



Strategic stalemate

The U.S. should lift the blockade before asking Iran to open the Hormuz Strait

President Donald Trump's decision to back off from striking Iran, just hours after threatening to seize the country's Kharg Island, underscores the dilemma he faces in dealing with Tehran. Mr. Trump, who launched the conflict with his ally Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel on February 28, now wants to end it through talks. But Iran, which survived 40 days of U.S.-Israeli bombing and now controls the Strait of Hormuz, appears unwilling to hand him a diplomatic victory. Caught between an uncontrollable Israel, whose bombing of Lebanon threatens the fragile U.S.-Iran ceasefire, and an emboldened Iran that has become increasingly defiant and intransigent, Mr. Trump reverted to his familiar playbook of using military pressure to alter Tehran's negotiating position. On Wednesday he ordered strikes on Iran after confirming that a U.S. Apache helicopter had been shot down over the Strait of Hormuz. Iran retaliated by striking U.S. bases in Kuwait, Bahrain and Jordan. After two nights of tit-for-tat strikes, Mr. Trump backed off on Thursday, claiming progress in talks. Over the past two months, he has claimed dozens of times that a deal with Iran was within reach. In the war's escalation cycle, Mr. Trump takes one step forward, two steps back.

When Mr. Trump despatched his "armada" to Iran's shores in February, he wanted to force Tehran into submission through military pressure. The U.S. and Israel had an ambitious list of demands, including dismantling Iran's nuclear programme, degrading its missile capabilities and ending its support for non-state militias. When the U.S. and Israel launched the war, they wanted regime change in Tehran. More than three months later, the war, which failed to achieve any of its declared objectives, has hardened Iran's positions. If Iran was willing to make concessions on its nuclear programme on February 27, it now insists that any discussion on the nuclear file can take place only after the U.S.-Israeli hostilities cease and the blockade is lifted. The war has fundamentally altered the strategic reality of the region. Yes, Iran has absorbed significant military and economic costs, but it has emerged strategically stronger by taking control of the Hormuz Strait and effectively trapping the U.S. in a costly stalemate. Rather than chasing a delusional Iranian surrender, Washington should adopt a phased, realistic diplomatic approach. The priority should be to enforce and extend the ceasefire in good faith and lift the blockade in exchange for Iran reopening the Strait of Hormuz. Once stability is restored, both sides can return to substantive talks on Iran's nuclear programme and work towards a durable end to the conflict.

Long overdue

Coal exchanges can balance out energy scarcities across India

Unveiled at a time of record domestic coal production, the Coal Exchange Rules, 2026, are a case of better-late-than-never. They will create a broad market-based mechanism through regulated trading platforms for the hitherto India's energy system — coal. They are aimed at enhancing price discovery, transparency, access for small consumers, as well as, one would hope, reduce bilateral agreements that are often opaque and come with a whiff of graft, too often. Today, most coal transactions between producers and buyers take place through long-term contracts, primarily for the power sector, followed by auctions, imports and captive mining. While India's commodity exchanges are well established, they function largely as financial markets rather than physical delivery platforms. Coal exchanges, however, appear closer in design to power exchanges, which, despite modest volumes, play a role in price discovery, market signalling and the development of secondary markets. As if to prove this point, coal exchanges are expected to serve the non-regulated sector, which relies on Coal India auctions where coal is often sold at a premium to the highest bidder. Power exchanges are not merely niche trading platforms; they serve as points of reference for the broader power market. They have enhanced price discovery and served as a balancing market without replacing long-term power purchase agreements. Initially the power exchanges were only balancing shortages, but eventually the spot prices became a barometer of the broader power market indicating scarcity, surplus and system stresses for all electricity stakeholders. Perhaps the first role of coal exchanges could be to open up inventories, allowing surpluses to balance out shortages across India.

The templates for the two exchanges are not very different though the specific rules framed by the Coal Controller Organisation of India will determine the success of coal exchanges. Just as with the successes, the failures of power exchanges can also serve as lessons learned for coal. Coal is not as fungible as electricity, which only generated is the same everywhere requiring only minimum standards. Coal quality varies widely. Therefore, robust standards and quality assurance are as important as contract design, liquidity creation and enforcement. The latter set of requirements will ensure that major producers and consumers are drawn to the coal exchanges. The emphasis should be on facilitating participation of retail consumers unlike power exchanges, which are dominated by discoms. Coal India's stance will be crucial. Besides safeguards against volatility, dispute resolution mechanisms and improved transportation logistics will be important too, since the coal exchanges will be physical delivery platforms.

Equality of treatment for Persons with Disabilities



Sushil Kumar
Former Secretary,
Government of India,
and an Advocate in
the Supreme Court
and High Court

Addressing the digital divide through the Digital India Mission, India has marched on towards becoming a global "best practice" model of a digital welfare state. Yet, persons with disabilities (PwDs) remain largely excluded from this promise of universal outreach. Disability pensions, contrary to the very principles underlying disability rights, are determined not by the nature or extent of disability but by domicile, the discretionary decisions of State governments, and cumbersome bureaucratic processes. As a result, a vulnerable section of citizens continues to remain outside the ambit of a welfare architecture that otherwise prides itself on inclusivity and last-mile delivery.

An inadequate safety net

The 2011 Census recorded 2.68 crore PwDs. Today, accounting for population growth and changing disease profiles, their number is conservatively estimated at 4.5 crore-6 crore. Although the Supreme Court of India has recognised the right to live with dignity as a fundamental right and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 provides legal protection, disability benefits — especially pensions — remain fragmented, discretionary, and inadequate. As a result, the Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme covers only a small fraction of PwDs, while pension amounts in most States range from just ₹300 to ₹500 a month, with a few offering ₹1,000-₹3,000.

India spends barely 0.02% of GDP on disability welfare including pensions. South Africa spends 0.12%-0.15% of GDP (six times more); Brazil 0.45%-0.50% (20 times more); OECD countries 2.2% (110 times more) and Australia 0.35%-0.40% (20 times more).

Beyond politics, sound economics demands the inclusion of PwDs. The World Bank and UNDP estimate that low- and middle-income countries lose 3%-7% of GDP when PwDs are excluded from education, employment, and social security. Disability income improves household stability, rural consumption, and labour participation. Studies show fiscal multipliers of 1.4-1.6, while the 2025 Pro Bono Economics report found that the socio-economic returns from disability pensions exceed their costs by nearly 48%. Far from being a welfare expense, disability pensions are an investment and an effective economic stimulus.

India must establish a Minimum Universal Disability Pension Floor Rate (MUDPFR) to give effect to the state's constitutional obligation, under Article 41, to provide public assistance to persons with disabilities, and to operationalise Section 24 of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, which guarantees adequate

social security, including pension benefits. Such a measure would translate the promise of inclusive growth and "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas" into reality by shifting disability pensions from a matter of charity and discretion to a matter of citizenship rights. While ensuring that no disabled person receives less than a minimum pension regardless of where they live, a MUDPFR will still allow States to provide additional top-ups.

This is not an unrealistic proposal. South Africa provides a national disability grant with uniform eligibility norms; Brazil's BPC guarantees a national minimum income; and Australia and New Zealand operate nationwide disability pension systems. Several developing countries, including Kenya, Rwanda, Thailand and Indonesia, also provide disability income support at the national level. International experience shows that centrally set standards promote uniformity, universality and portability.

A MUDPFR of ₹8,000 per month for 40 lakh beneficiaries would cost about ₹38,400 crore annually (0.08% of GDP), while ₹10,000 for 65 lakh beneficiaries would cost ₹78,000 crore. Even a pension of ₹15,000 per month would keep expenditures below 0.2% of GDP. Such spending is fiscally manageable when compared with allocations for food subsidies (₹2.05 lakh crore), rural development (₹1.80 lakh crore), tax concessions and revenue foregone (₹1.72 lakh crore), and infrastructure (₹11.11 lakh crore). Yet, disability pensions and inclusion continue to receive only a tiny fraction of public expenditure.

From fragmentation to integration

The current disability pension system, shared between the Ministry of Rural Development and the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, leads to duplication, delays and diffused accountability. Countries that have faced similar challenges have addressed them through a single national authority — South Africa's SASSA, Australia's NDIA, Brazil's INSS and Ireland's Department of Social Protection. India too needs a National Disability Pension Authority to oversee eligibility norms, a national registry, portability, digital integration, grievance redress and State-wise performance monitoring — one standard, one system, one nation.

Implementing a robust disability pension system would strengthen India's bid for a UN Security Council seat by translating its commitments into action under Article 28 of the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ILO Recommendation No. 202, SDG 1.3, and the G-20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration, all of which endorse social protection as a cornerstone of inclusive development.

Combining pensions with employment

India must adopt a minimum universal disability pension floor rate

The 8th CPC — a chance to reform pay commissions



Prem Kumar Nair
Retired Indian Army
officer (colonel)
with an interest
in governing
architecture
and systems

As India moves toward the 8th Central Pay Commission (CPC), public discussion has largely centred on familiar themes — fitment factors, salary revisions and arrears. Yet, the larger question may not be how much compensation should increase, but whether the framework for determining public compensation remains coherent, equitable, and fiscally sustainable. This is not merely an administrative matter. The manner in which the state structures salaries, allowances and pensions reflects broader institutional priorities and influences public confidence in governance.

The framework deficit

Over the decades, Pay Commissions have become far more than wage-revision exercises. Their recommendations shape inter-service parity, long-term fiscal commitments and the institutional balance within the state. Yet, the process remains narrow, with a small, time-bound body tasked with evaluating a diverse ecosystem of civil, military and technical services, largely on the basis of representations from the services themselves. A key challenge is the absence of a common evaluative framework. Services operate under different structures, career trajectories and working conditions, but there is no universally accepted method for comparing risk, responsibility, technical complexity or career progression. As a result, the system often seeks parity without clearly defining its basis.

