China and Russia risks triggering devastating consequences for global stability.

A historical precedent from the Zhou dynasty's Spring and Autumn period offers a stark warning. This era was defined by a decline in central imperial power, which hubristically insisted on acting as the sole governor of legitimacy, culture and etiquette. Meanwhile, the southern kingdom of Chu was often ridiculed by the elites of the Central Plains for its distinct language and customs. The breaking point arrived when the ruler of Chu, Xiong Qu, famously declared: "I am a barbarian; I will not adopt the titles and posthumous names of the Central Kingdoms."

This was a pivotal moment: liberated from the constraints of the central authority, Chu went on to become one of the strongest sovereign states tearing the empire apart.

Today's polarised geopolitical environment begs a similar question: when and why do nations fundamentally rebel against a Western-led, rules-based international order? What is the breaking point?

For Russia, the answer crystallised after decades of structural alienation. Despite voluntarily undergoing painful capitalist shock therapy and repeatedly floating cooperative security frameworks, including reportedly putting out feelers about joining Nato, Moscow was dismissed as a mere "gas station with nuclear weapons". The Minsk II ceasefire deal seems to have been used to buy time for Ukraine's military build-ups rather than to achieve peace. If Russia, culturally and racially intertwined with Europe, could not negotiate an equitable seat at the table, what chance does China have?

Beijing now faces a similar existential calculation. Ultimately, global statecraft is dangerously shifting from a calculation of what can be gained to a grim assessment of what is left to lose.

Daniel Cheung, Mid-Levels



Illustration: Huy Truong

China-India military relations stuck in 2020

Xi Jinping and Narendra Modi have shaken hands, border trade has reopened and direct flights have restarted but their armed forces are still not talking to each other



Gaurav Kumar

President Xi Jinping has met Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi three times in the past three years. Indian pilgrims are back at Kailash, the Tibetan mountain sacred to Hindus and Buddhists. Air China has restarted flights to New Delhi. But can trust grow between two armies that meet only in a crisis?

And why does the Pentagon now talk to the People's Liberation Army (PLA) more easily than India's army does?

In September, Xi made his first visit to India in nearly seven years; Beijing says it wants both countries to be "good neighbours and friends". Later that month, US President Donald Trump hosted Xi at the White House. Two capitals welcomed Xi. But only one lets its army talk properly to China's.

The Sino-Indian thaw has reached everything except the military. Direct flights have returned after nearly six years.

Three border trading points have reopened and trade now stands at more than US$100 billion a year. Leaders, traders and pilgrims cross the Himalayas. Why not soldiers?

Because two of the world's largest armies, facing each other along a disputed Himalayan border, are still frozen in 2020.

They last trained together in December 2019, at Umroi in Meghalaya, in the eighth round of Hand-in-Hand, a counterterrorism exercise that began in Kunming in 2007. Six months later came the Galwan incident, the first deadly clash on the border in 45 years. Soldiers fought with clubs and stones; 20 Indians and four Chinese died.

This May, Umroi hosted more than 400 troops from 12 Asian countries for the inaugural Pragati exercise. China was not among them. New Delhi's view is that the PLA must earn its way back.

The instinct is understandable. But caution is not a strategy. The question is not whether India should trust China blindly. It is whether India can afford to keep distrusting it by default.

Washington has answered that question for itself. Last November, US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth and his Chinese counterpart, Dong Jun, agreed to build channels to "deconflict and de-escalate".

In May, Hegseth became the first US defence chief since 1972 to accompany a president to China. The Pentagon treats talking to the PLA as risk management. Delhi still treats it as a concession.

Is this thaw a warning that India may be left alone? It is better read as a green light. If the world's two biggest rivals can compete and keep their generals talking, so can Asia's two oldest civilisations. India cannot possibly be more hawkish on the PLA than the Pentagon is; yet, awkwardly, that's what it looks like.

Are the new hotlines not enough? In August, Indian National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi agreed to add two military hotlines and two meeting points for senior commanders as well as a pledge of "early and substantial" progress on settling the boundary.

Beijing deserves credit. But a hotline is a fire alarm: it rings only when something is already burning. Weeks earlier, reports of a stand-off at Taksing in Arunachal Pradesh raised the alarm again. Armies that only talk in emergencies will keep having emergencies.

> *Would engagement reward Beijing for the Galwan clash? No. The incident is the reason to talk, not the reason to avoid it*

Would engagement reward Beijing for the Galwan clash? No. The incident is the reason to talk, not the reason to avoid it. Along the Line of Actual Control, a de facto border, both armies knew each other's positions down to the last tent but not each other's minds. Soldiers on both sides paid for that gap.

The objections are real. Pakistan received live inputs from China during Operation Sindoor, India's four-day conflict with Pakistan in May last year, and 81 per cent of Pakistan's recent military hardware imports are Chinese.

So what should be done? First, revive Hand-in-Hand. Over eight rounds and 12 years, it was the only regular occasion where the two armies met as professionals rather than adversaries.

Second, open the staff colleges. India's Defence Services Staff College in Wellington trains officers from dozens of countries. China's PLA Army Command College in Nanjing shapes future ground commanders. A few exchanges would let each side study the other's doctrine first-hand.

Would that expose secrets?

No more than India's exchanges with dozens of other armies do. And nothing humanises a rival like discovering that he, too, complains about the mess food.

Third, give the hotlines a political spine: an annual defence ministers' dialogue on a fixed date, whatever the mood on the border.

Fourth, train together for disaster. On the morning of August 26, a glacier-rock avalanche on the Nepal-China border sent a flash flood down the Bhote Koshi river. Within days, Indian military personnel and two PLA Air Force Y-20 transport planes had landed in Kathmandu. They worked in the same disaster, but apart. Glacial floods do not recognise borders and the next one may strike between India and China.

What should New Delhi ask in return? Restraint in the buffer zones, advance notice of large exercises and a joint way to investigate incidents. And why should Beijing agree? Because a quiet Himalayan front frees it to focus elsewhere and because an India that trains with everyone except China will be read by Asia as aligned against it.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio will reportedly visit India later this month ahead of a meeting of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a grouping comprising the United States, Japan, Australia and India. But Asia's peace will not be settled in Washington.

For Beijing, it means meeting openness with transparency, and having patience with India's politics. The diplomats of both countries have done their part. Now their soldiers have to talk.

Gaurav Kumar is a researcher at the Centre for Professional Military Education in the United Service Institution of India, New Delhi

Lawmakers not solely to blame for loss of gloss

Despite Legco becoming more efficient, public perception is far from overwhelmingly positive



Alice Wu

Rita Fan Hsu Lai-tai, Hong Kong's first post-handover Legislative Council president, recently dropped a political bomb. She revealed that one of her friends had been telling her that a legislature with 90 seats costs a lot more than one with 60 and that "I kind of agree with that".

The basic maths behind the statement cannot be refuted: 60 is two-thirds of 90. Even though Fan didn't bring up the topic herself – she was asked the question by the host during a radio show – it was shocking that a political veteran of her calibre would suggest considering the reduction of Legco seats to cut costs.

Funding is not the main issue at play here. Reducing the discussion to dollars and cents does not properly address the real problem, which is public perception.

First, a quick breakdown of how we arrived at the current number of Legco seats. The legislature expanded from 60 to 70 seats for the 2012-16 term. This was part of the 2010 constitutional and electoral reform package, which also increased the number of Election Committee members from 800 to 1,200.

Naturally, there was a cost to adding 10 more seats to the council, but the addition was seen as worth it. Then, the 2021 electoral overhaul took the number of Legco seats from 70 to 90 and completely reconfigured Legco's composition.

There is a gap between public expectations and the perception of how lawmakers are performing their roles and duties.

Fan did touch on this in her interview, pointing to the personal conduct of lawmakers and stressing that they should always behave with caution and avoid breaking the law, however minor the infraction. She cited recent misconduct by Legco members.

"Lawmakers should not only convey the thoughts of residents but also serve as role models for them," she said.

It is true that misconduct by Legco members erodes public trust in them. Without that trust, the council's perceived value diminishes. Lawmakers have been embroiled in legal troubles and controversy before, though, and reducing the size of the legislature did not come up.

Answering why Legco's size and cost are now an issue requires considering something beyond personal conduct. The skirmishes inside the chamber that used to make news have dissipated with this better-behaved, more patriotic Legco, so the most largely mundane work lawmakers do goes unnoticed.

Incidents such as the recent one at a district office of two lawmakers are more likely to garner headlines. A disgruntled resident reportedly threw red paint at the joint office because the lawmakers were "being unhelpful".

> *The biggest issue by far stems from the unintended consequences of how Chief Executive John Lee has conducted his business with Legco*

Such an episode leaves a greater impression on the public than lawmakers praising one of their own for being well-spoken, which also recently made the news.

A survey last year by the PoD Research Institute found that only 29.6 per cent of respondents expressed satisfaction with Legco's performance while 50.6 per cent were dissatisfied.

While we don't need fights to return to the legislature's chambers, we do need to know that quality debate is taking place and that our lawmakers are making constructive contributions to the city.

That means doing more than just airing any idea that comes to their minds.

One noteworthy bad example of late is the suggestion to hold a Mark Six lottery for families of newborns to help boost the city's anaemic birth rate. Legislator and former police officer Joe Chan last month said the government could collaborate with the Hong Kong Jockey Club to set up a Mark Six-style award ranging from HK$1 million to HK$4 million for newborns.

Two years ago, lawmaker Bill Tang Ka-piu had suggested that displaying photos of babies in government offices would encourage more civil servants to have children. These are not valuable contributions to Hong Kong's future.

The biggest issue by far stems from the unintended consequences of how Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu has conducted his business with Legco.

During his unprecedented speech to lawmakers at the oath-taking ceremony in January, Lee spoke at length on how he thought legislators should do their job. That gave the impression that Legco members did not know how to do their jobs. He did not mention the legislature's constitutional role of monitoring the government.

In addition to this, the way Lee and his team have treated lawmakers who have been critical of their policies is making it harder for the city's legislators to carry out their work.

Despite Legco having become more efficient, the public's perception of the council has suffered as a result of the administration's approach.

Alice Wu is a political consultant and a former associate director of the Asia Pacific Media Network at UCLA

يَعِيشُ المَرءُ عِدَّةَ بَنِي أَبِيهِ وَيوشِكُ
أَن يَصيرَ بِحَيثُ صاروا
(المهلهل)

YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB

Regardless how long an individual lives, he is always in the company of his forefathers, eventually following their footsteps.

Al-Muhalhel
(Pre-Islamic Arab poet and war hero)

Opinion

Riyadh airport attack requires a shared security response

DR. ABDULAZIZ SAGER

Saturday's attack on King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh is a painful reminder that the Houthi threat extends beyond Yemen's borders. An attack on an international airport endangers civilians of different nationalities, disrupts connectivity and undermines confidence in infrastructure serving the wider global economy. Its implications demand sustained international attention beyond immediate condemnation.

The incident also exposes a long-standing gap between Gulf and international assessments of the movement. For Saudi Arabia, Houthi missile and drone capabilities have represented a direct national security concern for years. International responses, however, have often viewed the Houthis primarily through the lens of Yemen's internal conflict or particular episodes of maritime disruption. These perspectives capture important aspects of the problem but they can underestimate the relationship between the movement's domestic position, external support and capacity to threaten neighboring countries.

It would be inaccurate to suggest that international partners have taken no action. Nevertheless, their measures have not produced a durable framework capable of preventing renewed attacks. The central concern is therefore the consistency of international engagement and whether it addresses the capabilities sustaining the threat. Iranian support remains an essential part of this assessment.

Addressing this problem requires sustained cooperation against procurement networks, illicit financing, weapons trafficking and the transfer of components used in missile and drone production. Diplomatic engagement with Iran should also place clear emphasis on preventing support that enables attacks on neighboring states. Such efforts should protect humanitarian access and avoid imposing further hardship on Yemen's population.

The US has an especially consequential role. Its military operations against the Houthis have demonstrated its ability to respond when maritime threats became an immediate priority. The May 2025 Oman-mediated ceasefire established that the US and the Houthis would cease targeting one another, including American vessels. Neither development, by itself, established comprehensive protection for Saudi territory or resolved the wider regional threat.



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This creates a difficult question for Gulf partners: How can security assurances translate into predictable support when their own civilians and infrastructure are targeted? Gulf governments continue to strengthen the protection of their populations while supporting efforts to prevent wider regional escalation. Building on substantial investments in national capabilities, closer regional and international cooperation can further enhance their ability to address interconnected missile threats, maritime security challenges and illicit weapons supply networks.

Several forms of deeper Saudi-US cooperation merit consideration. Renewed American operations would require clearly defined objectives and careful assessment of escalation risks. More coordinated action could strengthen deterrence and distribute responsibilities. Expanded defensive assistance could improve early warning systems, interception capacity, intelligence sharing and logistical readiness.

The Makkah Joint Defense Agreement between Saudi Arabia, Turkiye and Pakistan introduces another dimension. Its practical contribution will depend on how its commitments are implemented.

Saudi Arabia's security is closely connected to international interests in reliable energy supplies and secure maritime navigation. Protecting these shared interests requires sustained cooperation that combines credible deterrence, stronger defensive capabilities, the effective enforcement of weapons restrictions and a clear diplomatic path toward a durable settlement in Yemen. Saturday's Riyadh attack should serve as a turning point in translating shared concern into practical commitments.

For Saudi Arabia, Houthi missile and drone capabilities have represented a direct national security concern for years



COURTESY: AMJAD RASEM/ASHARQ AL-AWSAT

The Houthis fail to recognize that Saudi Arabia cannot accept political blackmail through terrorism

How Kingdom can make Houthi attacks more costly

HASSAN AL-MUSTAFA

Twelve people were killed and 309 others injured, some critically, in the attack carried out by the Houthi militia against a passenger terminal at King Khalid International Airport in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, on Saturday. The attack sparked an outpouring of anger toward the Houthis — and that anger was not confined to Saudis alone. Arab and international condemnations came swiftly and unequivocally, particularly since the attack struck a civilian airport rather than a military target.

Spokesman for the Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen, Maj. Gen. Turki Al-Maliki, described the attack as a "full-fledged war crime" and said in a statement that the coalition would respond "firmly," in accordance with international humanitarian law.

On the same day, coalition forces announced that a projectile had fallen in the vicinity of King Fahd International Airport in Dammam, following other attacks on Saudi airports in recent days. This is an indication of the extent of the Houthis' expanding hostilities.

They also seek to portray Saudi Arabia as a state incapable of confronting an armed faction and, consequently, believe they can alter Riyadh's regional standing and thereby secure financial and political gains in future negotiations, in which the Houthis would receive a greater share. This is a naive perception that is detached from reality. It does not read Saudi policy as it is but instead constructs a wishful vision through which the Houthis believe they are capable of exerting influence. They fail to recognize that Riyadh cannot accept political blackmail through terrorism and that its patience stems from its determination to decide the form, timing and mechanism of its response, rather than becoming hostage to Houthi actions.

Saudi Arabia's response to the ongoing developments is based on a military strategy formulated according to intelligence and to political and field realities. The scale of the airstrikes and the number of targets destroyed are part of the operations aimed at reducing the frequency of Houthi launches, diminishing their accuracy, increasing the time required to prepare them and forcing the Houthis to consume their stockpiles at a faster rate than they are able to replenish them.



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In parallel, the Saudi Ministry of Defense is working to protect airports, energy facilities and sensitive civilian sites through a multilayered ballistic missile interception system.

There is also a domestic Yemeni dimension that complements the protection of Saudi territory, through Riyadh and the coalition's backing of the internationally recognized Yemeni government, whose various battalions are directly fighting the Houthis in several governorates.

Turning back to the Houthi attack on King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh, Al-Maliki's description of it as a "war crime" adds a legal dimension to the military response. This would involve documenting the attacks, the types of munitions used and the civilian sites damaged. A case can then be submitted to international legal bodies and human rights institutions, thereby helping to build a broader coalition opposed to the Houthis.

Saudi Arabia will most likely work to make Houthi attempts to attack the Kingdom more difficult and more costly. It will do so by intensifying its airstrikes against military and security targets inside Yemen, supporting the legitimate Yemeni forces with additional equipment and intelligence, and urging the international community to shoulder its responsibilities in addressing the threat posed by the Houthis, not only to Riyadh but also to the security of the Middle East, Bab Al-Mandab and the Red Sea.

This is particularly the case given that this is a terrorist group that maintains cross-border ties with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Somalia's Al-Shabab and the Iraqi militias, all of which are extremist entities seeking to tighten their grip on the Middle East's vital waterways.

Opinion

The Houthis have crossed every red line

HANI HAZAIMEH



How many civilians must be killed before the world stops treating the Houthi militia as a political actor that can be managed through statements and diplomatic gestures? How many airports must come under attack, how many lives must be shattered and how much more blood must be spilled before the international community confronts the reality that this terrorist militia has become a direct threat to regional security and civilian life?

Saturday's attack on King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh should silence any remaining argument that Houthi aggression can be dismissed as another episode in Yemen's protracted conflict. Saudi Arabia's General Authority of Civil Aviation reported 12 deaths and 309 injuries. These are not incidental figures in a military briefing. They represent an appalling human cost inflicted on civilians who had every right to expect safety at an international airport.

There should be no ambiguity about the moral responsibility for attacks that deliberately target civilian facilities or recklessly endanger innocent lives. No political slogan, ideological grievance or claim of resistance can justify turning airports into targets and ordinary travelers into victims. The Houthi militia's conduct deserves the strongest possible condemnation. It is reckless, criminal and fundamentally incompatible with the most basic principles of humanity.

The Houthi militia is reckless, criminal and fundamentally incompatible with the most basic principles of humanity

The world must stop sanitizing this militia's actions with the language of political complexity. Whatever its claims or ambitions, an armed group that threatens civilian infrastructure and puts the lives of thousands at risk must be judged by what it does, not by the excuses it offers. The deliberate endangerment of civilians cannot be repackaged as resistance and terrorism does not become legitimate simply because its perpetrators wrap it in political rhetoric.

Following an attack of this magnitude, Saudi Arabia is entitled to take necessary and proportionate measures, consistent with international law, to prevent further assaults and restore security. This is in recognition of a fundamental principle: a government has a duty to protect its people.

The international community must also confront the broader regional consequences of Houthi aggression. The militia's military relationship with Iran, its access to weapons and its capacity to threaten neighboring countries and international shipping have made its actions a concern far beyond Yemen.

The security of Saudi Arabia is inseparable from the security of the wider region. Threats against the Kingdom's airports and infrastructure undermine regional stability, disrupt international travel and deepen the climate of insecurity across the Arabian Peninsula and the Red Sea. The implications extend to international commerce and the freedom of navigation through vital maritime routes, including Bab Al-Mandab. A militia willing to endanger civilian aviation must not be allowed to expand its capacity to intimidate the region by threatening global shipping as well.

The international response remains dangerously inadequate. Condemnation without consequences is not a strategy

Yet the international response remains dangerously inadequate. Condemnation without consequences is not a strategy. Declarations of solidarity without practical action are little more than diplomatic theater. Governments must work together to strengthen air and missile defenses, improve intelligence sharing, disrupt illicit weapons transfers and ensure that those responsible for attacks face credible accountability. The objective must be to prevent the next strike, not merely to document its aftermath.

The Houthis have crossed a line that should never have been crossed. Their attacks on civilian facilities demand more than ritual denunciations and carefully worded expressions of concern. They demand a serious, coordinated response that makes clear that terrorism and the deliberate endangerment of civilians will not be tolerated.

The real test is whether governments are prepared to act before the next tragedy, rather than express regret after it. If the world continues to reward Houthi aggression with indecision, it will bear part of the responsibility for allowing the threat to grow.

The protection of civilians must be the priority and the security of Saudi Arabia cannot be treated as negotiable. The Houthis must be confronted with credible deterrence, meaningful accountability and a clear understanding that their campaign of terror will not be allowed to dictate the future of the region. The time for diplomatic theater is over. The time for effective action is now.

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How UK-US military leases secure sovereign concessions

DR. BADER BIN SAUD



Maritime concession agreements coming into effect in 2026 reveal the emergence of a new form of colonialism cloaked in the guise of commercial investment. This structural manipulation centers on a 50-year lease agreement, materializing after two years of diplomatic wrangling following an initial January 2024 memorandum of understanding, through which Somaliland has granted a coastal strip on the Gulf of Aden to the Ethiopian navy.

This territorial lease was bartered for a promise of formal diplomatic recognition from Addis Ababa. Ethiopia continues to delay execution, while Somaliland maintains independent trade and security relations with the UK, Taiwan, Kenya and others without official status.

This calculated maritime encroachment coincides with the aggressive activation of contracts granting strategic control over critical ports and military facilities elsewhere.

Contemporary global powers seeking access to warm waters no longer deploy battleships to subjugate developing territories. They utilize long-term commercial leases to quietly dismantle the concept of the nation-state, transforming vital ports into disguised sovereign colonies while backroom legal deals turn international law into a tool for the voluntary relinquishment of domestic territory.

Modern colonial contracts are drafted with a financial precision that systematically converts defaulted infrastructure loans into voluntary surrenders of state authority. Analysis from the Center for Strategic and International Studies highlights the operational expansion of the Ream Naval Base in Cambodia and the isolated foreign-managed facilities at Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka under a 99-year lease agreement.

Backroom legal deals turn international law into a tool for the voluntary relinquishment of domestic territory

These developments demonstrate how dual-use infrastructure project facilities mutate into closed outposts shielded from the sovereign oversight of local host governments. These legal loopholes are engineered through binding financial swap clauses that strip the host country of regulatory, judicial and security authority within the facility's physical perimeter. Due to severe budget deficits, vital investment hubs across the Horn of Africa and the Asian maritime corridors are being hollowed out, becoming isolated enclaves completely severed from central state control.

This matches the contractual immunity guarding the upgraded Ream base, where host authorities lack the sovereign right to inspect incoming naval vessels or enforce customs controls within the designated zone.

Predatory control contracts violate the core spirit of the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, converting international treaties into a legislative shield that legitimizes disguised colonialism. This legal manipulation is evident in recent Indian Ocean diplomacy, specifically the diplomatic disputes surrounding the Chagos Archipelago.

Predatory control contracts violate the core spirit of the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea

The UK's framework to cede formal sovereignty over the islands to Mauritius remains structurally paralyzed following severe American opposition. British defense authorities immediately froze millions in contractual payments to Mauritius after the US executive branded the agreement "terrible," proving that these long-term control treaties have effectively stripped international legal bodies of their independent enforcement power.

The contemporary international order is entirely incapable of preventing major powers from politicizing commercial investments to construct permanent military outposts on foreign territory, directly guaranteeing the erosion of national sovereignty through legal consent.

Colonial lease mechanisms are clearly documented in records from the British House of Commons, which detail the financial terms of the proposed Chagos Archipelago agreement. The framework grants London and Washington absolute rights to manage and operate their joint Diego Garcia military base for a century-long term, requiring an annual payment of £101 million ($133 million) to Mauritius. This strategy involves severe geographical dispossession and the systematic forced exile of 2,000 indigenous Chagos Islanders, transforming their ancestral land into a covert military launchpad for long-range bomber operations.

Major centers of international influence no longer rely on conventional conquest to acquire territory. Long-term concession agreements serve as the primary mechanism for foreign empires to assert control over key ports and maritime access points in southern Yemen, the Republic of Djibouti and Somaliland, turning these commercial agreements into a legal cover that dismantles national states and replaces them with sovereign contractual colonies.

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OPINION

How the AI Boom Ends



INSIDE VIEW
By Andy Kessler

I can tell you how the artificial-intelligence data-center boom will probably end, but I can't tell you when. Implementing large language models has been a brute-force approach: Big, fast and expensive GPUs from Nvidia crunch a trillion parameters using massive amounts of memory housed in liquid-cooled, gigawatt-gobbling data centers, all with brute-force pricing. It sure smells like IBM mainframes of old.

Be careful about extrapolating anything from today's pricing. With AI, like all new technologies, the refinement stage is kicking in—just as mainframes gave way to cheaper minicomputers, microprocessors, web servers and now AI architectures. AI token prices have been dropping but are set to plunge faster than most anticipate. Tech growth is never a straight line.

Silicon Valley's mantra for decades has been smaller, cheaper, faster, better. I asked venture capitalist Steve Jurvetson to translate that into numbers. "We often see a technology shift when the new approach is 10 times better. It can be 10 times more performant or 10 times cheaper, sometimes both." He calls it the "factor of 10."

And it's happening. Last week, according to OpenRouter, OpenAI and Anthropic were charging a premium for some of their models—$1 to $2 per million input tokens. Comparable Chinese open-weight models like Z.ai's GLM and Alibaba's Qwen charged 6 to 12 cents, around 90% less—that factor of 10 inflection point. American AI labs have gone from 70% market share last year to 30% today. All are still growing. But prices matter.

AI architecture is evolving. Instead of a trillion parameters, efficient small language models might use 70 billion and run on an Apple Mac. These local models have no token costs beyond the cost of hardware and electricity.

But they must be less capable than the large language models, right? Not really. Stanford researchers show that a locally run small language model "can successfully answer 88.7% of single-turn chat and reasoning queries." No question we'll always have high-end models running in data centers. IBM still sells mainframes. But growth will happen elsewhere.

Where? Another Silicon Valley saying I've lived by: Intelligence moves out to the edge of the network. The real breakthrough will happen when robust AI models run on smartphones. It's already starting. In September, California-based PrismML released a compressed version of the popular open-source Qwen3.8 27B AI model. The company got it down to under 6 gigabytes. That means it fits not only on PCs but also on high-end smartphones. The memory size is reduced by roughly 9 to 10 times. There's that factor of 10.

Technology doesn't stand still. Qualcomm recently announced a new Snapdragon neural processing unit, or NPU, for smartphones. Using what the company calls a "mixture-of-experts" model, it could run a 30 billion parameter AI model in 3 gigabytes of memory. According to the Deep View, the largest AI model on a phone has been four billion parameters on an Apple A20 Pro chip. Qualcomm provides a 7.5 times boost.

Demand isn't about to let up, but prices will start plunging by factors of 10.

NPUs, like Qualcomm's new Snapdragon and Google's Tensor chips in its Pixel phones, are multiplying. Same for the latest Apple M- and A-series chips, engines that can run AI models locally on iPhones—maybe why Apple hasn't joined the AI data-center spending delirium.

A Nvidia-backed startup, Reflection AI, claims it matches leading Chinese open-weight AI models with "3-4x less inference compute." That's it? Only 3 or 4 times? Wake me up when it's 10 times. At the pace AI is moving, that could be year-end.

Agents are all the rage, from Meta's Muse to xAI's Grokbot. They run on virtual machines in data centers but raise all sorts of privacy concerns. Startup Perplexity recently teamed up with Nvidia to run agents on PCs. Zero token costs. And you own your data.

I often hear, that if tokens get cheaper, demand will go up. That's Jevons Paradox. Sure, elasticity works. But if prices drop 90%, demand must increase 900% just to stay flat. Remember when internet demand grew while debt-laden Global Crossing spectacularly failed because prices dropped too fast? Historically, semiconductors got 30% cheaper every year. When prices dropped by more than 50%, disaster struck with fabrication plant closings and company failures.

Will 2027 see peak data center? Again, timing is dicey. Current demand is gangbusters, but spending is a game of chicken until multiple factor-of-10 improvements kick in and prices collapse. This could set off a cascade of data-center halts and debt defaults, even as token demand increases.

Yes, model training, drug discovery and winning prizes like the recently solved Navier-Stokes equations require hot chips in data centers. But chatbots and agents and other tasks may increasingly be handled on PCs and phones and smart glasses and whatever new gizmos Silicon Valley invents over the next decade. I've heard this called the "Great Migration." Mr. Jurvetson's factor of 10 is visible now, as it often is, but ignored. Change doesn't happen overnight. It happens gradually, then suddenly.

Write to kessler@wsj.com.

What Are U.S. Soldiers Doing in Ecuador?



AMERICAS
By Mary Anastasia O'Grady

News that U.S. soldiers were deployed to Ecuador last month to fight drug-trafficking cartels deserves more attention than it has received. A trademark pledge of President Trump is to stay out of "endless wars." Yet if ever there were a conflict destined to go on forever, it's the armed effort to defeat the suppliers of mind-altering substances in the face of robust consumer demand.

This isn't to dismiss out of hand the Shield of the Americas, the new U.S. regional security initiative under which the Ecuador mission was launched. The State Department says the goal of the hemispheric project, unveiled in March, is to pull together "likeminded allies" to "work together to advance strategies that stop foreign interference in our hemisphere, criminal and narco-terrorist gangs and cartels, and illegal and mass immigration."

Enhanced cooperation on the security interests of pro-Western countries in the hemisphere is a welcome development. To the extent it's possible for the U.S. to assist neighbors in recovering democratic institutions that have been lost to organized crime, the initiative has promise. But if the Americas Counter Cartel Coalition, operating under the "shield," requires sending American soldiers to fight in the jungles of far-flung lands, it will tread on dangerous ground.

The U.S. successfully supported Colombia and President Álvaro Uribe in that country's war against narco-trafficking rebels in the 2000s by helping with intelligence, equipment and training and by sending in military advisers. It never committed troops.

A growing number of countries now welcome security help from the U.S. because armed groups have overwhelmed national police and military. The problems go well beyond narcotics production and trafficking. Criminal networks rule swaths of weak countries. They run extortion and kidnapping rackets, collect taxes, interfere with elections, traffic people, intimidate the political class with threats of violence, and run illegal gold-mining operations that trample the rights of mining companies and rural communities.

Quito is one of 19 governments that have joined the shield. Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru and Panama are members. Four Caribbean countries, including the Dominican Republic, are in the group. Most member governments are center-right. Guatemala is one notable exception. All have reason to worry about threats to democracy from transnational criminal networks.

Over the past decade drug traffickers searching for the path of least resistance from South America to the north have gravitated to Ecuador. Once a small-bore banana republic marked by political instability, its weak institutions, rampant corruption and attractive location made it a target for gangsters looking to create a transit hub. It is now an organized-crime hot spot.

Quito wants help in curbing cartel violence, but demand for drugs persists.

As cartel violence has intensified and security has deteriorated, Ecuadorians have desperately sought a way back to the old tranquility they remember. President Daniel Noboa won a special election in 2023 and a regular election in 2025 by promising to crack down on crime. But progress has been slow. The arrival of U.S. forces raised hopes that the tide will soon turn. In raids last month, Ecuadorian forces, fighting alongside Americans, killed three alleged narcos and captured dozens more.