This challenge is most visible in questions of parity. Officers across services with very different career paths and responsibilities may, at certain stages, receive comparable compensation. The issue is not one of competition between services but institutional coherence. If parity is to be maintained, the principles governing it must be transparent, consistent and objectively justified.

The comparison between civilian services and the armed forces illustrates this complexity. Military careers follow a sharply pyramidal structure, with limited promotional opportunities

and earlier retirement. Civilian services generally offer broader avenues for advancement and longer careers. Aligning compensation across such different systems requires careful consideration of these structural differences.

Another significant trend is the reduction in experience required for senior administrative positions. While faster career progression may reflect changing governance needs, complex policy challenges still demand institutional memory and seasoned judgment. Efficiency is important, but it cannot fully substitute for experience. Questions also arise over allowances. While they are intended to compensate for hardship, remoteness or operational risk, there is no uniform and transparent framework for assessing such conditions across services. This can create disparities that are difficult to justify and may foster perceptions of inconsistency.

Non-Functional Upgradation (NFU) raises a related concern. By allowing financial advancement without a corresponding increase in responsibility, it weakens the link between role, accountability and compensation. Though introduced to address slower promotion avenues, the NFU continues to generate debate over equity and institutional rationale.

The pension challenge

Pensions add another layer of complexity. India currently operates multiple pension systems, including legacy defined-benefit schemes, contributory plans for newer entrants, and separate arrangements for elected representatives. According to the Reserve Bank of India's State Finances Report (2023), salaries, pensions and interest payments consume a large share of State expenditure, limiting fiscal space for development. As a result, concerns about sustainability and inter-generational equity are becoming increasingly justified.

Taken together, these issues highlight the need for a more coherent approach to public compensation. At present, pay frameworks for the executive, legislature and judiciary evolve

through different processes. While constitutionally distinct, this fragmentation can create inconsistencies and reduce transparency in compensation decisions. Public trust depends not only on fairness, but also on transparency and explainability.

Constitutional imperative

A MUDPFR would give effect to the Constitution's guarantees of equality, equal protection, dignity and the right to life. India has already standardised major welfare programmes — from food security and health care to PM-KISAN and pensions — and delivers benefits at scale through DBT and UPI. The capacity and technology exist. What is needed is the political will to prioritise dignity. Disability pensions remain one of the few entitlements determined by where a person lives. If dignity is a constitutional right, geography cannot decide the minimum support for survival.

More than an economic or administrative reform, a MUDPFR is a moral one. It affirms that persons with disabilities are rights-bearing citizens, not recipients of charity. By transforming the state from a benevolent provider into a constitutional guarantor, it strengthens dignity, inclusion and citizenship. Should India continue with a system in which disability pensions vary according to State budgets, political priorities and bureaucratic complexities, leaving persons with disabilities vulnerable to hardship? Or should the Republic guarantee a minimum level of support for all? A Viksit Bharat cannot leave its most vulnerable citizens at the mercy of a postcode lottery. Federalism cannot be a justification for inequity.

A MUDPFR is the next logical step in India's welfare architecture, building on rights-based entitlements enabled by digital inclusion and DBT. It would humanise the state, uphold the dignity of persons with disabilities and strengthen the Republic.

Over the past 75 years, India has steadily expanded its welfare state in pursuit of social justice. With the necessary platforms and delivery systems now in place, the time has come to secure the foundation. The real question is whether India recognises dignity for persons with disabilities as a constitutional right and a collective obligation. That promise is long overdue, and a MUDPFR offers a way to fulfil it.

The 8th Central Pay Commission should reform compensation frameworks, not merely salaries

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The war drags on

America's contradictory statements, shifting positions in negotiations to end the war with Iran, and the selective closure of the Strait of Hormuz have adversely affected trade in many countries. U.S. President Donald Trump's public statements should be treated with caution, as they have not been

confirmed by Tehran. The two countries remain far apart in their approaches to resolving the crisis, with few signs of de-escalation. Repeated attacks on Indian ships could strain U.S.-India relations. Even diplomatic experts struggle to decipher America's motives, given its central role in triggering the crisis. It is frustrating that

there appears to be no end in sight.

V. Lakshmanan,
Tirupur, Tamil Nadu

Delhi fire, standards

It is a matter of shock and shame that so many people lost their lives in a fire in Delhi, including foreign nationals. Reports suggest that there was a lack of compliance with safety

regulations. In such circumstances, it is difficult to expect tourism to flourish, as foreign visitors may lose confidence in the safety standards of accommodation in India. The Ministry of Tourism should play a more direct role in ensuring that hotels adhere to safety standards.

N.G.R. Prasad,
Chennai

Hydration matters

It is unfortunate that the "water bells scheme" appears to have been ignored in most government schools in Chennai (Chennai, June 12). The Tamil Nadu government has repeatedly emphasised its commitment to the education and the welfare of schoolchildren. Given

rising summer temperatures, the scheme should be enforced in all schools across urban, semi-urban and rural areas of the State to ensure that children remain adequately hydrated.

Murali Mohan PV,
Chennai

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



A farmer sprays pesticides in a paddy field on the outskirts of Hyderabad. NAGARA GOPAL

The human cost of a deadly weed killer

In March, Telangana banned paraquat, one of the world's most widely used and highly toxic weedkillers, becoming only the third State in India to do so. The herbicide is responsible for hundreds of deaths each year, most of them suicides and some accidental. **Serish Nanisetti** reports on the campaign that led to the ban and why much more remains to be done

At 50, Banoth Goud (name changed) has lived to tell a tale. "I may look normal, but I become breathless when I climb stairs or even walk more than five minutes. The doctor says my lungs got affected," he says.

About three years ago, on a sweltering afternoon, Goud opened his refrigerator, took out a small plastic bottle labelled with a popular juice brand, and took a sip. The drink did not have the sweet, tart apple flavour that he was used to; instead, it tasted flat. He began vomiting. Goud did not know that he had drunk paraquat, a highly toxic herbicide and one of the most effective weed killers in the world. Paraquat, a colourless and tasteless liquid, is most often fatal for both humans and animals.

It was a mistake that resulted in Goud fighting for his life. "I had asked my nephew to get the *gaddi mandu* (the local term for the weedicide) to clear weeds in front of our house," he recalls. "He kept the bottle on a table inside the house. My wife thought it was a cool drink and placed it inside the fridge." While wholesale traders store paraquat in drums, farmers and others often fill up stray bottles with the weedicide.

Goud was rushed from his house in Paloncha to a hospital in Kothegudem, about 11 kilometres away. The doctors were sure he would die.

Being an employee of TSGENCO (Telangana State Power Generation Corporation Limited), Goud had an ESIC (Employee State Insurance Corporation) card, necessary for workers below a certain salary level to access free medical care and financial benefits at ESIC dispensaries and hospitals across the State. He was quickly ferried in an ambulance to a tertiary-care facility in Hyderabad, roughly 285 km away.

Dr. Verrana Addanki, a General Medicine practitioner, noticed that Goud had a 'paraquat mouth' — the severe, corrosive damage that occurs when a person swallows or is exposed to paraquat — and put him on continuous renal replacement therapy (CRRT). Over the next 40 days, Goud's condition slowly improved.

"His family had given up on him," remembers Dr. Addanki. "But we persisted and he had the will to survive too. Now, he has photographs of his family as his WhatsApp display picture."

On March 31, 2026, Telangana banned the sale, distribution, manufacture, and use of paraquat, to protect the safety and health of people, especially farmers. It became only the third State to do so, after Kerala and Odisha. The Government Order was issued days after intense lobbying by doctors, clinicians, and public representatives calling for the ban of the weedicide, which has been often used for self-harm. Neighbouring Andhra Pradesh followed suit in May.

Bans and bust-ups

Paraquat wreaks havoc due to its immense potential for harm, easy availability, low price



A ban by one State without the involvement of e-commerce sites is just a ban on paper. It is ineffectual.

DILEEP KUMAR
Pesticide Action Network

(₹280 per litre), and widespread use in India. The only law to regulate hazardous chemicals such as paraquat is the Insecticides Act, 1968.

Goud's story is an exception: the weedicide has killed thousands of people, as is evident from autopsy reports from hospitals across the world. Paraquat is banned in 74 countries. In India, Kerala became the first State to ban it in 2011. However, in February 2022, the Kerala High Court overturned the ban following a plea by a cardamom growers' collective. While the Kerala Agriculture Department's notification specifically named the chemical along with 13 others, the High Court struck down the ban on the technical ground that the State did not have the authority to enforce it beyond 60:30 days (as per Section 27 of the Insecticides Act).

In October 2022, Kerala was rocked by the murder of Sharon Raj, who was allegedly poisoned with a paraquat-laced drink by his fiancée, Greeshma. He died at the Medical College Hospital in Thiruvananthapuram, triggering a public uproar as details of the case quickly emerged in the public domain.

"We can still order it online," says Dileep Kumar of Pesticide Action Network, a global coalition of over 600 NGOs, institutions, and individuals across 90 countries dedicated to eliminating hazardous chemical pesticides. "A ban by one State without the involvement of e-commerce sites is just a ban on paper. It is ineffectual," he points out.

Kumar adds that the country needs stronger laws and regulations to manage the crisis. "Even the Bhopal gas tragedy (in 1984) did not lead to new laws to regulate pesticides," he says.