Yet the broader strategy is unclear. Mr. Uribe's triumph in Colombia over the guerrillas and the paramilitary didn't end the flow of cocaine to the U.S. One reason is that American demand for narcotics is inelastic: Even when the white hats reduce supply and prices go up, consumers keep buying. The net effect is that cartel income increases.

Illicit groups aren't about to abandon their profitable businesses. But they can be cut down to size. The difficulty is finding a way to minimize their capacity to control territory without trampling republican values. Mr. Uribe managed that. His government reestablished its authority across the country and restored it to its proper function of defending life and property without destroying democracy.

Contrast that with El Salvador, which has gone the strongman route, employing high-powered weapons and sweeping lockups with no due process and at the expense of pluralism. Freedom has been exchanged for peace. Some political opponents of President Nayib Bukele have fled into exile. Sadly, the Trump administration celebrates Mr. Bukele.

Ecuador could come out a winner if it can copy Colombia and avoid the error of El Salvador. If the costs of operating in Ecuador go high enough, gangsters might even leave, establishing routes through different countries. It's what regional analysts call the "balloon effect." The trouble is it doesn't do much for the Americas.

To reach a lasting peace, the region will do better to emphasize open markets, deregulation, transparency, independent institutions that check the concentration of power, and efforts to professionalize the military. That's a hemispheric cause worth fighting for.

Write to O'Grady@wsj.com.

Will the FTC Protect You From Discounts?

By Mary Sullivan

The Federal Trade Commission seems poised to join the backlash against personalized pricing. That would be a mistake. The practice remains poorly understood.

Personalized pricing, or its more sinister name, "surveillance pricing," is a method of setting prices whereby companies use personal data to make individualized offers. According to a new FTC proposal, personalized pricing likely constitutes an "unfair or deceptive" practice unless the seller discloses "the fact that the price is personalized, the basis of that personalization, and the type of data used."

The agency's conclusion is premature and relies on incomplete information. Don't take my word for it. The FTC concedes as much, stating in its August enforcement bulletin that "the extent to which businesses currently use personalized pricing is not well understood, and the effects of personalized pricing on consumers are unclear."

Nor do we have a grasp of its prevalence. Remarkably, the FTC's proposal doesn't cite a single instance of a company's using personalized pricing. Rather, it relies on hypotheticals designed to make the practice appear harmful to consumers. Consider a grocery chain charging more for milk to a family with children. A hotel could charge a higher price for a person traveling for a funeral.

The commission rushes to regulate personalized pricing.

These scenarios strain credulity. The FTC should develop its enforcement policy around real-world behavior, not imagined harms.

According to the theory of perfect price discrimination, a monopolist charges each consumer the maximum price that he is willing to pay for a good or service. This would make consumers worse off because all the gains from trade go to the seller.

In reality, even a monopolist wouldn't be able to extract all consumer surplus, because of the presence of alternatives and the inability to fully know consumers' willingness to pay. With personalized pricing, some buyers would see higher prices and others lower ones. The overall effect on consumer welfare is an empirical question.

So far, only one study, from 2022, has directly examined it with a pricing field experiment. Researchers at the University of Chicago found personalized pricing could benefit many consumers. While the practice raised prices for some, 60% were better off. They received individualized offers that were lower than the previous uniform price.

These results should give the FTC reason to pause any proposed enforcement and first develop a better understanding of personalized pricing. Instead of caricaturing how firms set prices, the commission should grapple with how the practice actually works. Rather than assume personalized pricing is always bad for consumers, it should account for the possible benefits suggested by scholars.

Our limited knowledge provides little justification for rushing forward with policies that could effectively ban personalized pricing—a practice whose potential upside we have yet to fully understand.

Ms. Sullivan, a former FTC economist, is a visiting scholar at the George Washington University Regulatory Studies Center.

BOOKSHELF | By Aurelian Craiutu

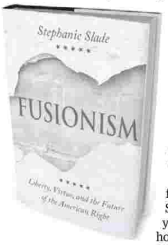
An Alliance Of Principles

Fusionism

By Stephanie Slade
Notre Dame, 304 pages, $30

The name of Frank Meyer is rarely heard on the political right today. Younger conservatives in the 2020s won't know much about fusionism, the political outlook Meyer formulated—briefly, the idea that free markets, virtue and tradition can cohere with one another. Since his death in 1972, fusionism's heyday, it has gone out of fashion, replaced by a form of right-wing bellicosity with little patience for compromise.

Stephanie Slade's "Fusionism: Liberty, Virtue, and the Future of the American Right" explores the intellectual roots of fusionism and, by extension, American conservatism. The starting point is the great debate between traditionalists as defenders of order, morality, religion and virtue, and libertarians and classical liberals as advocates of the free market and individual rights. Over time, neither side achieved dominance within American conservatism; what emerged instead was a "fusion" of the two. Ms. Slade, an editor at Reason magazine, has given us an excellent account of a once-influential political outlook that deserves renewed attention.



Fusionism was given its first full expression in the Sharon Statement of 1960, drafted by young conservatives in the home of William F. Buckley Jr. in Sharon, Conn. They believed conservatives needed a solid philosophical and metaphysical foundation anchored in the principles of limited government, free markets and individual rights. For them, liberty and virtue were the two pillars on which any good society rests. We need freedom to be virtuous, the fusionists argued, and we require virtue to live happily and freely. "The task of the conservative movement in America," Ms. Slade explains, "was to 'harmonize' social conservatism with free-market economics . . . because human flourishing is impossible without freedom as well as virtue."

Fusionists were liberals, but their liberalism differed from that of the progressives. This is evident in their conception of the role of the state. In the fusionist view, the state can't be trusted with authority over economic, moral, religious or lifestyle questions. Its job is to keep individuals free so that they can pursue a life of virtue on their own. Fusionists were conservatives, but their traditionalism had little in common with the vision of ultraconservatives who opposed the values of the modern world.

Fusionism, Ms. Slade maintains, was not merely an alliance between factions for short-term political gain. It offered a coherent set of shared commitments with a pedigree that runs through the American founding. Russell Kirk and Friedrich Hayek held views that seem irreconcilable, but they both adhered more closely to fusionist principles than is commonly understood. The same goes for Milton Friedman, who remained in the fusionist orbit for a long time.

Another arguably fusionist figure discussed in the book is Ronald Reagan, who combined libertarian leanings with genuine appreciation for freedom anchored in virtue. Sadly, Reagan's worldview has fallen into disrepute among what Ms. Slade calls the Dissident Right. She devotes half of the book to an analysis of the current political landscape on the right and explains why Reagan's vision is deeply at odds with today's scorched-earth politics.

A half-century ago, conservatives championed free markets and moral traditionalism. Much of today's right has abandoned that synthesis.

How did the Republican Party go from Reagan to Donald Trump? Today's right-wing populism, Ms. Slade asserts, has roots in the post-Reagan years when a split emerged between neoconservatives, committed to free markets and global cooperation, and paleoconservatives, who embraced economic nationalism, protectionism and anti-immigrant policies. The latter hearkened back to an earlier America First isolationism and introduced coarseness into political debates, vilifying adversaries and dissidents within their own camp. In Ms. Slade's assessment, the face of the paleocon movement was "Pitchfork Pat" Buchanan, whose militant and isolationist worldview reached its maturity in the MAGA movement. "The paleocons were concerned less with keeping the government small," she writes, "than with ensuring it be used to promote the right causes and help the right people."

Six decades ago, Meyer worried that a heresy had crept into Republican thinking, one that demanded election victories at all costs and that placed no importance on principle or policy. If he were alive today, he would not be pleased with his friends. The Dissident Right exploits grievance and status resentments triggered by immigration and economic hardship. Its leaders declare opponents traitors and denounce compromise, gradualism and moderation as signs of weakness. The Dissident Right, Ms. Slade persuasively shows, believes that our system of checks and balances and limited government is rotten and must give way to a "Caesarist" approach to executive power. Self-described conservatives jettison free-market policies and embrace big deficits and government expenditures for the benefit of Republican voting constituencies; their aim isn't to shrink the state or limit its purview but to control and expand it for nakedly partisan purposes.

Could an updated form of fusionism ameliorate some of these pathologies? Nobody knows for sure. Breathing life into the liberty-virtue synthesis might require relinquishing the vocabulary of fusionism. Perhaps a new type of conservatism will emerge that reflects and responds to the complexity and tensions of modern life.

Ms. Slade believes that there is a kernel of fusionism in almost all of us. She may be right. It is impossible, in the 21st century, to identify a single overriding interest or value that ought alone to govern social life, whether freedom, virtue, equality or efficiency. During the Cold War, as collectivism made advances in all areas of life, individualism made sense as a lodestar. But we live in a multiplicity of realms—social, economic, cultural, political, religious—that follow their own logic and cannot be reduced to a single principle. What's needed is a balance between rival values and principles that is flexible, moderate and resistant to doctrinal purity. Ms. Slade's history of fusionism might help conservatives practice this art of balance in dark times.

Mr. Craiutu is a professor of political science at Indiana University, Bloomington.

OPINION

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Trump's Diesel Insult to Lindsey Graham

The world misses Lindsey Graham, and never more than now as President Trump sides more decidedly with Vladimir Putin in his war against Ukraine and Europe. The late Senator might have been able to persuade the President to avoid this moral and strategic mistake.

His deal with Putin helps the Kremlin's war on Ukraine's cities.

Mr. Trump announced late Friday that the U.S. will buy up to 4.8 million tons (nearly 36 million barrels) of Russian diesel fuel in stages. That includes an "immediate" supply of 300,000 tons, another 500,000 in November, and one million "immediately thereafter."

The delivery of another three million tons is "based on the condition of their Diesel Refineries," Mr. Trump wrote on Truth Social. The U.S. Treasury lifted some sanctions on Russia through April 7 so it could export the diesel.

"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!" Mr. Trump wrote on Truth Social.

This is supposed to help Republicans in the November elections that are three weeks away. But 36 million barrels of Russian diesel won't move prices much. The world consumed 28 million barrels of diesel and other distillates daily in 2025, according to OPIS, which is part of Dow Jones Energy.

What the deal will do is directly finance Mr. Putin's bloody war in Ukraine. And it may be worse. The Financial Times reported Saturday that the Trump Administration "threatened to cut off vital intelligence sharing" to Kyiv if it continues attacking Russian refineries.

In September Mr. Trump blamed Ukraine for causing diesel-fuel shortages with its long-range strikes on Russian refineries. Never mind Iranian and Houthi strikes on Middle Eastern energy production and transport. Russia helps Iran with intelligence and weapons.

On Sunday Mr. Trump announced what he called "an ENERGY CEASEFIRE in the War between Russia and Ukraine. Both parties have agreed." Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Ukraine supports such a cease-fire if Russia does the same, but as we write this Russia hasn't commented.

An energy cease-fire would help both sides, as Ukraine faces another harsh winter and Russian refineries are under siege. But what about Mr. Putin's relentless attacks on Ukrainian cities?

On Wednesday 22 people, including five children, were killed in a Russian cruise missile strike on an apartment building in the city of Pryluky. The next day a glide bomb hit two buses in Kramatorsk, killing 33. After the diesel announcement, Russia launched glide bombs Saturday at a residential area of Zaporizhzhia, killing at least 20, including three children. Without a complete cease-fire, Russia will continue to torment Ukrainian civilians.

The strategic turn here is hard to understand. Only last month Mr. Trump signed Lindsey Graham's bill to allow new sanctions and tariffs on countries that buy Russian oil and gas. Now Mr. Trump has decided to buy Russian diesel and lift some current U.S. sanctions. The U.S. has been browbeating Europe, India and China not to buy Russian oil, and so much for all that diplomatic effort.

The Kremlin has been under financial pressure from Western sanctions and Ukraine's ability to hit targets in Russia. The Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air estimates Russian oil companies will earn some $4.5 billion from the diesel deal.

Mr. Trump added to the pressure on Ukraine by saying it's "time for Ukraine to get a new president." But he'll have to search far and wide for anyone in Ukraine who supports financing Vladimir Putin.

Mr. Trump complained again on the weekend that Mr. Zelensky could have settled the war many times. Yes, Kyiv could always surrender. Ukrainians prefer to fight for their independence and freedom. Eyeing a Nobel peace prize, Mr. Trump wants to broker a Russia-Ukraine peace, but the only pressure he ever applies is on Ukraine.

His multiple attempts at appeasing Mr. Putin with summitry, flattery, offers of new investment, and more haven't moved the Russian. On the weekend a Russian official said the diesel deal doesn't change Mr. Putin's determination to achieve his war aim, which is to turn Ukraine into a Kremlin satrapy. Until that changes, Mr. Trump's diesel deal helps Russia and not the cause of peace.

How to Make a Jihadist Martyr

Jihadist killer Nidal Hasan deserves his future in hell, but before he gets there Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth wants him to die before a firing squad open to the public for all to watch and record. This is a bad idea for many reasons, not least that it offers the killer the public martyrdom he craves.

These columns don't oppose the death penalty. For some murders, it shows that a society is serious enough about its self-preservation to deliver retributive justice. Mr. Hasan killed 13 and wounded 32 others at Fort Hood in 2009 in the name of Islam.

But his execution is best done quietly with few witnesses beyond officials and the families of the victims who wish to attend. This consigns him to history with ignominy but no fanfare. Mr. Hasan has said "I would still be a martyr" if executed, and that he killed those soldiers because they were "going against the Islamic Empire." A livestreamed death, complete with some incendiary last words, is what he wants.

Mr. Hegseth seems to think a livestreamed execution by firing squad will be a show of U.S. resolve and deter others from such murderous acts. This misjudges the jihadist mind. It is a miscalculation that Western leaders often make about revolutionary jihadists like those who now run Iran.

Mr. Hasan and his ilk understand they are likely to die. That is part of their fevered calculation. They imagine that by their violence they will contribute to the bloody caliphate they hope to build on earth.

A public death by firing squad would give Mr. Hasan that publicity in perpetuity. It would assist the cult of death promoted by the perversion of Islam seeking to recruit more suicide attackers. Far from deterring jihadists, it would serve as a YouTube recruiting video.

The U.S. doesn't need to execute Mr. Hasan on live TV to send a deterrent message. It needs to win the war against jihadists around the world, which at the moment means the fight against the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and its Houthi allies. If this weekend's attack on Riyadh is a guide, Mr. Hegseth has more urgent duties on that front.

Democrats vs. Alaska, Again

The Alaska Senate race is a toss-up this year, which is remarkable given how Democrats in Washington keep demonstrating their zeal to stop economic development in the state. They did it again before they left town last month, blocking a bill that would have aided oil and gas development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR).

They vote to keep oil and gas in the ground in a state that needs jobs and investment.

In 2017 Congress required the Interior Secretary to create a plan for developing oil and gas in the ANWR coastal plain with a competitive program for leasing, developing and transporting the resources. The Biden Administration quickly suspended the leases in 2021 pending environmental review. Joe Biden's Interior Secretary later canceled the leases. The political seesaw left developers without enough confidence in stable policy to make the large investments required to get the region's rich reserves out of the ground.

Trump II has opened more development leases for bidding, but companies are understandably wary of investing in projects that can be shut down by the next Democratic administration. In June the Bureau of Land Management's ANWR lease sale offered some 689,000 acres for lease but received bids on about 70,000 acres, worth about $3.7 million.

Enter Alaska Sen. Dan Sullivan, who proposed to provide some federal assurance that the leases can't be canceled by the stroke of a pen. The Alaska's Right to Produce Act 2.0 would have prevented leases in the coastal plain oil and gas leasing program from being canceled unless the lessee is in violation of the lease terms.

Democrats and the climate lobby blocked it from getting a vote on the Senate floor. Defenders of Wildlife said the bill would produce "rampant oil and gas drilling," while Sen. Martin Heinrich (D., N.M.) called it "another bill that would prioritize oil and gas over literally everything else."

That's odd, since New Mexico is a major oil and gas producing state and Mr. Heinrich's constituents profit from it. The U.S. Energy Information Administration says New Mexico had 4.15 trillion cubic feet of gross natural gas withdrawals in 2025, far more than Alaska.

Opponents say oil and gas leases in ANWR would destroy wildlife habitats, spoil the wilderness and infringe on sacred indigenous lands. But no one is proposing to pave the Arctic. If all of the 2026 leases offered had been purchased, the less than 700,000 acres would have been a small fraction of the more than 19 million acre wildlife refuge.

Progressives want Alaska to be a nature preserve for tourism and dog-sled races. But the oil industry makes up a significant portion of Alaska's GDP, and future oil and gas leases will add jobs and tax revenue. It also serves America's energy needs and national-security interests. Across his two terms, Sen. Sullivan has been a champion for bringing investment to a state that needs more of both, while protecting the environment.

His opponent, Mary Peltola, initially cosponsored a version of this legislation when she was in the U.S. House. When the vote took place on the floor, she voted "present." Ms. Peltola could provide the 51st vote to give Democrats a majority, and then vote "present" to put even more of Alaska's vast energy resources in a deep political freeze.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Massachusetts' Policies Increase Electric Bills

Regarding your editorial "Climate Reality Hits Beacon Hill" (Oct. 8): The Northeast is dominated by blue-state governments where politicians are beholden to an unrealistic "green" agenda and are simultaneously desperate to talk about "affordability"—an incompatible combination.

Opposition to domestic and reliable energy leads to the obstruction of pipeline projects. This in turn creates roadblocks toward getting natural gas from places like nearby Pennsylvania, the second-highest natural-gas-producing state. Natural gas is responsible for more than 40% of all electricity in the U.S., and the U.S. is the world's largest producer of natural gas. It should be a no-brainer.

Yet in recent years, Massachusetts has implemented policies to become carbon neutral by 2050. That means less natural gas, oil and coal, and more solar and wind projects.

Politicians have cheered the closure of regional coal plants, perhaps most memorably in 2022 when former President Joe Biden stood before the state's last coal-fired power plant, Brayton Point Power Station, to discuss the climate "emergency."

Forcibly removing reliable sources of energy from the grid doesn't make winter less harsh or homes warmer. It decreases supply, which leads to higher prices—Massachusetts' electricity prices are 40% to 60% higher than the national average—or forces an increased reliance on foreign supply.

Politicians can be focused on climate or affordability, but they can't do both. Sadly, it's a lesson Massachusetts residents are about to learn when they open their electric bills this fall and winter.

DANIEL TURNER
Executive director and founder
Power The Future
Round Hill, Va.

To Keep Medical Bills Low, Stay Out of the ER

Regarding "Influencers Urge Public: Don't Pay Medical Bills" (Page One, Oct. 8), here's a tip for reducing medical bills: Don't go to the emergency room when you don't need to. ER bills are high partly because of the tremendous overhead required to provide 24/7 availability of life-saving medical care and expertise. As an ER physician, I see patients come to the ER for all sorts of complaints and then lament the high costs. Facility fees help cover the staffing and resources that allow ERs to respond to anything at a moment's notice.

Visiting the ER for an ankle sprain provides a patient medical care wherever and whenever he wants it. But that convenience comes with a cost. Waiting to see a primary-care physician or a walk-in clinic would result in a significantly lower bill.

Using patient portals for nonurgent questions, seeking telehealth services, or consulting reputable online sources to determine whether something requires emergency services can save patients more than the 25% discount offered before a bill goes to collections. Simply not paying the bill exacerbates the problem by increasing hospital losses, potentially forcing them to raise charges to recoup those costs.

Patients looking to reduce medical bills should skip the TikTok influencers and turn to actual medical experts for guidance on where and when to seek care.

LAURA DAYMUT, M.D.
Omaha, Neb.

How to Help Lower Diesel Costs for Truckers

Regarding "Diesel Prices Wearing Down Truckers" (U.S. News, Oct. 5): For decades, the biodiesel tax credit encouraged fuel retailers to blend biodiesel into petroleum diesel, expanding supply options while also driving demand for U.S. soybeans. Trucking customers reaped the benefits, realizing tangible savings with every gallon pumped into their tanks, and farmers had more demand for their soybeans. A rare win-win. But Congress allowed the biodiesel tax credit to lapse in 2024.

This has ricocheted through the trucking sector, where fuel represents one of the industry's highest operating expenses. Loss of the biodiesel tax credit put upward pressure on the cost of all goods moved by truck. With more than 70% of all goods Americans purchase moving by truck, fuel prices are embedded in the cost of everything consumers buy.

Reinstating the biodiesel tax credit is one of the clearest ways to help lower fuel costs and stabilize fuel supplies while strengthening demand for American agricultural products, benefiting families, farmers and our overall economy. If truck drivers are using every trick they can to address rising diesel fuel prices, then it's incumbent upon Congress to do the same.

MAX MCBRAYER
President and CEO
NATSO, representing truck stops and travel centers
Alexandria, Va.

The West's Great Inheritance

Regarding your editorial "Rubio Gets to the Heart of the Matter" (Oct. 8.): The secretary of state is correct that the Western world must recover confidence in its history and heritage. That inheritance wasn't merely a retrospective justification for the postwar liberal order; it was one of the reasons its architects built that order in the first place. Western civilization—built on Greece and Rome, Christendom, the Renaissance and Reformation, the Enlightenment and the English and American traditions of liberty and representative government—provides a common intellectual and moral inheritance for the nations that built the Atlantic alliance.

In 1949 the Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted unanimously to report the North Atlantic Treaty to the full Senate. Its report concluded: "In tendering this unanimous report on the North Atlantic Treaty, we do so in furtherance of our Nation's most precious heritage—shared in common with the other signatories—continuing faith in our dependence upon Almighty God and His guidance in the affairs of men and nations."

That isn't antiquated rhetoric; it is an explanation of why these nations belong together. The postwar order is more than an arrangement of strategic interests; it is a political expression of a shared way of life and conception of the world. Recovering confidence in the West should mean reaffirming these principle that promote human flourishing.

ALEXANDER GELLOS
New York

Rahm Emanuel Gets the Core American Principles Wrong

In his op-ed "Washington Needs the Tax-Reform Spirit of '86" (Oct. 7), Rahm Emanuel writes at length about tax increases, mostly on business and capital, and even in duplicate when we die; he saves conciseness for his discussion of spending cuts. While none of that is surprising for a potential political candidate, not so his final, shocking sentence: "Washington's goal should be to create wealth, not protect it." For 250 years our nation has grown on the exact opposite principle: a free people who work, innovate and invest to create wealth, and a government that protects it. Mr. Emanuel's formulation, a government that "produces" wealth but doesn't protect its citizens' property rights, has been a total failure everywhere it has been tried. It's less evocative of a revolutionary American "spirit of '86" than it is a Russian "dukh of '17."

MICHAEL MENDELSON
Los Angeles

Justice Through Deterrence

In their op-ed "Justice for Our Daughter Christa" (Oct. 7), Chris Bauer and Sharon Bauer make a lovely Christian case against the death penalty. But the purpose of the death penalty is to set a price tag on human life. The more lenient the punishment, the more likely homicide will appear to be an acceptable course of action. The death penalty for murder isn't barbaric. It is society's attempt to prevent future homicides.

THOMAS F. BERNER
Yonkers, N.Y.

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Pepper ... And Salt

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



"Long night?"

OPINION

The Race to Defeat Russia's Jet Drones

By Jillian Kay Melchior

Kyiv, Ukraine

By now everybody in defense knows about the global shortage of Patriots and other high-end interceptors. But the war here is showing that the arms innovation cycle is relentless and cheap drones can become an equally dire problem. Fall behind in technology or scale to counter them, and you pay in blood. Russia's newest breakthrough is a jet-powered drone, and Ukraine lacks a good response. The good news is that Kyiv has a framework for catching up quickly. The West should pay attention. It may need one.

Russia's jet drones can fly up to 375 miles an hour with a maximum altitude of about 5.5 miles—too fast for Ukraine's current stock of interceptor drones and too high for man-portable air-defense systems. Jet drones have a range of nearly 600 miles and carry a maximum payload of almost 200 pounds. Ukraine intercepts only 55% of them, compared with more than 90% of the older Shaheds. The Kremlin is launching up to 100 jet drones a day. They cost $100,000 or less each. Ramping up production is a Russian priority.

The West needs to pay attention as Ukraine defends itself against a novel Russian weapon.

Jet drones aren't only a Ukrainian problem. Vladimir Putin wants to break the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and is testing what level of aggression he can get away with in Europe. An increasing number of drones are straying into NATO airspace amid aerial attacks on Ukraine. Europe has repeatedly failed to detect suspicious drones over sensitive military sites and infrastructure, and the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies has warned that Russia is likely behind these incursions and probing for air-defense vulnerabilities.

Danish defense intelligence recently warned of "a low but growing risk" of a "limited" military attack "against one or several NATO countries bordering Russia." The Spanish publication El Mundo reported in late September about warnings from U.S. intelligence that Moscow could launch a drone attack on Europe from ships in the Mediterranean. Moscow shares information about drone technologies and tactics with China, Iran and North Korea. Last week concerns about an Iranian drone attack prompted the U.S. to move its B-1 bombers from a British military base.

The El Mundo report focused on Russia's smaller Gerbera drones, but older models of Shaheds can be launched from a ship deck, as can jet drones in all likelihood. A prominent Russian military blogger recently published maps with potential jet-drone targets in the U.S., the U.K., France and Poland. Targets include major military bases, tech and defense companies, nuclear power plants, ports and airports. Deterrence requires the ability to identify such threats and a cost-effective countermeasure, but adversaries have reason to suspect the West lacks both.

To understand how Ukraine is responding, last month I visited an air-defense center protecting Kyiv, one of several such hubs nationwide. I interviewed the commander and deputy commander but agreed not to publish their names, given the sensitivity of their work.

Ukraine's air-defense system collects data along the front line and across the country from tens of thousands of audio, visual and thermal sensors and radars. In the air-defense center, a real-time digital map displays everything in Ukrainian airspace. The system automatically provides information about the number and types of threats and their location and speed.



THOMAS PETER/REUTERS

A building hit by a Russian jet-powered drone strike in Kyiv, Sept. 28.

In total the system can provide up to 150 discrete details about an aerial threat, while an unassisted human can pick up fewer than five. Closed-system artificial intelligence helps Ukraine analyze and act on all this data to mount a timely air defense. The air-defense center also manages deconfliction, ensuring that kinetic and electronic countermeasures against Russian drones don't result in friendly-fire damage.

Russia's massive combined drone and missile attacks are "designed to overwhelm your defenses, and one way to deal with it is slicing your response," the deputy commander says. Electronic warfare is the cheapest countermeasure available. The system identifies whether an enemy drone may be vulnerable to electronic warfare and executes a defense accordingly. Failing that, the air-defense centers coordinate responses up the echelon both geographically and kinetically, like a zone defense in football. The goal is to use the cheapest countermeasure at the earliest point to neutralize the threat, with all decisions driven by data.

This air-defense system gives Ukraine a head start as it develops a cheap, reliable interceptor for jet drones. Kyiv has collected extensive intelligence about how the new drones function, so weapons developers know what specific problems they need to solve. Several interceptors are in testing, and developers receive near-instantaneous feedback and adjust accordingly. Ukraine's air-defense system accounts for the rapid innovation cycle, so any new tool can be plugged in and used as soon as it's ready: different type of interceptor, but same basic air-defense concept.

The bad news is that until Ukraine develops and scales a jet-drone interceptor, "we are in deep s—," says Yuriy Sak, a former adviser to Ukraine's Defense and Strategic Industries ministries. There are major challenges ahead. Given the jet drones' high speeds, the new interceptors will require sophisticated technologies that may be hard to procure. "Scaling up is tough because of constant attacks," Mr. Sak says.

Here in Kyiv, aerial attacks have been so intense that authorities are contemplating designating the capital a front-line city. The threat extends far beyond civilian morale. Russians can target Ukraine's weapons manufacturers and its energy grid at the same time. Ukraine's weapons developers need reliable power to produce at scale, and the attacks on energy infrastructure, ports and grain-export vessels will also hinder the Ukrainian economy, hurting tax revenue. Kyiv's best option may be to pursue joint production in partner countries.

During this window, Ukraine's air defenders are taking advantage of the precision of their information about incoming aerial threats to blunt the danger and disruption to businesses and civilians. Better-tailored air alerts can limit the number of businesses that have to shut down and avoid sending civilians to shelters unless a threat is imminent.

The West can do more to help Ukraine get through this dangerous interval. F-16s are the most reliable defense against jet drones, but Ukraine is flying them far more than the West anticipated, and too many are now out of commission pending maintenance in Belgium.

Ukraine was caught unprepared for the jet-drone threat in part because of financial constraints that force it to choose between competing defense research-and-development and procurement priorities. Europe has frozen billions in Russian assets, and it can strengthen its own deterrence by transferring some of that money to Ukraine.

Ms. Melchior is a London-based member of the Journal's editorial board.

The 'Scientific' Socialism of Abdul El-Sayed



LIFE SCIENCE
By Allysia Finley

Apparently, "following the science" means embracing socialism. So argues Abdul El-Sayed, the left-wing Democrat running for Senate in Michigan.

"Once you train in the sciences, you don't leave that scientific approach to thinking and that rigor of thinking. And I try to bring that to policy problems," Mr. El-Sayed, who has a medical degree but has never practiced as a physician, told Scientific American. "You construct a hypothesis of the world and you test it . . . and then you'll study the outcome of the intervention to see if it works."

A drug maker would scrap an experimental medicine that fails to help patients and causes severe adverse effects. Mr. El-Sayed and his fellow Democrats want to rerun failed policy experiments at a higher dosage.

Consider taxes. Most European countries that have imposed wealth taxes—including Austria, Denmark, Germany, Sweden and France—repealed them because they prompted high earners to flee. Before France's repeal in 2018, a net 580 households subject to the tax left each year on average. After repeal, many returned.

Progressives claim the wealthy are impervious to higher taxes. So why has a stream of Cessnas vamoosed from California, New York and New Jersey to zero-income tax Florida, Texas and Nevada?

A 2013 study of European soccer players found countries with lower tax rates attracted the most talented foreign players. Irony alert: One of the study's authors was left-wing economist Emmanuel Saez, an architect of a California wealth tax ballot measure, who advocates drowning the rich to pay for cradle-to-grave states. Democrats are on board.

Mr. Sayed has endorsed a wealth tax on billionaires and even those with smaller fortunes. He also wants to tax capital gains above $1 million at the same rate as ordinary income, remove the $184,500 income cap on the 12.4% Social Security payroll tax and boost the top marginal personal income-tax rate (now 37%), though he doesn't specify how high.

Such ideas are mainstream in the Democratic Party. New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker has proposed raising the top income-tax rate to 43%. Maryland Sen. Chris Van Hollen bids 49%. Uncapping the Social Security tax would boost the marginal tax rate for higher earners by another 12.4%, putting the total top federal rate in the neighborhood of 60%.