The problem is not just limited regulation of pesticides, weedkillers, and insecticides; it is also low awareness about safe use. According to a



Ambulance vans stand outside the Gandhi Hospital mortuary in Hyderabad, where 217 paraquat victims were brought in for postmortem examination between 2024 and 2025. NAGARA GOPAL

statement by the Minister of State for Agriculture in the Lok Sabha, 79,185 farmers were made aware of the safe and judicious use of pesticides between 2020 and 2026. This is a low share in a country where 46.1% of the population is dependent on agriculture, as per the Economic Survey of 2025-26.

As per the Act, the ban in Telangana was for 60 days and can be extended by 30 more days. On the day that the Telangana issued a Government Order imposing a ban on paraquat, the Legislative Assembly passed a bipartisan resolution asking the Central government to ban the chemical across the country.

Lobbying for a ban

On the afternoon of February 12, Dr. Marri Mahesh Reddy, the founder of a grassroots movement called Doctors Against Paraquat, called for a gathering of farmers in Potharam village in Karimnagar. The emerald green village, with endless paddy fields, is on the eastern side of the Sriramsagar flood flow canal that carries water from the Godavari river. This whistle-stop tour and meeting with farmers was part of a campaign by Dr. Reddy.

"If we don't use this, can't we do agriculture?" Dr. Reddy said, addressing the gathering. "Didn't we do agriculture before this? Brush-cutter *leva*, *vere mandulu leva*. *Dina valla yavaruki upagam*? (We have brush-cutters, sickles, and other chemicals. Why use this toxic substance?)"

He explained what made paraquat particularly dangerous. "I used to get emergency cases of snake bites and poisoning," he said. "There were antidotes for snakebites and the venom was not always so toxic. But paraquat is in a different league. It destroys the cell structure and there is no antidote."

Doctors Against Paraquat comprises 202 doctors drawn from different parts of Telangana, who lobbied with politicians, farmers, and bureaucrats relentlessly for a ban on paraquat. Using social media and personal connections, Dr. Reddy reached out to the Telangana Chief Minister's Office, the Maharashtra Chief Minister's Office, the Prime Minister's Office, and politicians.

Yet, Potharam and other farming villages have found paraquat useful. As labour shortage is rising and the cost of hiring farm workers is increasing, farmers use paraquat, which is labelled and sold as non-selective contact herbicide (meaning, it does not differentiate between one plant and another), to clean up residual plants and weeds. Paraquat imports to India rose from 8,598 tonnes in 2019-20 to 20,786 tonnes in 2022-23, according to the Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 2542 under the Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare in 2025.

"Without any oversight or intervention by officials from the agriculture department, there is a runaway use of paraquat in most parts of the country. There are many accidental deaths due to careless use as well," says Kodanda Reddy, Chairperson of the Telangana Agriculture Farmers Welfare Commission, who has also worked to get the ban imposed in the State.

"Currently we are working with e-commerce companies as well as cyber crime officials to ensure that the product is not available in online stores," he adds. This lobbying appears to have paid off, as two big e-commerce sites — Flipkart and Amazon — no longer list the chemical in Telangana. However, it is easily available from smaller agriculture commerce sites.

A rush to save patients

Bodies are constantly wheeled in and out of the Department of Forensic Medicine, Toxicology and Autopsy Complex at Gandhi Hospital in



Without any oversight or intervention by officials from the agriculture department, there is a runaway use of paraquat in most parts of the country.

KODANDA REDDY
Chairperson of the Telangana Agriculture Farmers Welfare Commission

Hyderabad. Families wait in grief and the police mill around. There is an overpowering odour of bleach, urine, and putrefying flesh.

The toll of paraquat poisoning is evident here. According to Dr. Atmudi Vivek Sai Ram's Doctor of Medicine dissertation, 'An autopsy based study on deaths due to Paraquat poisoning in Gandhi Hospital', the facility recorded 217 cases of paraquat poisoning in 2024 and 2025. Of these, 54% of the patients were farmers and 16% students. Of the 100 cases studied for the dissertation, 94% were suicide cases and 5% were accidental.

"There is no treatment for paraquat poisoning, no antidote. We only receive clues from the family when bottles with labels are found near the victim or there is an oral statement," says Dr. Krupal Singh, the head of department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology. He is also part of Doctors Against Paraquat.

"All we can do is symptomatic treatment," Dr. Singh adds. "As a result, treatment remains largely supportive, focusing on early gastrointestinal decontamination, organ support, and prevention of further oxidative damage. If the patient is put on a ventilator, the progress of the chemical is accelerated, with multiple organ failure and fibrosis of lungs being irreversible."

Inside the nephrology ward of the century-old Osmania General Hospital in Hyderabad, patients sit in rows. "Every month, we get 4-5 paraquat-related cases. Most of the patients die within days," says Dr. Manisha Shenoy, Head of the Nephrology Department, who is the first doctor to be called in once a patient suspected of imbibing paraquat is wheeled into the hospital.

"The prognosis is bleak even with advanced treatment like CRRT," she explains. "The chemical causes rapid damage, first to the kidneys, then the liver, and eventually the lungs. Intubation of a patient on a ventilator accelerates damage to the lungs." She does not remember any survivors.

Poor regulatory efforts

While the dangers of paraquat and its misuse have drawn global attention, regulatory efforts in India have largely escaped public scrutiny.

Paraquat's origins date back to the 1880s, when it was first developed as a chemical dye. Its herbicidal properties were discovered in the 1950s, and Imperial Chemical Industries began marketing it as Gramoxone in the 1960s. Concerns about its toxicity surfaced early in India. In 1989, G. Vijaya Rama Rao, a doctor from Siddipet, raised the issue in the Lok Sabha, but the Agriculture Minister said the government had received no reports of harmful effects.

However, Imperial Chemical Industries documents suggest the company was aware of the risks. An agenda paper by the company dated November 19, 1987, and accessed by *The Hindu*, noted: "Suicidal abuse of the product will not be eliminated." According to the paper, the company also chose not to dilute the chemical to make it safer, calculating that this would increase packaging size fivefold. It noted that "usage by farmers would reduce significantly because of bulk inconvenience/higher prices."

During these years, Imperial Chemical Industries was earning significant revenues from paraquat. In 1987, sales of the product reached 15,000 tonnes, generating ₹192 million, according to a document from October 4, 1988, and accessed by *The Hindu*.

In August 2025, the Lok Sabha was informed that there are 1,503 licensed manufacturers of paraquat in the country. While Telangana banned the herbicide on March 31, on April 16, the Central Insecticides Board and Registration Committee, at its 471st meeting, cleared seven applications for formulation under indigenous manufacture as "satisfactory."

India has not been a passive player in the regulation of paraquat; it has also, at times, been an enabler in its continued use. In May 2013, India joined Guatemala in opposing the listing of paraquat as a "severely hazardous pesticide formulation" under Annex III of the Rotterdam Convention, a multi-lateral environmental agreement. Such a listing would not have led to a banning of the chemical, but it would have required exporting countries to notify and obtain prior consent from importing countries before shipment. The proposal was supported by 118 countries but did not go through because the treaty's voting rules require complete consensus.

CropLife India, representing 17 agro-chemical companies, said to *The Hindu*, "Sudden restrictions on paraquat dichloride and carbofuran, just as kharif sowing begins, could raise input costs, disrupt crop protection, and deepen farmer vulnerability." Paraquat is used on nearly 80 lakh acres in India and remains a low-cost weed-control option for small farmers, it added.

In Karimnagar, however, the ban has already had a visible impact. "Deaths due to paraquat have dropped from around 30-50 per month before the ban to 3-5 now, according to data from pulmonologists and nephrologists," says Dr. Reddy. "We can reach zero deaths if the ban is imposed across the country and the chemical is removed from shelves and online stores. All doctors will breathe easier if that happens."

Those in distress or having suicidal tendencies could seek help and counselling by calling any of the following numbers: **1Life - 78930-78930**

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IN 1932

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

One year after AI 171 crash, questions persist

JUNE 12 marked the first anniversary of the Air India flight AI 171 crash, which claimed 260 lives in Ahmedabad: 241 of the 242 people on board and 19 on the ground. Under international aviation norms, the final investigation report into an air disaster should be made public "as soon as possible and, if possible, within 12 months". While this timeline is not legally binding, it seems that India's Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) will need more time to release its final findings about the Boeing 787 Dreamliner that crashed. At the same time, the information in the public domain, particularly the preliminary report released on July 12 last year, raises concerns about the handling of the case.

The first concern relates to the manner in which the AAIB released its preliminary report. At 11 months, and without a press briefing at which questions could be addressed. The second pertains to the report's content. It had only a single paraphrased exchange between the pilots regarding the fuel switches, rather than the full cockpit voice recorder transcript or audio. The limited information released and the questions left unanswered have fuelled speculation of pilot error. Meanwhile, Boeing and the 787 Dreamliner programme have faced recurring technical concerns, including lithium-ion battery failures, fuselage manufacturing defects, and electrical system problems. A US-based aviation safety advocate group has filed a whistleblower testimony submitted to the US Senate, alleging that the aircraft involved in the Ahmedabad crash had experienced multiple technical issues during its service life. Against this backdrop, the concerns raised by the Federation of Indian Pilots — selective disclosure of information, the apparent absence of key subject-matter experts from the investigation and an inadequate examination of a possible electrical or systems failure — deserve serious attention.