Single-payer healthcare has proved itself a failure, so he wants to rerun the experiment on America.

Throw in state taxes, and the wealthy in some states would be paying north of 70% of their income to the government. The top rates in the U.K. (45%), Germany (47.5%) and France (55.4%) would be a relative bargain. Watch as professional basketball players jump to European leagues.

Soaking the rich hasn't solved the fiscal problems of European welfare states. Instead, it has stunted economic growth and, in turn, tax revenue, resulting in a lower standard of living and shoddy public services.

Witness the recent student-led protests in France over the rickety infrastructure in public schools. Its national healthcare system is similarly dilapidated. Seniors may not have the energy to take to the streets because their hips are failing and the government won't pay for a replacement. They're going to die soon anyway, so why spend the money? Better to spend it on subsidizing idle young people—France's youth unemployment rate tops 20%—who can't find jobs because of stultifying taxes, regulations and labor rules.

Mr. El-Sayed and his socialist compatriots present "Medicare for all"—a euphemism for a single-payer system—as a healthcare nirvana. The Democratic candidate's idealized system has no copays, deductibles, premiums or provider network. It promises free healthcare on demand from any doctor. Such a system doesn't exist anywhere in the world.

Medicare requires premiums, copays and deductibles, and as Mr. El-Sayed acknowledged, "as it operates right now, there is some subcontracting to private companies." About half of Medicare beneficiaries are enrolled in privately administered Advantage plans, which are less expensive than traditional fee-for-service because insurers do a better job than the government of controlling waste and fraud. Democrats want to eliminate the Advantage program and move entirely to a fee-for-service system. If you like your Medicare plan, don't expect to keep it.

Most countries fund their government-run systems with payroll and value-added taxes, so that people pay for healthcare by having less disposable income. And by enduring delays. Government-run health systems are inefficient and stingy. Result: longer waits for appointments with procedures, if rationing bodies will even approve them.

About 17% of patients in the U.S. wait more than two months for an appointment with a specialist, which is significantly less than in socialized-medicine utopias like Canada (48%), France (45%) and the U.K. (43%). Government-run healthcare means less access, not more.

Democrats are unlikely to ban private insurance in the short term, if only because this would be unpopular with unions that have Cadillac plans. The bigger danger is they muck up private insurance with more regulation as they try to fix the unintended effects of their disastrous ObamaCare experiment.

Republican Senate Losses Will Hurt Long After Trump

By Matthew Continetti

Republicans are bracing for an ugly November. The GOP House majority looks lost, and Democrats are increasingly confident of capturing the Senate. Divided government lies ahead, along with obstruction and investigations. "I'm going to be impeached," President Trump told South Carolina voters in August. "They're going to impeach me. They have no idea why."

Impeachment may be the least of Mr. Trump's worries. After all, he's been through it twice. What he hasn't experienced is full Democratic control of Congress. It would make all his problems worse.

The president might believe he would be able to dismiss a Speaker Hakeem Jeffries as a nuisance, as he did Speaker Nancy Pelosi in his first term. He won't have that luxury if Chuck Schumer is also Senate majority leader. A Democratic Senate would be impossible to ignore.

Nor would the pain end for Republicans when Mr. Trump leaves office. Senate elections have a long tail. Six-year Senate terms are spread across presidential administrations, giving senators many chances to serve in the majority, influence policy and cast defining votes.

The senators who win this year won't be up for re-election until 2032, the end of the next presidential term. They will become the base of support for, or a bulwark against, the legislation and appointments of Mr. Trump's successor. Some may try to become that successor.

This has happened before. Democrats netted six seats in 2006 and gained Senate control. Sherrod Brown, Bob Casey Jr., Claire McCaskill, Jon Tester, Jim Webb and Sheldon Whitehouse opposed George W. Bush during his last years in office, for sure. But their true impact wasn't felt until 2009, when they voted for President Obama's stimulus bill and ObamaCare.

Conversely, Republicans gained nine seats and a Senate majority in 2014. The class of '14 included conservative stars Ben Sasse, Tom Cotton and Joni Ernst, who helped sustain Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's 2016 hold on Merrick Garland's nomination to replace Justice Antonin Scalia. And when Donald Trump became president, they all voted for Mr. Trump's Supreme Court nominees and the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.

Even small gains in the Senate can have major consequences. Democrats won two Senate seats in 2018 (while losing four), yet Kyrsten Sinema and Jacky Rosen went on to vote for President Biden's spending deluge. Democrats won both Georgia Senate seats amid the 2020 election debacle—aiding Mr. Biden and providing a presidential springboard for Jon Ossoff.

Though Republicans lost a Senate seat in 2022, one GOP senator elected that year found himself as Mr. Trump's vice president in 2025, casting the tie-breaking vote for the One Big Beautiful Bill Act. Americans who cast votes this year in protest might wind up launching the career of the Democrats' JD Vance. Also recall 2004, when an open Senate seat in Illinois served as the launch vehicle for Mr. Obama.

New members of the upper chamber will remain there through the first term of the president's successor.

Here's what a Democratic Senate might do: Not only would Democrats stop Mr. Trump's legislative agenda. They would amplify the progressive tax, spending and regulatory bills that come from a Democratic House. President Trump's veto pen would be busy.

At the same time, Senate Democrats would block presidential appointments. The Supreme Court wouldn't be exempt. Democrats have been thirsting for revenge since Sen. McConnell blocked Mr. Garland's nomination. Winning the Senate in November would give them that chance in the event of a vacancy.

Thwarting Mr. Trump would be only the start. Democrats in Congress will use policy and messaging to soften the ground for the 2028 presidential campaign. And if a Democrat wins in 2028, he could, like every first-term president since Bill Clinton, take office with a unified government. Then the conservative nightmare begins.

By 2029, potential Democratic members of the class of 2026—Roy Cooper, Mr. Brown, Mary Peltola, Josh Turek, Abdul El-Sayed and company—would all be ensconced in the Dirksen, Russell and Hart office buildings. They'd be eager to cast votes for the next Sonia Sotomayor or Ketanji Brown Jackson. They'd be champing at the bit to end the legislative filibuster.

That would open the door for bills to override state-based election laws, including voter ID, to impose term limits on or add seats to the Supreme Court, and grant statehood to the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Senators elected under the banner of "affordability" would be positioned to raise taxes, limit oil and gas production, expand government and muck with health insurance—a lefty free-for-all.

A Senate election has lasting consequences. That is even more reason for Republicans to make a priority of spending in races that could tip the balance of power. Mr. Trump may agree with Democrats that the election is about him, but it is also about setting the stage for what comes after him. Mr. Trump might not be on the ballot this year. The future of American politics certainly is.

Mr. Continetti is a columnist for WSJ Opinion's Free Expression.

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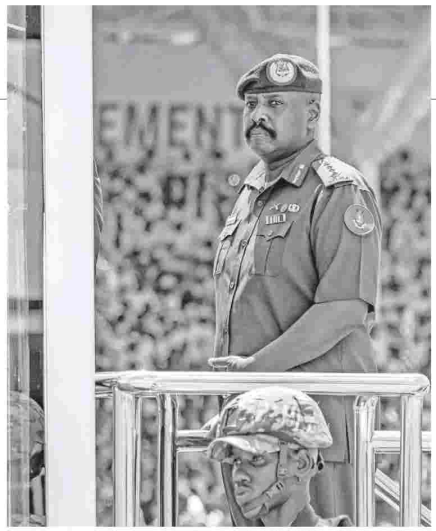
Opinion

I went to Uganda and saw the authoritarian future

A crackdown in the country shows how new technologies, Chinese influence and America's moral retreat are making the world safer for autocrats.

Megan K. Stack
Contributing Writer

This essay is part of "The New World Disorder," a series exploring the disintegration of the postwar international system and how countries are adjusting as America steps aside.



BADRU KATUMBA/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

The military chief, Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba, who is also the president's son, has bragged about his torture chambers.



LUIS TATO/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

KAMPALA, UGANDA Plainclothes thugs frog-marching a radio commentator from the microphone midbroadcast. An opposition activist dying after reportedly being barricaded in his house, which was then set on fire. Security forces raiding a powerful independent media company, cutting electricity and imposing a monthlong closure.

A reign of terror grips Uganda. Specifically, the reign of Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba, the country's belligerent and erratic military chief, who also happens to be the only son of Yoweri Museveni, the octogenarian autocrat who's ruled Uganda for four decades. Critics of General Kainerugaba, who recently announced his intention to become Uganda's next president, risk finding themselves in the "basement," his nickname for the torture chambers he brags about on social media.

Ugandans have discovered that, increasingly, there is nowhere to hide. Civic life here is defined by thickening webs of state surveillance built with foreign help. Chinese cameras and facial-recognition software monitor the streets; Russian radio frequency chips implanted in license plates have been tracking cars in real time; Israeli software plunders the private contents of phones. Technology has created an intrusive eye that never blinks — a stealthy weapon for dictators keen to stifle speech and thought.

Welcome to our menacing new world, a place where authoritarians — established and aspiring alike — enjoy tolerance from the international community; wield cheaper, quieter and far more powerful surveillance tools at home; and reach across borders to help one another hang on to power.

Africa has become a testing ground for all of this. Authoritarianism is spreading on the continent, where Freedom House's 2026 report found that only 10 percent of people now live in countries classified as "free," a dismal statistic outdone only by the Middle East.

China has quietly fueled this political hardening. With unparalleled trade reach, a voracious appetite for natural resources and a compelling authoritarian model, Beijing has deepened its economic and political presence across Africa. Along the way, it has exported many of the technologies that the Communist Party uses for political and social control at home. African governments have spent at least $2 billion on the Chinese artificial-intelligence-powered surveillance systems that hound dissidents from Mozambique to Zimbabwe to the Republic of Congo.

China is not the only one. Israeli spyware such as the notorious Pegasus piracy software, which can use a phone to spy on its owner, has been snapped up by rulers around the world. And companies from the United States, Canada, Britain, France, Germany and other European states have exported surveillance technologies to Africa and other regions. Such tools have sometimes been used to target opposition figures, journalists and activists.

I visited Uganda recently to explore the aftermath of President Trump's abrupt retreat from human rights, clean government and public diplomacy. I was told, over and over, that American silence during this clampdown has made it easier for other Western countries to remain similarly quiet and has radically emboldened an increasingly ruthless Ugandan regime.

This is not to overstate past U.S. altruism. America has always chased its interests overseas — sometimes violently, often cynically, selectively calling out the abuses of disfavored regimes while ignoring repression carried out by strategic allies. But it's also true that America stood up for dissidents and human rights defenders when it was not inconvenient and sometimes when it was. It pressured despotic governments, criticized rigged elections and imposed sanctions on officials.

Now, suddenly, Beijing's rules prevail: Make money, extract resources, turn economic ties into leverage. Whatever you do, respect local power; don't criticize other governments for tyranny or abuse. Mr. Trump plays by those rules, too — "trade, not aid," his administration pithily calls it.

Welcome to our menacing new world, a place where authoritarians — established and aspiring alike — enjoy tolerance from the international community.

"I really believe, if we look at the next 20 years, our politics will be influenced by the Chinese very, very much," said Job Kiija.

I met Mr. Kiija in Kampala, the Ugandan capital, at a coffee shop wedged over a gas station on a ramshackle street fringed with palms and groaning with traffic. He runs Innovations for Democratic Engagement and Action, a civil society group that now works in the legal shadows since it was shuttered and defunded by government crackdowns.

He showed me threatening texts he'd been receiving on his phone ("U said some not nice things . . . U mayb in trouble soon"). He fretted about whether his group should publicly release an extensive report about the much-criticized elections this year that — yet again — kept Mr. Museveni in power.

To depend upon international law or support from friendly Western diplomats, Mr. Kiija said, is "no longer sustainable."

"You live knowing you're in danger," he said. "But if you don't do something about it, nobody will."

It's a mask-off moment in Uganda. For people caught in the cross hairs, these are days of dread.

KAKWENZA RUKIRABASHAIJA has read the classified documents that list, in black and white, the arms of state power and surveillance tech that attacked him.

Mr. Rukirabashaija is a Ugandan lawyer and novelist. His first book, "The Greedy Barbarian," is the sprawling, satirical story of a president who becomes a dictator, spiraling deep into greed and corruption until he is finally ousted by popular revolt.

The regime was not amused.

Over the next two years, Mr. Rukirabashaija was repeatedly detained and tortured. He was viciously flogged and beaten so badly that his ankle bones were fractured, his kidneys damaged and his back laced with scars. He said that General Kainerugaba, the president's son, twice visited him in detention.

During the first visit, he said, the general ordered the author — the taller of the two men — to bend over to make himself shorter and to remove his pants to reveal the size of his penis. Then, as the general recorded the exchange on his phone, he told Mr. Rukirabashaija to kneel on the floor and apologize, the author said.

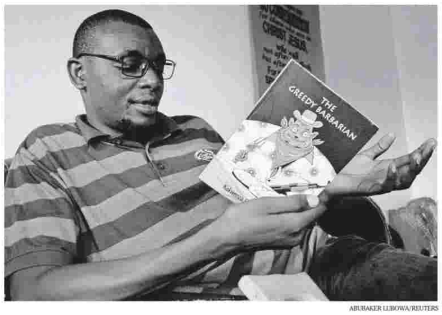
On the second visit, he said, General Kainerugaba offered him a bribe to keep quiet about the abuse he had suffered. Mr. Rukirabashaija was stunned.

"I just looked at the floor. I couldn't believe what he was telling me," Mr. Rukirabashaija said. "He could see that I could not even stand."

Even upon release, awaiting what he considered to be a show trial, Mr. Rukirabashaija remained in the virtual prison of constant surveillance. Soldiers surrounded his house. He was certain his phone was compromised. In 2022 he managed to smuggle himself out of his house and sneak to the border, leaving his phone at home to mislead the authorities tracking its location. He now lives in Germany.

It wasn't until Mr. Rukirabashaija read his classified police file — sent to him in Germany by his lawyer — that he was confronted with the full machinery of his suffering. The secret court order authorizing the search of his phone. The tables laying out how a person identified only as Investigator No. 9 began to

STACK, PAGE 11



ABUBAKER LUBOWA/REUTERS



HAJARAH NALWADDA/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Above, the police unleashed tear gas on an opposition presidential candidate's supporters. Below, Kakwenza Rukirabashaija's novel offended Uganda's regime. He was detained and flogged.

OPINION

The New York Times
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A.I. cannot be above the law in any country

The Editorial Board

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.

We can't let companies escape legal responsibility for their products in the name of innovation.

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.

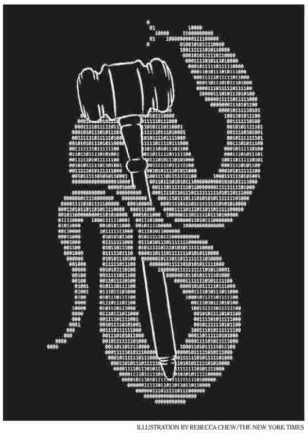


ILLUSTRATION BY REBECCA CHEW/THE NEW YORK TIMES

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.

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.

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Screens are not the problem

Jonathan Slater



MARÍA HERGUETA

Parents, politicians and best-selling psychologists are increasingly anxious about how much time children and teenagers spend on screens and how it may affect their mental health. In May, the Office of the Surgeon General warned about the harms of screen use and called for a limit of two hours a day of screen time at home for children ages 6 to 18. Last month, the Department of Health and Human Services released a digital book called "The Magic Tablet" that encourages "children and adolescents to get off screens and live real life."