For the victims and their families, a rigorous and transparent investigation is the minimum that justice demands. Four families have filed lawsuits against Boeing and aircraft-parts manufacturer Honeywell, alleging negligence, while the father of one of the pilots has sought a court-monitored inquiry. These developments speak of erosion of confidence in the investigative process. Restoring that trust must be a priority. AAIB's interim statement on Friday said the final report will be released "upon completion of all investigative activities". The Civil Aviation Minister, too, has asked on X that the investigation continues. Every authority involved should ensure that no line of inquiry is left unexplored and no legitimate question goes unanswered. Establishing the truth about AI 171 is essential not only for accountability but also for aviation safety and public confidence. Until the final report is released, conclusions must remain guided by evidence, not conjecture.

Amid rising inflation, vigilance holds the key

IN RECENT weeks, there has been much concern over the direction of inflation in the economy and the implications for monetary policy. Last week, when the Monetary Policy Committee kept interest rates unchanged, the RBI pegged inflation at 5.1 per cent for the year, up from its earlier assessment of 4.6 per cent. For the first quarter, it had projected 4.2 per cent. The latest data from the National Statistical Office show that while retail inflation edged slightly upwards to 3.93 per cent in May, from 3.48 per cent in April, it was marginally lower than expectations. This also puts inflation in the quarter so far at 3.7 per cent, slightly lower than the central bank's expectation.

Food inflation rose to 4.78 per cent, up from 4.2 per cent the month before, with tomatoes and ginger seeing a sharp surge. With weak rainfall delaying kharif planting, the outlook in this category is uncertain. In the non-food category, the rise in energy prices at the retail level (petrol, diesel, commercial LPG cylinders) seems to be reflecting in transportation — of goods and personal vehicles — and restaurants. Energy price adjustments are continuing — recently, domestic LPG prices were raised by Rs 29. Prices of other key inputs are expected to continue feeding inflationary pressures, while supply-chain and energy disruptions pose upside risks. Household inflation expectations are also firming up, with three-month and one-year ahead expectations rising by 80 basis points and 50 basis points respectively.

The global environment continues to be in flux. On Thursday, the European Central Bank raised interest rates by 25 basis points amid concerns that the energy shock is beginning to spill over into the larger economy. Other central banks — the US Federal Reserve and the Bank of England — are scheduled to hold meetings next week. In the US, consumer prices rose at an annual rate of 4.2 per cent, complicating matters for the new Fed chair. The MPC's next meeting will be in August. By then, there will probably be some indication of the flows being mopped up through the FCBR (B) route. Another set of preliminary data will also be available, and there will be some clarity over the underlying growth momentum. These will shape the MPC's decision.

A champion shooter, a master mentor

INDIAN SHOOTING has produced Olympic champions, world champions and celebrated coaches. But there was only one Jaspal Rana — outspoken, occasionally controversial, often brilliant and always deeply invested in the sport. Rana, who died on Friday, was a champion long before Olympic medals made shooting a national obsession. He won an Asian Games gold in 1994, and over the next decade, his cabinet would be brimming with medals. He couldn't win an Olympic medal because his pet event, centre-fire pistol, wasn't in the Olympics. After his competitive career ended, Rana became the junior India coach, shaping a generation of shooters and helping lay the foundations for India's rise as a global power in the sport. In a sport increasingly shaped by technology, analytics and specialised support teams, Rana remained a believer in fundamentals. He was uncompromising on discipline and hard work — these traits helped Manu Bhaker become the first Indian athlete to win two medals at the Paris Olympics.

Rana didn't shy away from demanding answers. When the GST was introduced, and a shooting equipment tax was added to the tax bracket, he spoke up for the shooter. Officialdom didn't always take his views kindly. They blamed his "negative influence" for the poor show at the Tokyo Olympics. Three years later, in Paris as Bhaker's coach, he was vindicated. For three decades, Indian shooting could count on one certainty: Jaspal Rana would have an opinion, and he would not hesitate to share it. More often than not, the sport was better for it.

GROWING UP next to an all-purpose sports facility — the epicentre of our young lives in Rajkot's railway colony in the 1980s — we had our own football heroes. There was Rafiq Baloch, aspiring Siddhi boy, with tree-trunk legs. Parshotam, endearingly called Pasiyo, was a fearless defender with goal-scoring ambitions. And the delightful Ahmed, a compulsive dribbler, loved dodging goalkeepers and tapping the ball in the goal.

They all played for our team — the modestly named Jagjivan Ram Railway Institute. We rarely won the local league since other sides from outside our township — Young Challengers Club and Youth Club — were more consistent but less watchable. For context, we were Rajkot's Liverpool.

Back in the day, our exposure to the world of football was primarily through the written word. Englishman Brian Glanville, the finest football writer ever, was our guide. He took us to iconic stadiums around the world, informed us about the ball skills of greats and sparked our young minds to imagine what they did on fields oceans away. His beautifully crafted, impressively authoritative articles regularly appeared in *Sportstar*, that sporting bible of our youth. We would rub our cheeks against its glossy pages for that soothing, smooth feel before devouring the magazine from cover to cover.

Once in a while, it was our lucky day, the Films Division produced *Newsreel* that used to be shown before movies in theatres would feature a few seconds-long video clips of international football. It was a wink-and-miss

sporting opportunity that came your way in dark cinema halls with un-cushioned wooden seats. To say that we, nestled in our comfortable cocoon, were cut off from the world would be factual — not an attempt to romanticise remoteness.

And then it all happened during that magical summer of 1986 when footballing greats, and even a God, graced our living room every night. We had watched Ravi Shastri drive his team mates in an Audi at MCG a year back but that was not at our home. Watching live sports from your own couch was new to us. As far as eye-openers go, Mexico '86 was epic — it burnt new, permanent footballing images into our retinas, rewriting the old ones.

Poor Baloch, Pasiyo and Ahmed, they were pushed out of our mind space by Maradona, Sócrates, Platini, Zico, Linkeer, Laudrup... the list was unending. To date, Mexico '86 is counted as the most memorable and greatest of World Cups. Hand of God, greatest goal ever, heart-breaking results and that thrilling climax where Valdano latched on to Maradona's measured through-ball to break the 2-2 deadlock in the final against Germany. As the Argentines hugged Maradona, the world, including the recent converts from Rajkot, wanted to jump into the television to be part of the happy huddle.

Our colony's first try with top-level football was delightful and also insightful. It gave a chance to witness how national teams build fanbases in distant lands. How those uninitiated into international



SANDEEP DWIVEDI

The big sporting spectacle has commenced in Mexico. Still, nothing can replace the Summer of '86, nor can there be a return to that age of innocence

football in our neighbourhood picked the teams they would be backing for the World Cup, and the rest of their life, was a story that would have inspired R K Narayan. These were simple folk, with no skin in the game, feeling obliged to connect with the mesmerising men, from different countries and cultures, playing the Beautiful Game.

Late one night, the grandfather of a close friend announced to the family, sitting together watching their first World Cup, that Germany was to be the team they would support. Starting as a cobbler mending shoes on the footpath of a busy road, the highly respected patriarch had gone on to own a few imposing footwear shops in the city's tonny area. His proclamation had come minutes after the commentator had read the German player XI, starting with their goalkeeper Toni Schumacher. "See, like us, the German goalkeeper too is a shoemaker. So, henceforth, Germany is our team," he said.

Not far from where we stayed lived the Joshis. In the dead of night, they pledged their allegiance to Brazil. That was after the World Cup's most entertaining team had beaten Poland, where their right-back Josphimar had scored a stunning pile-driver from outside the D. Next morning, as word spread about Joshis' allegiance, our locality's certified funny man overrode Mr. Joshis' nameplate outside his home. It was now reading Josphimar, with the "mar" addition done sloppily with a black sketch pen.

Our milkman would become a

huge Michael Laudrup fan as he was from Denmark, a country he knew was big on livestock and dairy products. England, too, had a few fans. The presence of many Gujaratis in the UK, many having come via Africa, was a factor. The English fans loathed Maradona when he first cheated and later humiliated them in that Hand of God game. But they were a minority; Argentina and Maradona ruled most hearts.

For our small group, the hero was the Brazilian, Sócrates. He was tall, lanky, outspoken and an underdog. He was a reflection of a certain Angry Young Man, a popular silver-screen character of that image. Sócrates was a doctor who smoked like a chimney and drank like a fish. He had a casual air about himself even in high-pressure situations. Sócrates conducted himself in a crucial World Cup game like a father playing ball with his child in a park. The good doctor answered the biggest question of our teenage lives: What was cool?

Four decades after our baptism by the roaring Mexico fire, the World Cup has come full circle. The big sporting spectacle has commenced in Mexico. Still, nothing can replace the Summer of '86, nor can there be a return to that age of innocence. This is the age of excessive information and data mining. Nothing is left to the imagination. The joy of connecting with strangers on a gut feeling is over. "Oh, when I look back now... Those were the best days of my life." That Summer of '86.

The writer is national sports editor, The Indian Express.

Too much capital adds to Air India's turbulence



SATYENDRA PANDEY

MOST CORPORATE turnarounds have similar themes. New ownership, an injection of capital, rightsizing, capex, product-revitalisation, and for the successful ones — profitability. Just four years ago, with the transition from being a Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) to new ownership under the Tata Group, Air India was supposed to be that story. However, it has been anything but.

The airline continues to incur severe losses, its reputation requires repair, and as we mark the first anniversary of the horrific Ahmedabad crash of Air India Flight 171, where 241 people on board and 19 on the ground lost their lives, there are more questions than answers.

All this while, Air India continues to struggle with culture, cash flow, and credibility. The elephant in the room is that Air India moved from a situation of constrained capital to abundant capital. But too much capital can be a curse. Because too much capital can inadvertently amplify challenges, and at scale. And capital creates a false sense of security, which then has consequent impacts.

The numbers speak for themselves: A loss in excess of \$2 billion; an estimated 22 per cent-plus cut in capacity; and a wide variation in net promoter scores highlight a consistently inconsistent product. For those looking beyond the numbers, the signals are many. But those calling them out are few and far between. The fact that the airline is not able to turn a profit in a duopoly market where it holds significant advantages is very telling.

What makes the Air India situation even more compelling is that the airline's success is not only important for the airline and the Tata Group but also for India's broader ambitions. For one, strategic autonomy essentially includes air connectivity as a core pillar. To this end, the country has asserted itself by not revisiting air service bilateral agreements, a position that will be untenable without a strong global airline.

Second, Air India's success will demonstrate that PSUs can be privatised and deliver a profit to the benefit of the exchequer and all citizens. Then there is the element of jobs across the skill spectrum, where a large, successful airline can be a strong catalyst. Finally, a successful global airline provides

the fillip towards building an aviation hub to challenge those in the Middle East and Southeast Asia, thereby leveraging the Indian demographic dividend and the premiumisation wave.

Air India's goals by March 2027 as part of its transformation plan highlight targets for fleet growth, market share, brand identity, innovation, and being a preferred employer. But what needs to be put front and centre is the customer in every way possible. Yes, the Indian consumer is demanding, yes, aviation is an exciting business, and yes, the returns on capital for airlines are very hard to deliver. But these are facts to be worked with. Not challenges to be glossed over. And doing this requires hard decisions that align the airline with the market reality.

Going forward, the flight path for Air India is anything but smooth. Elements of its strategy, such as the ultra-long-haul flights, engineering challenges, and overall talent strategy, require a rethink. The airline has to deliver consistency, not excuses, and the consumer has to be front and centre. There are no easy answers. Buying and financing aircraft with the backing of the Tata Group was the easy part; delivering a competitive cost structure, consistent product and service, and operational excellence is an order of magnitude more difficult.

There is an aviation adage that goes: "The three things that are of no use are the runway behind you, the altitude above you, and the fuel still in the tank." For Air India, the focus has to be the here and now. The past, the vision, and the impending product upgrades are not items that will move the needle. Similarly, market share, compliance, and seniority cannot outrank safety, consistency and reliability. A consumer cannot be taken for granted, especially in the international segment, where there are many options. As such, the first goal for the airline is to enter consumers' consideration sets.

The good news is that Air India finds itself in the right market at the right time and with a strong parent company with patient capital. But it has to be backed up with strategic intent and executive capital. One year after the crash, no Air India executive has held an official, in-person press conference to brief the public or answer questions about it.

The writer is managing partner at AITV, an aviation finance firm

Where there were phuchkas, there are now bulldozers



MADHURITA GOSWAMI

2008. DUMDUM Junction. I made a friend with whom I shared my daily train commute to college. Our friendship grew over plates of phuchka outside the adjoining Metro's ticket counters, persuading hawkers to add more of the fiery green chilli extract to the potato filling. From 2008 to 2011, I travelled daily from Agarpara to St Xavier's College on Park Street, changing from the local train to the Metro at Dum Dum. At the end of last month, vendors were evicted from the railway land at Dum Dum. Stores were dismantled overnight as part of an anti-encroachment drive earlier undertaken at the Howrah and Sealdah stations. Bulldozers brought down roughly 500 stalls at Dum Dum, leaving hawkers who had been operating from the railway premises for decades in despair. So far, the government has not announced any policy for their resettlement.

For students like us, who travelled from the outskirts to the city, these hawkers were a lifeline. After long classes, we looked forward to their phuchkas, jhalnuiri — recently hailed by the Prime Minister himself — egg rolls, chips, cold drinks and other inexpensive fare. Not just students, the hawkers at Dum Dum also sustained daily-wage labourers and other workers with modest incomes. My friend and I often stopped at the phuchka stalls on our way home. Regulars were given preference, and if one of them drifted over to another stall, a mock-combative exchange would break out among the hawkers. We had settled on Raja Kaku's phuchka. He would boast that nobody ever got sick after eating at his cart. "I do not use red chillies. The green chillies do not upset stomachs," he told us.

When the hawkers were evicted from Dum Dum station, people protested. But against the police and the infamous bulldozers, they were no match. Reading about it miles away from the city, I felt disturbed at my inability to do anything. The displaced vendors have been hitting the streets, demanding an alternative venue for their stalls. I also wondered what the new generation of students taking the train will look forward to.

As of now, the question of the hawkers' resettlement looms large. The nostalgia of people like me who grew up benefiting from what they dished out in minutes is a secondary concern. But as prices rise, I wonder what will happen to this hawker-driven economy that didn't let many of us go hungry. The hawkers did not just sell food. At stations — among the most democratic public places — they were the fabric that briefly held people together in their shared love of food, irrespective of background. They were central to an ecosystem of sellers and buyers, Biharis and Bengalis, Muslims and Hindus, men, women, and those of other gender identities, standing shoulder to shoulder, waiting for their turn to dig into small but filling dollops of pure joy.

Undoubtedly, Kolkata's famous street food culture hinges on the daily labour of hawkers. At their carts, people gather not only to eat but also to discuss politics, or daily experiences, in what's a melting pot of ideas that contributes to an evolving social consciousness. I still visit phuchka stalls when I go back home and ask for more heat, more salt, and a phau — a free dry stool to end with. From the vendors' end, a phau, though a small gesture, symbolises a kind of unique generosity from those with little to spare.

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40 YEARS AGO

June 13, 1986



Punjab-Haryana land dispute

THE TRANSFER of Chandigarh to Punjab and Haryana, a long-pending issue, was set to be resolved on June 21, as announced by the government, depends upon a settlement between the chief ministers of the two states. The Venkatarajah Commission has awarded 70,000 acres of land to Haryana in lieu of Chandigarh. But the commission has not identified the areas and has instead suggested either the appointment of another commission to determine these or a settlement between the two states.

France offers high technology

FRANCE OFFERED to transfer high technology to India without any pre-condition. The offer was made during 30 minutes of talks, covering a wide range of subjects between the French PM, Jacques Chirac, and the Vice-President, R Venkataraman. The areas covered during the talks included transfer of technology, trade relations between India and France, the situation in Sri Lanka and holding of the French festival in India.

Hegde's word satisfies Chavan

THE MAHARASHTRA Chief Minister, S B Chavan, said that his Karnataka counterpart, Ramkrishna Hegde, had made it clear to him that there would be no compulsory introduction of Kannada in primary schools in the bilingual boundary region of the state. He said

during his talks with Hegde, the latter offered to show him the government circular on the issue and had promised that his government would not do anything unconstitutional.

SALT is dead: US

THE WHITE HOUSE declared the SALT-2 strategic arms treaty dead and said any future decisions on arms reduction made by the United States would be based on "Soviet behaviour" in key areas. The presidential spokesman, Larry Speakes, told reporters, "SALT is dead. The SALT treaty no longer exists". His statement appeared aimed at clarifying remarks in which he softened the US position on the unratified 1979 Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty.

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

• HISTORY

The June 12 HC ruling that paved way for Emergency

Nikita Moha
New Delhi, June 12

LATE ON the night of June 25, 1975, President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, acting on the recommendation of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, proclaimed a state of Emergency, citing threats to the nation's internal security. But the trigger, according to historians, was a June 12 judgment of the Allahabad High Court, upholding a petition that charged her with corrupt practices in her 1971 parliamentary election.

The election case

Raj Narain, the socialist leader Indira Gandhi defeated in Rae Bareilly in 1971, had challenged her victory in the Allahabad HC. Known as the 'election case', the petition alleged that Gandhi had secured her win through corrupt practices, particularly by exceeding the legal limit on campaign spending and by using government officials and state machinery for support.

On March 19, 1975, Gandhi became the first Indian PM to testify in court. She spent five hours in the witness box, answering questions about her election campaign.

CONDITIONAL STAY

The SC's conditional stay said the PM could attend Parliament, but neither vote nor draw a salary until her appeal was decided. Justice Sinha had noted that his ruling might ultimately prove weak, since the violations were not 'grave electoral vices'.

Justice Jagmohan Lal Sinha dismissed 12 of the 14 charges against Gandhi. In his 238-page ruling, he upheld two findings: first, that Yashpal Kapoor, Gandhi's former private secretary, had begun functioning as her election agent before formally resigning from government. Second, officials of the Uttar Pradesh government had assisted her campaign. Justice Sinha declared Gandhi's 1971 election void and barred her from contesting elections for six years. But he also granted her 20 days to appeal before the Supreme Court.

Reactions to the judgment

The day after the Allahabad HC verdict, Opposition leaders protested outside Rashtrapati Bhavan, demanding that the President dismiss the "corrupt" PM. Gandhi's supporters, however, moved swiftly to counter this campaign. Every day, more supporters gathered outside her house, and she came out to speak to them. She also addressed a massive rally at Delhi's Boat Club lawns. On June 23, the SC began hearing Gandhi's appeal. The next day, Justice VR Krishna Rao issued a conditional stay: the PM could continue to attend Parliament, but she could neither vote nor draw a salary until her appeal was decided by the full SC bench.

Some advised Gandhi to resign temporarily and allow a senior colleague, such as Jagjivan Ram, to serve as interim PM until the case was resolved. Those urging her to remain in office included her son Sanjay Gandhi and several Congress leaders.

Proclamation of Emergency

The same day, Ray helped draft an ordinance declaring a state of internal Emergency, which was promptly signed by the President. That night, the electricity supply to newspaper offices across Delhi was cut, preventing morning editions from appearing on June 26. By the next day, state-controlled radio informed the country that an Emergency had been declared and that civil liberties had been suspended.