It's easy to see why alarm bells have gone off. Children and teenagers today spend far more time in front of screens at home and at school than previous generations did. Rates of youth anxiety and depression have been climbing for years.

But as a doctor who treats children with mental health problems, I see screen time as a tantalizing distraction from bigger problems: America doesn't offer enough mental health care for children or sufficient health insurance to pay for it. If we make screens the villain, then we let the people who control children's health care — Congress, insurers and health systems — off the hook for the fact that half of American children with a treatable mental illness get no treatment at all.

In my office, I see children who use phones, iPads and other devices compulsively, but the compulsive use is usually a sign of something deeper — depression, anxiety, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism or family history of addiction — which can both feed the screen use and, in turn, be fed by it. These are teenagers who game so compulsively that they fail out of high school or college. They are children whose moods collapse or turn violent when an adult takes the device away.

It's not how much time children spend on screens that raises their risk of the most severe mental health outcomes, including suicide, but whether their use becomes addictive. It's specific activities, such as using social media in a compulsive way, that harm mental health. The harm from social media in particular appears to hit girls hardest.

The case for screen time limits rests in part on an unproven assumption that fewer hours will mean fewer anxious and depressed kids. The best evidence doesn't support it. Limiting screen time can promote children's overall health. But the amount of time children spend on screens has only a small effect on their mental health. Genetics and certain experiences in childhood, as well as the lack of proper diagnosis and treatment, appear to be far more influential. Limiting screen time is not the first line of treatment for children with anxiety or depression.

In 2025, JAMA published a study examining data on the screen use of more than 4,000 9- and 10-year-olds over the course of four years. Among other things, it measured how many hours children spent on screens and the degree to which their screen use had become addictive.

Self-reported screen time that was measured at ages 9 and 10 — before most children had substantial social media exposure — showed no association with depression, suicidal ideation or suicidal behaviors four years later. But addictive use of those same screens was associated with all three. Adolescents who used their phones compulsively — who felt anxious when separated from them, who kept scrolling despite knowing the cost — had more than twice the risk of suicidal behavior.

Compulsive device use is often a sign of deeper mental health issues.

Nearly one in three children showed a rising pattern of addictive social media use beginning at age 11.

The JAMA study did not account for A.D.H.D. or children who had adverse childhood experiences such as neglect, abuse, poverty, homelessness, parental violence or substance abuse. This matters because children exposed to four or more of these experiences had three times the odds of problematic video game use. Kids with attention issues are also more prone to addictive screen use, as are children who come from families with addictive behavior.

If we truly wanted to see improvements in the rates of mental health issues among kids and teenagers, then we would focus on expanding access to the interventions that work — finding the children who need treatment and getting them the treatment — and the insurance reimbursement to pay for them.

Right now, schools, which are the country's largest mental health provider for kids, don't have the funding to screen for underlying mental health issues. Student-to-counselor ratios run at 376 to 1, while the recommended ratio is 250 to 1. Regardless of the setting, in counties with mental health professional shortages, youth suicide rates are higher.

We know that cognitive behavioral therapy reduces problematic screen use in adolescents. And treating the mental health disorders that drive these often compulsive behaviors is the heart of the work. Every major clinical guideline says the same thing: For kids with anxiety, depression or A.D.H.D., we have proven treatments that work.

To its credit, the acting surgeon general's advisory notes the warning signs of compulsive screen use: trying and failing to cut back, withdrawal when screens are unavailable, continued use despite consequences. The advisory acknowledges the limitations of the available research, and notes that "developmental effects depend on multiple factors." Yet the advisory proceeds to recommend specific time limits. This stands in contrast to the recommendations of global researchers, who recently cautioned that screen duration "is not the main factor influencing mental health outcomes."

Instead of screen limits, the government should prioritize tracking and funding youth mental health. Lately, it's gotten harder to know what's happening with youth anxiety and depression because the federal surveys built to track the well-being of the country's youth are losing the staff and funding they need to function.

In 2022, Congress established a $1 billion bipartisan federal program to train and place mental health professionals in schools. Those school-based mental health programs both help kids and are cost-effective. Nevertheless, this administration has terminated the grant, despite a judge's order, and 15 states are back in court to save it.

Even when a child with a mental health problem is identified, insurance doesn't always adequately pay for it. The fix isn't mysterious: Make insurers cover mental health care the same way they cover everything else and raise Medicaid's low payment rates.

Blaming screens is a convenient way to avoid harder, deeper issues: inadequate mental health care and a system that chronically underfunds treatment. Policymakers and health system leaders instead must focus on providing the therapy, medication and support that troubled kids and families need.

JONATHAN SLATER *is a clinical professor of psychiatry at Columbia University Irving Medical Center.*

Zohran Mamdani's moral obscenity

STEPHENS, FROM PAGE 1

their children; children were murdered in their beds. A fieldworker was beheaded with a garden hoe. I know this because Hamas filmed itself doing this and I forced myself to watch the film. I know because that same month, I visited the bedrooms where the kids had been murdered, their mattresses still soaked in blood.

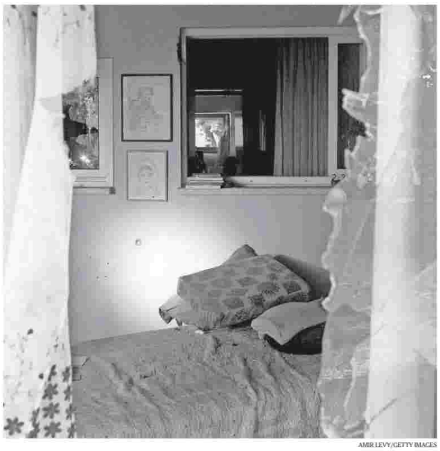
It is obscene because, whatever else you may think of the war in Gaza, on the eve of Oct. 7 the border of Israel and Gaza was governed by a cease-fire. It was Hamas that chose to kick off the violence, just as the Japanese did in 1941 with the attack on Pearl Harbor. Whether in fistfights between people or wars between states, whoever throws the first punch forfeits the right to throw the last.

It is obscene because Mamdani is being misleading when he speaks as if his prime objection to Israel is what it did *after* Oct. 7. In fact, the mayor has been an anti-Israel zealot at least since his college days, when, as a leader of Students for Justice in Palestine, he broke off collaboration with the left-leaning Jewish group J Street, which advocates a Palestinian state, because it also recognizes the rights of a Jewish state. He's written a rap professing "love" for five men convicted in a U.S. court of funneling money to Hamas. The day after Oct. 7, he issued a brief statement that said nothing about Hamas but immediately denounced Israel. Put simply, this is a mayor who first condemned Israel as guilty and then went about collecting evidence.

It is obscene because, however much the genocide allegation against Israel is mindlessly repeated by people too lazy or prejudiced to understand the difference between war and genocide, that allegation is as false as it is sinister. False, because genocide is about killing whole classes of people for *who* they are rather than for *what* they did — and if Israel wanted to kill Palestinians as Palestinians it never would have bothered mobilizing hundreds of thousands of its own soldiers for the war, and losing hundreds in high-intensity urban warfare. Sinister, because the political purpose of the genocide allegation is to trivialize, if not erase, the attacks of Oct. 7 by making them seem minor in comparison to the Palestinian casualties that tragically, but all-but inevitably, followed.

It is obscene because Hamas's intentions toward Israel really are genocidal. Its leaders have often and publicly vowed to perpetrate future Oct. 7s. Had the group not been stopped by force that day, there's no reason to think it wouldn't have kept up its orgy of slaughter on its way to Tel Aviv and other Israeli cities. Yet one searches in vain for anything from the mayor except perfunctory, pro forma condemnations of Hamas.

It is obscene because there's an even more wretched purpose to the genocide charge against Israel, which long predates the recent war in Gaza. It is a specimen of Holocaust erasure: not the dumb kind, which seeks to deny Nazi Germany's murder of six million Jews, but a more sophisticated version that accuses living Jews of genocide as a way of ending the historical Jewish claim to a long and ongoing history of persecution and near-annihilation that accounts for its need for a sovereign state capable of defending its people.



AMIR LEVY/GETTY IMAGES

Finally, it is obscene because Mamdani is the mayor for about one million Jewish New Yorkers, many with close relatives in Israel, who deserve better on a day of grief than to be offered the equivalent of an "All Lives Matter" homily. This is yet another of the double standards through which modern-day Jew hatred manifests itself: Whenever antisemitism is mentioned in progressive circles, it is inevitably accompanied by nods about Islamophobia or other bigotries.

It would be better to have a mayor who, if only on Oct. 7, can say: Jewish Lives Matter. Israeli Lives Matter. Full stop. The lectures about Gaza can come some other day.

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I went to Uganda and saw the authoritarian future

STACK, FROM PAGE 9

extract data from his phone at 3:44 p.m. The software tools the government had bought from the Israeli company Cellebrite to analyze his social media posts and the Canadian company Magnet Forensics to pull his data from the cloud.

Mr. Rukirabashaija knew Uganda's government was brutal, and he said he didn't expect much from an Israeli company, either. But the cameo appearance of a Canadian company rankled him — the cold, corporate touch of a Western democracy. He wondered whether the people involved in these deals ever questioned their moral responsibility for the products they sold.

"When they see what happened to me, when they see my pictures — all the mutilations, all that software extraction, all that information," Mr. Rukirabashaija said, "what do they think about?"

A Cellebrite spokeswoman told me the company has stopped selling technology in Uganda, "based on our ethics and integrity standards and risk assessment framework." Magnet Forensics did not reply to a request for comment.

Surveillance technology has spread quickly through Uganda since 2019, when the government installed a $126 million closed-circuit television network from the Chinese telecommunications conglomerate Huawei to monitor public spaces. Uganda is among dozens of countries worldwide to buy such security packages, which are typically marketed as smart city systems — cutting-edge weapons against crime.

Huawei engineers were embedded in the offices of Uganda's security forces, according to reporting by The Wall Street Journal. At the same time, Uganda made a deal with a shadowy Russian company called Joint Stock Company Global Security to buy a license plate monitoring system, which Human Rights Watch has called a threat to privacy. The Russian company was to help operate the system for the first 10 years.

Huawei declined to speak on the record, but it previously denied that it or its staff helped Uganda's government spy on political opponents. My efforts to speak to the Ugandan government resulted — after many unanswered calls and ignored messages — in nothing. As for the Russian company hired to install trackers on cars, the Ugandan attorney general last week declared the contract null and void. The future of the license plate monitoring project is unclear.

Ugandan dissidents have rarely been so vulnerable. State security apparatchiks who once relied on radio transmitters and word-of-mouth informants now wield technological superpowers, vastly expanding their ability to keep tabs on even ordinary citizens in far-flung corners of the country who criticize the regime online.



BRIAN INGANGA/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Above, Uganda's security forces patrolling the streets of Kampala this year. Below, Bobi Wine after being nominated last year for president. He became a prime target for a paranoid and ossifying regime. Bottom, Kizza Besigye, Uganda's other major opposition figure, arriving at the High Court in Kampala to face a treason charge in February.

IT IS PERHAPS NO ACCIDENT that Uganda's surveillance buildup came just as a credible, popular opposition was gaining ground against the 82-year-old Mr. Museveni. That challenge arrived, somewhat improbably, in the figure of Bobi Wine, a reggae and Afropop singer affectionately nicknamed the Ghetto President.

Mr. Wine, who grew up in the Kampala slums, gained fame churning out dance hits and songs that addressed social problems like corruption, poverty and police violence. In 2017 he pivoted to electoral politics, galvanized young Ugandans with his charisma and talk of clean, democratic government and easily won a seat in Parliament. The crowds thronging his campaign rallies suggested that Mr. Wine, whose real name is Robert Kyagulanyi, had awakened a dormant political energy.

Mr. Wine became a prime target for a paranoid and ossifying regime, which used Huawei technology to penetrate his encrypted messages, according to The Wall Street Journal. (Huawei and the government have denied that allegation.) In 2018, Mr. Wine was arrested, tortured and charged with treason. His outraged supporters filled the streets, where they clashed violently with security forces.

Undeterred, Mr. Wine went on to run for president twice against Mr. Museveni, first in 2021 and again in January of this year. Both times, Mr. Wine lost in elections that were marred by violence and allegations of vote-rigging and intimidation. At least 16 people were "likely killed" by security forces during and shortly after this year's election, according to Amnesty International, including a woman who was shot in the back of the head while walking home after casting her ballot. People were detained (or abducted, in at least one case) and interrogated about their support for Mr. Wine.

While campaigning, Mr. Wine and his supporters said, they were placed under tight surveillance and often arrived at events and rallies to find security forces waiting. The police have acknowledged using facial recognition and license plate readers to track Mr. Wine's supporters.

In Kampala, I visited the headquarters of Mr. Wine's party, National Unity Platform, to meet its secretary general, David Lewis Rubongoya. Inside the sprawling compound, we crossed a courtyard ringed with murals commemorating slain party activists interspersed with ones featuring Nelson Mandela, Malcolm X and Bob Marley. No matter where we stood, we couldn't seem to escape the view of cameras mounted on a tall mast just outside the walls, angled to peer down.

"They're aware that you're here right now," Mr. Rubongoya told me cheerfully. "They monitor everything that happens."

After the 2026 election, when the president's son took to social media to say he was praying for Mr. Wine's death and threatened to "handle him accordingly," Mr. Wine went into hiding and eventually fled Uganda to live — temporarily, he insists — in the United States. I asked several people close to him how he managed to evade security and leave the country. Mr. Wine, I was told, was helped by supporters inside the security forces.

"Not everyone in the security establishment is pro-government," Mr. Rubongoya said. "The country is silent, but there is a lot of anger."

Uganda's other major opposition figure, Kizza Besigye, hasn't fared any better. He was Mr. Museveni's comrade and personal doctor back when they were rebels fighting their way into power from the bush in the 1980s. Mr. Besigye eventually turned on his old friend, accusing the president of selling out their shared principles, and challenged him in elections starting in 2001.

In recent years, Mr. Besigye drew closer 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.

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.

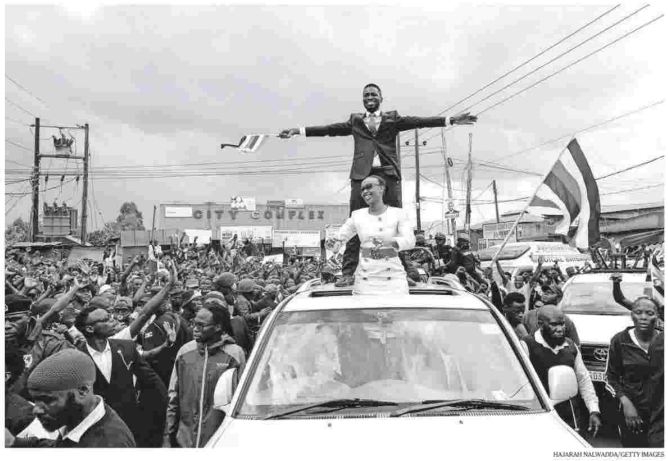
Mr. Besigye was abducted while visiting Kenya in 2024 for a book release and was transferred illegally back to Uganda, where he was charged with treason and illegal gun possession. The Kenyan government at first denied any involvement, but its foreign minister eventually admitted to cooperating with 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.



HASARAH NALWADDA/GETTY IMAGES



ABUBAKER LUBOWA/REUTERS

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.