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Centre	English Medium	English Medium
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● Netaji	29 June 11:30 AM	29 June 8:30 AM
● Indore	22 June 11:30 AM	24 June 5:30 PM
● Lucknow	17 June 11:30 AM	24 June 11:30 AM
● Prayagraj	29 June 11:30 AM	23 June 8:00 AM
● Ranchi	29 June 11:30 AM	Admissions Open
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• ECONOMY

Amid youth protests, a snapshot of India's employment rate over this decade

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IN RECENT times, stories pointing to growing youth unrest have made headlines — be it the launch of an online youth-led pressure group or 18-year-olds propping over tenders to investigate the school examination set-up. These developments shift the focus from mere economic growth to job creation. These lines by writer Mokomoka Mokhonaona could well describe a prevalent sentiment: "If heaven really exists; then heaven is the job, hell is unemployment, while life is merely an interview."

Employment data
Before getting into the subject of employment, a note on data. This explainer will use employment data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), a leading private company.

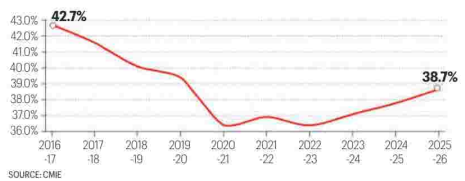
The reason is that CMIE provides a continuous data series since 2016. The official data, released by surveys from India's Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), have undergone many changes during this period. Until 2011-12, MoSPI released Employment-Unemployment Surveys (EUS) once every five years. In 2017-18, MoSPI replaced it with the annual Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS). The very first PLFS in 2017-18 found that unemployment was at a 45-year high, but the government ran it down for flawed methodology. The employment rate is arguably the more important metric than the unemployment rate for India. Here is why. Imagine the total population of a country to be 100. Suppose that only 60 are above the age of 15. They constitute the workforce. Say only 50 of these 60 are looking for a job; the other 10 could include people like a 22-year-old student, or a 30-year-old who is disillusioned and has stopped looking for a job. These 50 constitute the labour force. Now, when the data shows that the unemployment rate (UER) is, say, 10%, that does not mean that only 10 people are unem-

ployed. That's because the UER is calculated as a share of the total labour force. A 10% UER means 10% of 50, or five people who are looking for jobs but are unable to get them. If these five people also opt out of the job market, the workforce will remain 60, but the labour force will shrink from 50 to 45. The UER rate will fall to 0%, without accurately capturing the distress in the job market.

One way out is to look at the Employment Rate (ER). This is the number of people with a job as a percentage of the total working-age population. A rising ER shows that a higher percentage of people in a particular cohort have a job, bypassing labour force size fluctuations.

India's employment curve

The share of working-age people (15 years and above) with a job was 42.7% in 2016-17 and it is 38.7% at the end of March 2026.



planned. The ER data shows that while things may be improving from the lows of 2020 and 2021, broadly, a lower percentage of people hold a job now than a decade ago. Often, governments focus on growth rates as the metric for success. To some extent, this is justified because GDP increase

• DIPLOMACY

How trust underpins India's ties with France



SHUBHAJIT ROY

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi is headed to France over the weekend for a bilateral visit as well as the G7 leaders' summit. He will be in Nice on June 13 and 14, in Evian on June 16 and 17 for the summit, and in Paris on June 17 and 18.

This is the Prime Minister's seventh official visit to France since 2014 and follows French President Emmanuel Macron's visit to India on February 17-19, when bilateral relations were elevated to a "Special Global Strategic Partnership". France is one of India's most preferred partners in Europe, and the relationship, built on strategic autonomy and respect, has been a success story over the last several decades. The forthcoming visit is a testament to New Delhi's durable ties with Paris.

What to expect from the bilateral visit...

The key thrust of the bilateral visit will be tech and innovation. In Nice, Modi, alongside Macron, will inaugurate the Bharat Innovates event that brings together top innovation startups from India, France and the world. More than 120 Indian companies and startups, and prominent business leaders from France and other countries, are expected to participate in the event, being held during India-France Year of Innovation.

The Prime Minister will hold a bilateral summit with President Macron in Nice, the first since the elevation of ties to a "Special Global Strategic Partnership". On June 18 in Paris, alongside Macron, Modi will attend the VivaTech Summit, Europe's largest technology and startup event. The VivaTech Summit will host an Indian pavilion, the largest one at the summit this year.

...and the G7 summit

The West Asia conflict has set off an energy crisis shock for India and the world and put the lives of Indians living in the region at risk. The recent US attacks on ships sailing through the Strait of Hormuz have killed Indian sailors.

With US President Donald Trump at-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with French President Emmanuel Macron in Mumbai in February. X/@NARENDRAMODI

tending the G7 Summit, India has an opportunity to convey its concerns on a matter that has hit its security and economic interests.

In that context, France and Europe will be an important partner, as it is a common understanding that the continuation of the war is not in anyone's interest.

Ties defined by history...

To understand the durability of India-French ties, let's take the example of the famous French politician Jacques Chirac. In 1976, as India faced global criticism over Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's Emergency, the French Prime Minister agreed to be the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations.

He returned as the Republic Day chief guest 22 years later, this time as President, and launched the Strategic Partnership with India. The Strategic Partnership was India's first with any Western nation, and France's first with a non-Western nation.

Just months later, in May, India conducted the Pokhran-II nuclear tests. Western powers criticised India and imposed sanctions — but France did not.

The visits are testament to French pragmatism and foresight in how it diplomati-

PM's itinerary

In Nice, Modi and Macron will inaugurate a startup event and hold a bilateral meet.

The PM will then head to Evian for the G7 Summit.

The next stop is Paris, where Modi and Macron will attend another startup and tech event.

cally managed the sensitive nature of the ties. The strongest link between the two countries, which has led to the innovation and tech partnership, is "strategic trust".

...and based on trust

Political understanding is extremely important, and that is visible at the highest levels. One of the prime examples of the leadership-level trust was displayed when India reached out to Macron at the last minute in December 2023 — after US President Joe Biden had declined the invitation for the Republic Day celebrations in January 2024. Then the Indian envoy to France reached out to Elysee Palace directly, and the French President didn't hesitate to ball out India, despite knowing fully well that he was Delhi's second choice.

The Indian Prime Minister returned the favour in 2025, when he headlined the AI summit in France.

The larger trust is on display again as India has again been invited for the G7 Summit in Evian on June 16-17. France believes that India's presence at the G7 reflects its standing as a leading voice of the Global South and a key partner in addressing shared global challenges.

• DEFENCE

Why Zojila tunnel breakthrough is a boost for military mobility

Bashaar Masood
Srinagar, June 12

THE ZOJILA tunnel, the world's longest high-altitude bi-directional road tunnel, is a step closer to completion after a "breakthrough" was achieved in its construction on Tuesday — marking the end of the excavation phase. The tunnel, which will connect Kashmir Valley and Ladakh through-out the year, is one of India's most important strategic infrastructure projects. The project is significant for residents, who can soon expect all-weather connectivity, and for the armed forces, who can now reduce their dependence on air transport in the strategic Himalayan region.

The tunnel

The Zojila tunnel, situated at an altitude of 11,758 feet, is a 13-km road tunnel connecting Baltal (near Sonamarg) in Kashmir valley and Minimarg (near Drass) in Ladakh's Kargil district.

The tunnel bypasses the treacherous Zojila pass — a narrow, winding road at an

elevation of 16,430 feet — that remains closed in the winters and is prone to landslides throughout the year. This will reduce the distance from Sonamarg to Drass by 27 km and cut travel time by more than two hours. The tunnel, which is now targeted to be completed in February 2028, forms the centrepiece of the 30,894-km Zojila project. It includes roads, bridges and tunnels aimed at ensuring year-round access to Ladakh.

All-weather connectivity

The Union Territory (UT) of Ladakh is connected to the rest of the country by two main highways: the Srinagar-Sonamarg-Leh highway and the Leh-Manali highway. Both roads, however, remain closed for almost six months every year owing to snow, avalanches and extreme weather.

People in Ladakh have long been demanding a road tunnel that connects the UT to Kashmir Valley. Besides fulfilling that demand, the tunnel will also provide swift round-the-year mobility to defence forces in one of India's most sensitive border regions. An all-weather link is especially impor-

Project delays

● The Rs 6,800 crore project, whose foundation stone was laid in May 2018, was expected to be completed by September 2026.

● But the Covid-19 pandemic, the 2024 terror attack on the workers at the Sonamarg tunnel, and extreme weather conditions delayed it.

tant for the forces, as it will boost manoeuvrability in case of hostilities with China on the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh or with Pakistan in the Line of Control in Kargil.

The all-weather road is a strategic lifeline that will facilitate the seamless movement of personnel, military hardware, fuel and daily supplies — ending the long-standing reliance on expensive and vulnerable airlifts. It is expected to significantly enhance military mobility by enabling quicker deployment of troops and equipment and reducing response times in the event of hostilities. It will also offer greater protection from enemy surveillance and artillery fire, vulnerabilities that were evident during the 1999 Kargil War when the key road link came under artillery fire.

The other key tunnel that keeps the Srinagar-Leh highway operational throughout the year — the Z-Morh tunnel or Sonamarg tunnel — was completed and thrown open for traffic in January last year.

What next

The Zojila tunnel project has several key

components. Besides the main Zojila tunnel are two smaller ones — one 457 metres long and the other 1,953 metres long — at Nilgaur.