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 church 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."

MEGAN K. STACK *has been a correspondent in China, Russia, Egypt, Israel, Afghanistan and the U.S.-Mexico border area. Her first book, a narrative account of the post-Sept. 11 wars, was a finalist for the National Book Award in nonfiction.*

The FT View



FINANCIAL TIMES
'Without fear and without favour'

ft.com/opinion

The collective global duty to safeguard time

Agreeing a standard is crucial for infrastructure and space exploration

Who should decide what time it is on the Moon? That is the question facing the International Bureau of Weights and Measures (BIPM) — whose role is as fundamental to modern life as its public profile is obscure. Its mundane name hides its function as guardian of the measurement systems that underpin science and societies. From tomorrow, its members will meet in Versailles outside Paris for a crucial test of international collaboration in an age of geopolitical mistrust.

The BIPM's 69 members, including great and emerging world powers, will discuss profound changes to how we track time on earth and beyond, affecting areas from financial transactions to the quest to colonise other worlds. The body was created in 1875 to standardise measurements including the kilogramme, the metre and the second — and thus time on earth.

Timing and navigation have become increasingly political issues as the world's digital dependence raises the costs of disruption to both. Accidental outages and wartime sabotage have shown the vulnerabilities of existing methods such as the global positioning system that has become part of daily life, but relies on satellites housing ultra-accurate atomic clocks.

Interruptions to navigation and timing measurements threaten electronic systems vital in areas including communications, financial transactions and operating power plants. That has prompted a search by countries for more precise and secure technologies.

BIPM members will discuss a plan to replace the "leap second" — an adjustment applied to reconcile tiny differences in the time gauged by atomic clocks and which is calculated astronomically using the Earth's slightly irregular rotation. The leap second, which has been added 27 times since 1972, is a pain because it requires changes to all timing-dependent infrastructure. The problem has intensified because Earth has been spinning faster since the mid-2010s, due partly to changes in its core, meaning a leap second might eventually have to be deducted rather than added.

That unprecedented alteration could play havoc with systems not adapted to deal with it. The proposal before BIPM members would replace the leap second with a leap hour, which might take 1,000 years or more to accumulate — and so in effect mean no further timing system adjustments would be required.

BIPM members will hold further discussions about efforts to set a standard time for the Moon — where time passes at 57 microseconds a day faster than on Earth due to gravitational effects flowing from the differences in mass.

The need for an agreed lunar time has been made more pressing by the new race not just to visit but to inhabit it. Both the US and China are aiming to land astronauts on the Moon in the next few years, with longer-term plans to build lunar bases. Countries and companies including SpaceX are exploring prospects for lunar mining for valuable materials.

Timing and navigation have become increasingly political issues as the world's digital dependence raises the costs of disruption to both

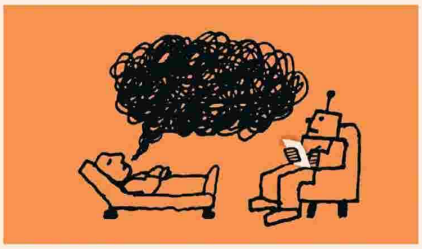
Common timing for the Moon — and perhaps later, Mars — would be essential to any sustained future human presence there, helping ensure lunar communication network signals stay within allocated bandwidths and don't interfere with one another. A benchmarked lunar time would be crucial to navigation, too. The difference with Earth is enough for light waves used on communications systems to travel about 17km. Failing to adjust for that could lead to catastrophic failures in attempts to land spacecraft or track the location of astronauts.

BIPM member meetings have typically not been a venue for UN general assembly-style political warfare. Now would be a bad time for that to change.

Opinion Society

The problem with your AI therapist

Ben Hickey





You may have noticed some intriguing new language cropping up in conversations with friends and family recently. "Are you sure this isn't your anxious voice talking?" a pal asked me a few months ago during an episode I will simply describe as a wobble (OK, minor meltdown). "I wonder what your honest voice might say instead." Heh?

She suggested that I might not be speaking from my wisest place (she was correct). We discussed the possibility that I was having a temporary freak-out (I was). She reminded me that, when we are feeling anxious, we can be poor at decision-making and figuring out whether the thing that's bothering us is a minor issue or, as the case usually seems at the time, an Extremely Major Issue that is going to make the rest of our lives miserable.

What helped me wasn't chatbot psychobabble but having a friend there to speak to me

But it wasn't until after our conversation, when she sent me a screenshot showing two columns full of delightfully straightforward bullet points, that I realised this rather curious "anxious voice" versus "honest voice" dichotomy had come directly from what is surely the world's largest provider of mental health services: ChatGPT. The anxious voice "speaks from fear" and "wants one definitive answer", the hive mind expounded, whereas the honest voice "speaks from values" — whatever that means — and "allows two truths to exist".

It wasn't an entirely misguided framework, although I found some of it a bit off the mark, including the very idea of an "honest voice". (Wouldn't "secure voice" have worked better?) To be fair to the chatbot (as one should always be), I definitely felt better and more level-headed after our conversation. But as I thought more about it, I realised that what had helped me was not so much the AI-generated psychobabble, but having a friend there to speak to me, with all her kindness, uncertainty and imperfection.

What bothered me was how attached my friend seemed to certain specific terms during our conversation, repeatedly deferring to them as some kind of authoritative backup for what she was saying. Because they had come from a machine and not a human being, they were delivered with none of the nuance or hesitancy that a real-life therapist might have spoken with and were therefore somehow being treated as the whole truth.

But the thing about words is that they can never fully capture the whole truth. There are usually several versions of the truth anyway, particularly when it comes to interpersonal dynamics, but the ever-obsequious chatbot forgets to tell you that, giving you too much confidence in your (and its) version. Further, there are certain experiences, feelings and energies that are ineffable and more elusive than the words that seek to tie them down.

And while language might be incredibly useful at helping us make sense of how we experience the world and ourselves and others, it starts to become unhelpful when we become so attached to words and labels that they begin to narrow and to warp our experience of reality. Language can become a barrier to genuine self-reflection and exploration, a way of keeping uncomfortable feelings safely locked up in the brain rather than encouraging further introspection and more embodied forms of healing.

Furthermore, words can themselves have a pathologising effect. Even before the dawn of chatbots, the explosion of interest in mental health issues and the sudden arrival into the mainstream of terms that would have once been reserved for the shrink's couch had begun to change the way people understand themselves. No, that man who just broke up with you *is* into you, he just has an avoidant attachment style (and he's probably a narcissist too). No, you're not just disorganised, you have ADHD. Indeed, it is so commonplace to be "neurodivergent" these days that it sometimes seems more neurodivergent not to be.

When I went back to my friend to ask her whether she was still finding her chatbot therapist as helpful as before, I was quite struck by her response. Increasingly, she told me, her experience is that it's "like eating cardboard covered in chocolate — it seems good but then I wake up after three hours and realise I'm not actually that well nourished". When she speaks to her real-life therapist, she told me, she realises "how not alive the chatbot is, and that feeling alive in a dynamic really matters".

In a study a year ago, 37 per cent of British adults had used an AI chatbot for mental health support. That figure is almost certainly higher now, and I'm sure it is helping many people. But it's worth remembering that an AI therapist simply does not possess the kind of "honest voice" that "allows two truths to exist" — and anyway, it can never go beyond its words.

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EU sustainability directive could sap the bloc's energy resilience

Martin Wolf's observation that the Iran shock has so far proved surprisingly manageable (Opinion, October 7) has raised a critical question: will Europe be able to preserve the supply flexibility needed to withstand the next crisis?

The EU's Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) risks weakening that flexibility. It requires covered companies, including foreign suppliers, to identify and address human rights and environmental impacts across their operations and supply chains. Although recently narrowed, its compliance obligations and potential penalties could still discourage energy suppliers from serving European markets.

Qatar has warned that it would stop supplying LNG to Europe if subjected to substantial penalties under the directive. American and Qatari energy officials have also jointly warned that CSDDD could undermine reliable, affordable supplies and discourage future investment. If suppliers choose other markets rather than accept CSDDD risks, Europe could face the next disruption with fewer supply options. Replacing lost oil, LNG or refined fuels requires more than finding another seller. Shipping, terminals, contracts and transport networks must also align. Greater European competition for replacement supplies would transmit higher costs worldwide.

While energy shocks can be absorbed, it is the access to diverse suppliers and adaptable logistics that helps contain their damage. As such, this should be a wake-up call. Before implementing CSDDD, EU leaders should reassess whether its remaining provisions could sacrifice the energy resilience on which European economic growth and prosperity depends.

Michael J Roman
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How to unlock the value of low-rate mortgages

Robert Armstrong ("My mortgage is a problem for the Fed, and for America", Opinion, FT Weekend, October 3) describes his personal experience with the "lock-in" problem bedevilling the American housing market, thanks to the Federal Reserve's past "quantitative easing" actions.

His bargain basement 30-year, 2.75 per cent mortgage makes it virtually impossible for him to move. "I'm locked into the place," he says. "Downsize when the kids leave? Move for a great job offer in another city? Nope."

There is an alternative that may allow Armstrong to sell his home to a happy new buyer and downsize, or take a new job, and still benefit from the economic value of his cheap mortgage. It's a classic financial concept, but a new idea when applied to mortgage loans: defeasance.

With US Treasuries yielding 5 per cent, Armstrong could create a trust of Treasury securities to pay all the remaining payments on his old mortgage for about 79 per cent of the unpaid balance on his loan.

The remaining 21 per cent, a sizeable number we imagine, he could share in an agreed-upon fashion with his current lender.

Defeasance is a real option if his current mortgage is held by a portfolio lender — like a credit union, bank or savings association — which has the power to agree to the defeasance. Unfortunately, legal issues preclude defeasance if his mortgage has been sold in a mortgage-backed security.

We explain how defeasance transactions are already occurring in the US in a recent article, "Unlocking the Value of Low-Rate Home Mortgages."

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The SEC revised its quorum rules for a reason

The US Securities and Exchange Commission's commitment to its mission remains unchanged, despite the departure of my good friend, Commissioner Hester Peirce.

Suggesting that the SEC is "hastily revamp[ing]" its quorum rule so that the remaining commissioners can "have their way" makes for a colourful comparison to fictional dystopian regimes but misleads readers about why the Commission revised its quorum rule and why it's for the better.

The bleak and draconian picture of the SEC rules painted in Robin Wigglesworth's FT Alphaville column ("One person is now a quorum at the SEC", FT.com, October 5) obscures the historical record that this is not the first time in the SEC's 92-year history where there were fewer than three commissioners.

In the Clinton administration, the SEC had only two Democratic commissioners. Reductions in Commission composition are neither new, nor evidence of institutional decay. The article also overlooks that commissioners are subject to strict federal government ethics rules, which mandate recusal under certain circumstances.

These recusals primarily affect enforcement decisions, not agency rulemaking as Wigglesworth suggests.

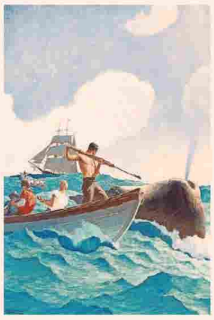
In 2015, Senator Elizabeth Warren heavily criticised the then SEC chair Mary Jo White for recusing herself from enforcement matters due to conflicts of interest, railing that her absence deadlocked the agency and let bad actors off the hook.

The prior rule allowed the Commission to act under one commissioner. This rule change maintains that practice but clarifies that the Commission can establish a quorum if all but one commissioner is disqualified from a matter.

Without this change, a two-member Commission could be stymied from taking enforcement action against Wall Street firms — both sell-side investment banks and buy side — public companies and others solely for lack of a quorum. Well-resourced defendants would loudly proclaim lack of authority for the SEC attorneys litigating their cases. Allowing such persons to escape accountability hardly seems the outcome desired either by the investing public or your correspondent.

And one final note: Regent University announced in May 2026 that Peirce would be joining its faculty in November — far from an abrupt or unexpected departure.

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They say the 'whale that spouts the most is the one that gets harpooned'

Harold Wilson's 'white heat of technology' apparatchiks

It was very cheering to read Anjana Ahuja's well-deserved tribute to my old acquaintance Peter Jost, in her piece introducing FT readers to the discipline he identified, tribology or the science of how surfaces move against each other, creating friction and wear ("How tribology makes the economic world go round", Opinion, October 7).

As a recruit to Harold Wilson's team of apparatchiks brought on board by the Labour prime minister's promise to harness "the white heat of technology" I witnessed Jost's evangelism that led to the commissioning of his 1966 report.

It was inspiring to hear him explain that, while the technology of lubrication is central to tribology, this amounts to more than bunging a squirt of oil between cogs and surfaces; it examines ways of reducing contacts, and of selecting or modifying materials used in moving parts that can exploit their natural "quasi-lubricating" nature, and the unexpected impact of design and location on the performance of lubricants.

In practice this requires analysis of a production process, or the operation of machinery that identifies first, where movement can be eliminated altogether — electronic controls rather than mechanical controls, for instance, which may eliminate the need for tribological engineering. Where contact movement cannot be avoided, Jost said you should incorporate "lubricant" materials — tin provides a lubricating character that can be added to alloys, for instance in bronze bearings that may require no liquid lubricants. The slipperiness of nylon is similarly exploited in appropriate parts.

I heard a wonderful example of a tribology consultant identifying (and curing) a serious problem at a steel cold-rolling mill. The mill managers had tried a succession of different proprietorial rolling lubricant-slurries. Each had deteriorated quickly under loads. The consultant walked around the rolling line checking its geographical alignment. He seemed to be behaving like a Feng Shui guru.

The problem, as he explained it, was caused by the alignment of the backup rollers of the mill. These massive steel rollers maintain the effective rigidity of the much smaller working rollers (which have regularly to be removed and reground) as they are subject to enormous pressures rolling coils of steel.

The steel rollers had become magnetised because of their particular alignment with the earth's magnetic field, and generated strong electromagnetic forces of their own, which had partially decomposed the specialised rolling lubricants. The consultant helped identify and formulate a new, bespoke, lubricant that could withstand the unwelcome powers of the magnetic rollers.

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Where banking regulation offers a useful analogy

The prospective flotations of Anthropic and OpenAI offer a one-off opportunity to establish a wider governance regime for frontier AI ("Charles hosts summit on AI frontier risks", Report, September 18).

Both companies have already accepted the principle that ordinary corporate governance is not enough. Anthropic is a public benefit corporation with a Long-Term Benefit Trust; OpenAI has retained foundation control of its public benefit corporation. Both recognise that the potential effects of frontier AI extend far beyond their shareholders.

Governments should build on that principle before these companies enter the public markets and their ownership structures become entrenched.

The aim should not be to regulate every AI company. It should be to establish a category of systemically important frontier AI institutions, with special obligations: independent safety oversight and model evaluation, mandatory reporting of serious incidents and threats, protected public-interest governance, and structured legal powers for government to delay deployment where exceptional risks justify it.

Banking offers a useful analogy. Systemically important banks remain private businesses, but their potential externalities justify special governance, stress-testing and supervision.

Public capital markets are a privilege as well as a source of finance. To allow these AI behemoths to float without addressing their wider responsibilities would be to squander a remarkable opportunity.

Jesse Norman
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A Trump whaling age adage

Ruchir Sharma explains the true state of the US economy well in his opinion piece (October 5).

That is contrary to the frequent trumpeting of wealth-for-all by President Donald Trump, and Sharma concludes with this about the forthcoming midterm elections: "Should the Republicans get swept aside this year, Trump — who rebuilt the GOP as a vessel of anti-incumbent anger — will have turned his party into a target."