The larger Zojila project also includes four bridges, an approach road from Sonamarg tunnel to Zojila tunnel, three vertical shafts — structures that provide ventilation and emergency access to the tunnel as it has no separate escape tunnel — and seven "cut-and-cover" (tunnel-like) structures. Most of these projects have already been completed. "What remains is the balance works in the vertical shafts, we have already made the hole and have to widen 6.6 metres. It is the most challenging job we are up to and we expect it to complete in one-and-a-half years," said Colonel A K Shivkumar, Zojila tunnel's Project Manager.

"We also have to do the balance work for the main tunnel. We have completed the inner concrete lining for 3 km and the rest of the stretch is expected to be completed in a year. In addition to this, we have to build a drainage system and set up a ventilation system, electrical system and a fire-fighting system," he added.

Decrease over decade

As the chart shows, the percentage of working-age people with a job fell within the last decade. According to CMIE, around 406 million Indians had a job in 2016-17, and in 2025-26, this number rose to 438 million. But this was not enough because the underlying working-age population grew faster.

For men, the ER has fallen from 70.5% to 64.8%, and for women, from 11.8% to 9.4% over the same period. This fall has occurred in all except two major age groups — 25 to 29 years and 55 to 59 years. CMIE data also shows that in terms of educational attainments, all groups show a lower ER now than a decade ago. The cohort with only primary education has seen the sharpest decline in ER. In terms of religion and caste, too, most groups are worse-off.

Conclusion

The ER data shows that while things may be improving from the lows of 2020 and 2021, broadly, a lower percentage of people hold a job now than a decade ago. Often, governments focus on growth rates as the metric for success. To some extent, this is justified because GDP increase

shows that the total market price of all the goods and services produced in a country is growing. But it may not be a sufficient condition for all-round improvement.

Academics such as Ashoka Mody (who wrote the book *India Is Broken*) have argued that India should be paying greater attention to job creation. India's growth model seems to be failing Indians where it matters most: Creating jobs and boosting incomes commensurate with overall GDP growth. This poses the current government, although the situation has worsened over the decade in many ways.

During this period, many countries have also turned more insular on trade and immigration — think US President Donald Trump's ill-advised tariff mania. A world less open to trade hurts countries such as India, which have an ambitious goal ahead of them.

When the famous science fiction writer Arthur C Clarke wrote that "the goal of the future is full employment", his hope was "so we can play". In India, "unemployment" evokes a far more distressing future.

FULL REPORT ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM/EXPLAINED

FOOD INFLATION ROSE TO 4.78% IN MAY, FROM 4.2% IN APRIL

Food prices rise in May, propel household inflation to 3.93%

Inflation for the 'restaurant and accommodation services' category increased further to 5.75% in May

Siddharth Upasani
New Delhi, June 12

CONSUMER PRICES IN India rose 3.93% in May compared to a year ago as producers continued to pass on more of their input cost increases to households, according to data released on Friday by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI).

Higher food prices also drove up the overall inflation rate, with the Consumer Food Price Index rising 0.92% month-on-month in May as against a 0.75% increase in the overall CPI.

At 3.93%, the May headline inflation rate, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), is higher than the 3.48% recorded in April.

Inflation, which is the year-on-year change in prices, has now risen every month in 2026.

And economists expect it to rise again in June to around 4.5%. "Geopolitical tensions and El Niño conditions continue to remain upside risks to inflation," said Megha Aroa, Director at India Ratings & Research. While crude oil prices have declined on reports of the US and Iran reaching an agree-

ment over the opening of the Strait of Hormuz, "it will take time for crude prices to move towards \$70/bbl", a level seen before the West Asia war.

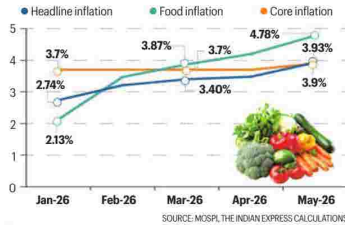
After having risen to 4.2% in April from 2.9% in March, inflation for the 'restaurant and accommodation services' category increased further to 5.75% in May, reflecting the impact of eateries raising menu prices due to hikes in commercial LPG prices amid West Asia war.

The increase in prices of 'restaurant and accommodation services' in May compared to April was 1.8%.

Meanwhile, overall food inflation rose to 4.78% from 4.2% in April, with Radhika Rao, Senior Economist at DBS Bank, noting that "heatwave conditions in some parts of the country" pushed up food prices. According to Rajeev Sharan, Head of Research at Brickwork Ratings, while the May inflation print is broadly in line with expectations, the rise in food inflation "underscores persistent price pressures in perishables, particularly tomatoes, ginger and other vegetables."

Tomato prices were 48% higher year-on-year in May,

Food price pressures firm up for households



while ginger was up 52%. The corresponding figures for April were 35% and 14%, respectively. The rise in food prices in May will be of concern to policymakers, with the monsoon this year forecast to be 10% weaker than the Long Period Average.

"Rising input costs for producers — reflected in the Wholesale Price Index inflation of 8.3% in April — are now increasingly feeding into consumer prices. The impact of the West Asia conflict, which has now entered its fourth month in June, is therefore starting to percolate household budgets," said Dipti Deshpande, Principal Economist at Crisil.

The increase in CPI inflation comes a week after the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) rate

setting panel, Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), left the policy repo rate unchanged at 5.25%, with the central bank lowering its growth forecast and raising its inflation view for 2026-27.

On June 5, the RBI cut its GDP growth forecast for 2026-27 to 6.6% from 6.9% and raised the inflation projection to 5.5% from 4.6%, with Governor Sanjay Malhotra warning there are indications that average crude oil prices this financial year would be "substantially higher" than \$85 per barrel.

As per the RBI's latest forecasts, inflation is seen averaging 4.2% in April-June, 5.1% in July-September, 5.9% in October-December, and 5.4% in January-March 2027.

Over April-May, CPI inflation has averaged 3.7%. The

RBI is mandated to target a CPI inflation of 4% in the medium-term in a range of 2-6%. As such, the forecasts show inflation reaching the upper bound of the RBI's target range in the last three months of 2026.

"Our assessment is that headline retail inflation could breach 6% at some point over the next six months," said Sujain Hajra, Chief Economist at Anand Rathi Group. "Even so, the RBI may refrain from adopting a decisively hawkish stance, provided core inflation remains anchored around 4% and inflationary pressures do not become broad-based."

The RBI expects core inflation to average 4.7% in 2026-27. In May, core inflation rose to 3.9% after having stayed steady at 3.7% in the first four months of 2026. Core inflation measures the change in prices of non-food, non-fuel items, whose prices can be volatile. The movement in prices of non-food, non-fuel items, therefore, are seen as an indicator of underlying price pressures in the economy.

Economists warn that the second-round effects of fuel price hikes are expected to intensify across non-food items.

"Moreover, domestic LPG cylinder prices were raised by Rs 20/cylinder in early June, which is also likely to exert some pressure on the headline CPI print in the month," said Rahul Agrawal, Principal Economist at ICRA.

Case for capital gains tax changes in equities weaker than bonds: CEA



Government exempted foreign institutional investors from capital gains tax on government securities last week. REUTERS

Reuters
Bangalore, June 12

THE CASE for changes to capital gains taxes on equities is weaker than for bonds, Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran said on Friday, suggesting the government sees less urgency for further tweaks to the tax regime for stocks.

India exempted foreign institutional investors from capital gains tax on government securities last week, part of moves designed to attract more capital at a time when surging foreign equity outflows, elevated oil prices, and an embattled currency weigh.

The South Asian nation, the world's third-largest oil importer and consumer, ships in about 90% of its oil and is one of the countries most exposed to prolonged war-related dis-

ruptions to global energy supplies. Economists say sustained higher oil prices may hinder economic growth, inflation and government finances when the country is already bracing for an El Niño weather phenomenon that often portends drought.

The Reserve Bank of India's economic growth projection of 6.6% for the ongoing financial year 2027 (FY27) with a downside risk of 20-30 basis points is realistic, Nageswaran told broadcaster NDTV.

In February, CEA projected economic growth of 7.0%-7.4% for FY27, estimates issued before the West Asia conflict. The nation's fuel retailers may not have to pass on a lot more of higher oil prices to consumers, provided global prices conform with how financial markets expect them to be lower for the full year, Nageswaran said.

US-Iran peace hopes spark market rally, indices surge 2%

ENS Economic Bureau
Mumbai, June 12

INDIAN STOCK markets staged a strong rally on Friday, with benchmark indices surging more than 2% amid expectations of a possible diplomatic breakthrough between the US and Iran that could lead to the end of West Asia conflict.

Indices jumped as aggressive short covering, easing geopolitical concerns in the West Asia, a sharp decline in global crude oil prices and a strong recovery in the Indian rupee boosted the sentiment.

The benchmark BSE Sensex jumped by 1,695.40 points, or 2.30%, to close at 75,527.95, while the NSE Nifty50 advanced 461.30 points, or 1.99%, to settle at 23,622.90.

The Nifty reclaimed the crucial 23,600 level and ended comfortably above it, reflecting renewed confidence among investors after recent bouts of volatility. Positive global market cues and sustained domestic institutional buying further strengthened investor sentiment throughout the trading session.

While domestic institutions led by insurance companies and mutual funds pumped Rs 5,341 crore into the market, foreign investors pulled out Rs 1,082 crore on Friday.

Market participants attributed the sharp rise largely to



Domestic institutions, led by insurance companies and mutual funds, pumped Rs 5,341 crore into the market on Friday. REUTERS

expectations of a possible diplomatic breakthrough between the US and Iran. Hopes of de-escalation in the conflict-ridden region triggered a decline in crude oil prices, a development that is particularly beneficial for India, one of the world's largest oil-importing nations. Lower oil prices are expected to reduce inflationary pressures and improve the country's fiscal outlook, prompting fresh buying across sectors. Supporting the bullish sentiment, the Indian rupee recorded a significant recovery, appreciating by 64 paise to close at 95.11 against the US dollar. The rupee benefited from the sharp fall in global crude prices and weakness in the American currency.