That result would also prove true the old adage — the whale that spouts the most is the one that gets harpooned.

James Hanshaw
Zurich Switzerland

Correction

● The legends in a chart for 'actual family size' and 'unfulfilled fertility' were transposed in the Big Read on October 8.

Opinion

How to pay for social care

Steve Webb

The UK prime minister's plans for social care face a formidable funding problem. A full-blown National Care Service would cost an estimated £17bn a year by the mid 2030s. But savings from the new policy Andy Burnham announced on the state pension triple lock will only generate a fraction of this in the early years.

Meanwhile, other ways of raising money, such as a charge on estates — dubbed a "death tax" by critics — have been electorally toxic. And it is hard to think of a recent example where a party pledging to raise direct taxation has been successful in a UK general election.

But, in a report published today by analytics consultancy LCP, we set out a new approach to social care funding that could help Burnham achieve his objectives in a politically acceptable way.

It is estimated that about one in seven people will face lifetime care costs in excess of £100,000, potentially wiping out the value of their family home and lifetime savings — more in the case of severe dementia and other incapacitating conditions. Our proposal could protect people from such catastrophic care costs through the pooling of risk.

The idea builds on the model of opt-out automatic enrolment for workplace pensions — an approach that has been successful in getting more than 10mn people started on saving for the future.

In our model, everyone aged 40 or above — including those over pension age — would automatically be enrolled into paying a social care premium delivered through a 1 per cent increase in the standard rate of income tax. The maximum premium would be just over £30 per month.

In return, those who paid in would immediately start to qualify for a discount on their personal contribution to social care costs. In our model, one year of contributions would generate a 4 per cent discount, two years an 8 per cent discount and so on until those with twenty-five years in the system would qualify for completely free personal care, thereby insulating their home and savings from this risk.

As with automatic enrolment for pensions, those who were enrolled into the social care premium would be free to opt out. And our modelling allows for extensive opt-out — for example among those living in rented accommodation who might expect to have limited assets in retirement and therefore access to free personal care in any case.

> About one in seven people will face lifetime care costs in excess of £100,000, wiping out lifetime savings

But even allowing for opt-outs, we estimate that this policy would generate around £3.5bn a year.

A huge attraction is that much of the cost of this policy falls years down the line, as those who are currently of working age do not make claims on the scheme until they are elderly and frail. In the meantime, the upfront revenue can achieve three things.

First, it can be used immediately to relax the draconian capital rules whereby anyone in England with more than £23,250 in assets gets no public funding to help with care costs (health and social care is devolved so the threshold in Scotland is currently higher, with more publicly funded care provided). An increase to £100,000 could be afforded using part of the revenue.

Second, the money can be used for prevention. We should not simply take as given the ever-increasing cost of social care for elderly people. There are many things that can be done to help delay the impact of conditions such as dementia, which can lead to onerous social care costs. Preventive health benefits the individual but also contributes to reducing pressure on the NHS so it can continue to be there when we need it most. Similarly, support for informal at-home care by friends and family members could be improved, reducing the cost of state provision.

All too often there is funding for sorting things out after they have gone wrong, but limited funding for measures to stop the slide. This policy delivers funds to improve the later-life prospects of those currently paying in, as well as those currently needing care.

Third, and crucially for the prime minister, the policy delivers money now to speed up the rollout of the proposed National Care Service.

Pooling the risk of catastrophic care costs is approached differently in different countries. In Japan, mandatory premiums for long-term care have been in place for more than two decades; Germany has had a mandatory system of social insurance for long-term care since the mid 1990s. But in the UK an opt-out system might be more politically feasible.

The current UK approach of expecting people to save six-figure sums (on top of often inadequate pension savings) on the off chance that they are the unlucky one is unrealistic. Enabling people to pay a modest premium to pool this risk with others is a constructive and politically feasible way in which the state can deliver what private markets have not.

The writer is a partner at LCP and was UK pensions minister from 2010 to 2015. The full paper can be found at lcp.com

Democrats need a foreign policy

POLITICS



Rana Foroohar

Foreign policy issues aren't usually top of mind for midterm voters. But this time is different. Cost of living and inflation are tied as the top issues of concern for Americans. The Iran war itself ranks number three in one key poll, ahead of healthcare, ballooning federal debt or immigration. Voters have clearly made the connection that President Donald Trump's failures in the Middle East are directly tied to the prices they are paying at the pump.

Energy inflation is particularly pressing in key battleground states like Iowa, Alaska, Texas, Maine and Ohio, where people pay a relatively higher proportion of their take-home pay on things like gas, heating oil and electricity bills. This provides a big opportunity for Democrats, who are pressing home the connection between affordability and Trump's war in Iran. But it also opens a new challenge. If there is a blue wave in the midterms, and perhaps even a progressive president in 2028, what should a Democratic foreign policy look like?

This is an existential question for liberals, one that touches even bigger issues about what the Democratic Party stands for in the wake of Maga. Progressives rightly complain about Trump's incoherent tariff policies, tax cuts for rich people and companies, and unwinnable wars. But their own prescriptions are less clear. There is an ongoing debate about whether the party will pivot back towards Obama and Clinton-era centrism in response to Maga, or go down the more left-leaning route that has been carved out by the Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren wing, and which may well triumph in key midterm elections focused on the cost of living.

In terms of how to deal with the rest of the world, this presents a particularly striking fork in the road. Foreign policy has too often been an elite project in the US. Policymakers have tended to be globalists who know a lot about the world, but less about how to sell free trade agreements, immigration policies or security alliances (and their costs) to domestic voters. The Biden administration started to connect some of those dots, with nascent conversations about "friendshoring," a word that former Treasury secretary Janet Yellen first used with me at an Atlantic Council event in 2022, and proclamations by former national security adviser Jake Sullivan about the end of the neoliberal consensus the year after. But historically, it takes more than one administration to move the needle on policy.

There is now a robust debate taking place behind closed doors about how liberals should engage with other countries. Answers can't come soon enough, given that foreign policy is now a linchpin for so many domestic issues. The fate of the US bond markets depends on whether foreign creditors will keep buying US T-bills. The ability of America to stay competitive with China in areas like electric vehicles will hinge on rare earth mineral alliances with allies, and shared standards and supply chains with other countries. US technology companies that want access to European markets will have to play ball with Brussels. As Pax Americana fades away, US policymakers — and voters — will have to think a lot more about the rest of the world and how to deal with it, just like other countries do.

The key issue will, as always, be China. There are some centrist Democrats who still imagine it might be possible to time warp back to the 2000s and pretend the last decade of tougher tariff policy never happened. But while voter views on China have softened slightly in recent years, double the percentage of Americans are distrustful of Beijing as they were twenty years ago (71 per cent in March 2026 versus 35 per cent in March 2005, according to Pew). Trump may end up being the least hawkish president on China in our lifetimes.

> Focusing on economics rather than culture when it comes to global relations is smart

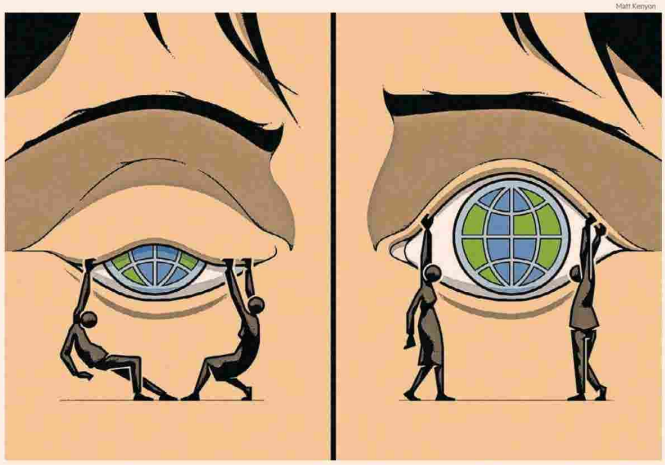
Still, smart Democrats (and Republicans) know America can't go it alone. Former Biden officials Kurt Campbell and Rush Doshi have written articles arguing that it will be possible for a future Democratic administration to forge new alliances in a post-neoliberal world with old allies. They advocate industrial and technological diplomacy via the building of shared supply chains and capacity in key industries (like electric vehicles) with US allies (the EU, but also Canada, Mexico, South Korea and Japan). Given that the French and Germans are advocating for greater EU action around unfair Chinese trade practices, and the Japanese, Koreans and other Asian nations are eager to forge new alliances, it's an opportune moment to be thinking about what the new world trade order could look like.

The idea of focusing on economics rather than culture when it comes to foreign policy is smart, particularly as Republican presidential contenders such as Marco Rubio are giving xenophobic speeches about "civilisational bonds" with Europe, even as both the US and Europe must ultimately pull in more immigrants to spur growth. But it will force liberals to take tough decisions about accepting money from top donors, like Big Tech companies, which will push back hard on the stronger AI regulation favoured by voters.

Democratic policymakers must buck that pressure. Foreign policy can no longer be an elite project. It must focus on the shared problems of workers at home — and abroad.

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Matt Kenyon



There is a smarter way to tax the rich

Kimberly Clausing

Advocates for taxing the rich often have novel ideas about how to do so. Voters in California will soon cast ballots on a billionaires' wealth tax, a one-time levy of 5 per cent on residents with more than $1bn in assets. Some Democrats in the US Senate champion "billionaires' income taxes" that would tax unrealised capital gains. While these proposals have laudable aims, the former risks harming a mobile tax base and the latter poses serious constitutional challenges.

There is a better approach to consider: raising a tax that is already in place — the federal corporate income tax, now levied at a statutory rate of 21 per cent, though effective rates are far lower. Increasing the corporate tax rate by six to nine percentage points for fewer than 2 per cent of corporate taxpayers would reach more than 95 per cent of corporate taxable income. Alongside base-broadening reforms, a corporate tax increase could raise about $4tn over a decade — about 0.9 per cent of GDP, according to the Penn Wharton Budget Model.

The case for a corporate tax increase is strong. It would achieve many of the goals sought by supporters of a billionaires' tax. It could also address both the populist impulses that brought Donald Trump to power and the increasingly fragile US fiscal situation — all without the underlying flaws of other proposals. Supporters of the Californian proposal stress that it is a one-time wealth tax which would avoid the risk of billionaires curtailing their residence or activities in California. However, many of those billionaires fear it will be levied again in the future.

This dynamic illustrates a broader problem with tax competition. When taxpayers can move to a place with different rules, their income is harder to tax.

A nationwide, federal approach relying on the corporate tax has more promise. Although corporate interests would oppose it, large majorities of voters are in favour of higher corporate taxes. And implementing "billionaires' income taxes" across America would also face obstacles. Aside from winning the requisite votes in Congress, such taxes would encounter constitutional hurdles. The US Supreme Court is sceptical of wealth taxes, and at least four of the justices appear similarly sceptical of taxing unrealised capital gains.

> An increased corporate levy could meet important aims of our system in a time-tested fashion

In contrast, the increased corporate tax could meet many important aims of our tax system in a time-tested fashion. First, the corporate tax as levied is steeply progressive, as shown by all major tax estimators, raising revenue disproportionately from those at the very top of the distribution. It also captures US equity income that would otherwise go untaxed — including that held by foreign investors, tax-exempt institutions (such as university endowments) and tax-exempt retirement accounts or pensions.

The corporate tax has large potential. Despite having the world's most successful public companies, the US raises much less from corporate tax (about 2 per cent of GDP less) than other rich countries. A modest increase on fewer than 2 per cent of US corporations can close nearly half the gap between what the US collects in corporate tax revenue and what peer nations manage.

Further, US adoption of international tax reforms to levy a higher minimum tax on the foreign income of US multinationals could counter offshoring incentives. This approach would better align US policy with international efforts to tackle tax competition. Such reforms provide a real response to offshoring, in contrast to Trump's regressive and disruptive tariff regime.

By concentrating the increase on the largest firms, the corporate tax can act as a pro-competition policy lever. It is also a flexible response to the challenges posed by the AI revolution. There is no need to predetermine the economic success of AI, which firms are AI firms, or how much AI adoption displaces labour. Instead, the corporate tax will tax excess profits wherever they arise, whether from AI deployment, the war in Iran or a profitable patent.

Finally, the corporate tax is not subject to the weaknesses of other taxes on capital. The federal corporate tax was ruled constitutional even before personal income tax was made constitutional (in 1913, by constitutional amendment).

All that remains is the will to tax the world's most profitable companies, something the coming years may well provide. Fiscal pressures will mean more revenue is needed. By both populist and policy criteria, the corporate tax is worth a close look.

The writer is the Eric M Zolt professor of tax law and policy at the UCLA School of Law and served in 2021-2022 as the deputy assistant secretary for tax analysis at the US Treasury

Why are our children not flourishing at school?

Anthony Seldon

Education the world over was in crisis even before Covid hit. Now students are up in arms — literally in France, where hundreds of thousands of young people have been protesting at the lack of investment in their education and worries about future jobs. Will this academic year see similar frustrations spill over on to the streets in schools and universities worldwide?

The catalyst is ubiquitous AI, which is detonating the tired system of factory education that has predominated since the last century. Based on passive learning and formulaic exams, this system has endured to the detriment of developing our young people's many faculties, including their entrepreneurial, scholarly, creative, artistic and communal as well as sporting talents.

Every era reimagines education in the light of changing technological, economic and social imperatives. For years, employers have been complaining bitterly about the skills of those arriving in the workplace. The time has come to address the problem. For five years the OECD has been working with the top education-performing countries internationally to develop a new model for education based on "human flourishing", highlighting precisely the attributes that will be required in the age of AI.

The five competencies it now recommends are: acting in the world, understanding rather than mere knowledge, appreciating the world, behaving ethically and becoming adaptive problem solvers. Academic subjects and rigour will remain but there will be more space for independent inquiry, prioritising resilience and team problem solving, assessed to provide a much deeper profile of each pupil's capabilities. These are the skills required for students everywhere to use AI positively rather than to swallowed up by it.

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Polling shows that only 9 per cent of 11 to 24-year-olds in the UK believe their schools and universities understand what is happening on AI and how extensively it is being used by students. The ignorance and lack of grip by those running these institutions is staggering. Parents speak of children giving up on school or college because the AI agents can coach them better at home with personalised teaching, detailed suggestions for improvement and precise instructions on how to get top grades in each subject.

This week a father asked me, "My daughter has a place at a top university but is refusing to go. She can't see the point. What can I do?" "Nothing," I responded. "If her school has done so little to encourage her curiosity and interest in her subject, you shouldn't force her." Not the answer he expected. But a student in his final year at a prestigious university sympathised, telling me that AI had told him and his friends the mark schemes for achieving top-class degrees and the minimal level of study they needed to put in, so they now had time for full-time jobs.

Is this the future? When schools and universities are only about passing exams and not places of enrichment, joy and belonging, it is not surprising that the young are voting with their feet. Meanwhile, academics everywhere complain that students arrive at university lacking genuine interest in their subjects, curiosity and appetite for independent thought.

Wellington College is now working with the OECD to introduce the new model for its own students and at partner state schools across the UK and internationally. The International Baccalaureate, the most respected curriculum and exam system in the world, has also fully embraced this new human flourishing model. The aim is for students to succeed as well or better at exams while offering a saner and more enriching system. To put humanity back at the heart of education is the best response to the blisteringly quick spread of this technology.

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