The strengthening rupee

also boosted investor confidence by easing concerns over imported inflation and foreign capital outflows, traders said.

Brent crude, which had traded near \$93 per barrel on overnight dealings, fell sharply after Trump reportedly cancelled plans for additional military strikes against Iran.

The rally on Dalal Street was broad-based, with all major sectoral indices ending in positive territory. Realty, financial services, PSU banks, private banks and consumer durable stocks led the gains, rising between 2 and 4%. Information technology stocks, while ending higher, underperformed the broader market and remained the session's relative laggards.

FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

MARKET REFORM PUSH BY REGULATOR

Corporate governance, delisting & KYC norms under review: SEBI chief

George Mathew
Mumbai, June 12

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is undertaking a comprehensive review of several key market regulations, including the Listing Obligations and Disclosures Requirements (LODR) framework, delisting norms, derivatives markets, framework for independent directors (IDs), short selling and KYC norms for foreign investors and NRIs, as part of a broader effort to strengthen corporate governance, deepen capital markets and enhance investor confidence, Chairman Tuhin Kanta Pandey said.

The LODR framework is currently under review to make it more responsive to emerging governance and disclosure requirements, Pandey said.

"We will also review the delisting framework further. A well-developed capital market must provide fair entry and fair exit," he said.

"Independent Directors play a crucial role in corporate governance. Their role is not limited to asking difficult questions on governance. They must contribute in board discussions on how best to address emerging challenges, such as, AI, cybersecurity, ESG, R&D, and rapid technological change," Pandey said at the ET Now market summit.

At the same time, they must protect minority shareholder interests and support long-term value creation between the cash and derivatives markets and enhance liquidity, he said. In commodity derivatives, SEBI's proposals on extending early pay-in benefits to options contracts, phased shift from cash settlement to physical settlement in select agricultural commodity contracts, and review of

SEBI's proposals

- Reviewing the delisting framework
- Mulling scalable network for capacity building of Independent Directors
- Reviewing the Innovators Growth Platform so that strategic sectors like AI, semiconductors, clean energy, bio-tech, advanced materials, defence-tech can access markets better for long-term capital
- Guidelines on the responsible use of AI in capital markets
- Municipal debt and portfolio management services are also being reviewed
- Derivatives on bond indices in consultation with RBI
- Securities Lending and Borrowing and short selling frameworks to be reviewed
- Simplifying KYC and a risk-based review of disclosure norms for foreign investors
- Phased shift from cash settlement to physical settlement in select agri-commodity contracts



"We will work with other regulators to ease the KYC process for NRIs. Our efforts will be to provide clarity that global capital seeks, especially in uncertain times," he said.

Pandey said deepening the cash market is a priority. The Securities Lending and Borrowing and short selling frameworks are being comprehensively reviewed, to facilitate inter-linkage between the cash and derivatives markets and enhance liquidity, he said.

In commodity derivatives, SEBI's proposals on extending early pay-in benefits to options contracts, phased shift from cash settlement to physical settlement in select agricultural commodity contracts, and review of

position limits are aimed at deepening participation and strengthening risk management, he said.

Electricity derivative contracts are being traded on our exchanges now. Longer-term and newer forms of contracts in this space will be required going forward.

"We will also be looking to bring in, along with RBI, derivatives on bond indices," Pandey said. "We are reviewing the Innovators Growth Platform so that strategic sectors like AI, semiconductors, clean energy, bio-tech, advanced materials, defence-tech can access our markets better for long-term capital," he said. FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Govt limits diesel sales to 200 litres per vehicle a day

New Delhi: The government has capped diesel sales to a vehicle in a day at 200 litres and restricted industrial, commercial, and institutional users from buying petrol and diesel from petrol pumps in a bid to prevent local shortages amid global supply disruption, according to an official order.

Retail outlets can sell diesel only into a vehicle tank or PESO-approved container, and not more than 200 litres per customer or vehicle per day.

Also, industrial, commercial and institutional consumers will no longer be allowed to buy petrol or diesel from retail outlets. They must source their fuel from their own consumer pumps.

The restrictions, which will be in place for up to 90 days, follows abnormal demand growth, particularly that of diesel, in some pockets after bulk supplies started buying fuel from petrol pumps due to the pricing difference. PTI

BRIEFLY

India's forex reserves drop \$711 mn: RBI

Mumbai: India's forex reserves dropped \$711 million to \$681.610 billion during the week ended June 5 due to a sharp decline in foreign currency reserves, the RBI said on Friday. In the previous reporting week, the overall reserves had jumped \$938 million to \$682.321 billion. For the week ended June 5, foreign currency assets — a major component of the reserves — was down \$2.704 billion to \$543.444 billion. PTI

'India willing to let fiscal deficit widen to 4.8% of GDP for FY27'

New Delhi: India is preparing for a wider-than-expected budget deficit this year, Bloomberg News reported on Friday, citing an official familiar with the matter, as the war in Iran raises fuel subsidy costs and pressures government finances. Reuters could not immediately verify the report and has sought comment from India's finance ministry. REUTERS

Nestle India rejects charges of infestation in its noodles

New Delhi: Nestle India on Friday rejected allegations that insects were found in its MAGGI noodles product, after news agency ANI reported India's food regulator had taken cognizance of social media complaints and issued notice to the company. Nestle India said that the concern was raised from an unverified social media account. Testing of a reference sample from the same batch at an independent laboratory notified by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) found no infestation, the firm said. PTI

India clears way for self-driving, safety car tech to reduce mishaps

Bangalore: India has scrapped licensing requirements for radio spectrum used by crash-avoidance and self-driving systems in cars, removing a commercial barrier for automakers as it seeks to make some of the world's deadliest roads safer. India reported more than 177,000 deaths in 2024, latest government data show. In notices on Thursday, the government waived licence requirements for radar sensors in the 77GHz to 81 GHz frequency band, allowing companies to use the spectrum without separate allocation by authorities. REUTERS

● INSTITUTIONAL & RETAIL INVESTORS BOUGHT 555.6 MILLION SHARES OF SPACEX AT THE OFFERING PRICE OF \$135 APIECE

SpaceX soars 23% in Wall Street debut, makes Musk 1st trillionaire

AP
New York, June 12

Shares of SpaceX soared 23% in their Wall Street debut on Friday, making the rocket maker's CEO Elon Musk the first-ever trillionaire.

The shares opened at \$150 and kept rising, reaching \$166.90 around 12:20 pm ET. That price gave the company a market value of \$2.18 trillion. Forbes is now estimating Musk's net worth at USD 1.1 trillion. Institutional and retail investors jumped at the opportunity to buy 555.6 million shares of SpaceX at the offering price of \$135 apiece.

The \$75 billion in proceeds easily topped the previous record IPO from oil giant Saudi Aramco in 2019. Musk says SpaceX is going public now be-

cause it needs money to fund its ambitions of putting satellites and data centres in space and eventually establishing a colony of people on Mars.

Musk earlier marked the opening of trading on Nasdaq, where the company's are trading under the symbol "SPCX," by joining a ceremonial bell ringing from Starbase, the South Texas home of SpaceX.

He reiterated his lofty goals "to make life multi-planetary." "Not just a few astronauts, I mean literally you," Musk said.

"Whoever you are watching loses as big as its ambitions. In addition to establishing a one-million person Martian colony, the company has promised to save humanity



Shares open at \$150 a piece, up from \$135 IPO price. REUTERS

by establishing other outposts in space, launch data centers the size of football fields into orbit and outdoor rivals Anthrop and OpenAI in the race to make money from artificial

intelligence. To reach its goals, SpaceX needs billions more than it currently takes in from rocket and satellite business. Between the start of 2025 and March 31, 2026, the company lost \$5.1 billion. Wall Street bankers that helped take SpaceX public are enthusiastic about the company — and the big fees they will earn — but not everyone thinks the stock price is justified. Analysts at research firm Morningstar, which doesn't earn any investment banking fees, wrote that the IPO is "significantly overvalued" because of SpaceX's unproven technology and massive capital needs. They estimate the company is only worth \$780 billion — less than half its IPO value. Still, Musk has pulled off the

seemingly impossible before. The trillionaire — on paper at least — made his fortune by creating two companies, Zip2 and PayPal, that netted him about \$200 million at sale.

He used that money to start SpaceX and invest in Tesla, and defied the odds by creating a space company that figured out how to reuse rockets and a car company that made electric vehicles cool.

Musk has realised vast sums of wealth for himself, much of it in stock he has yet to cash in or grants for shares he'll only receive if Tesla or SpaceX hit ambitious performance targets.

At Tesla, he's worried shareholders by fighting with regulators or dividing his attention between multiple companies and last year by taking a role in the Trump administration.

MARKETS

Sensex	NIFTY	Gold	US Dollar
75,527.95	23,622.90	₹1,47,800	₹95.11
1,695.40	461.30	Silver	Oil
2.30%	1.99%	₹2,42,582	₹93.19

NOTE: GOLD, SILVER RATES AS PER INDIAN BULLION AND JEWELLERS ASSOCIATION GOLD PER 10G; SILVER PER 1KG; CRUDE OIL (INDIAN BASKET) AS OF JUNE 11, 2026

When art serves purposes of propaganda



PAST PARTICIPLE
MANU S PILLAI

Sometime in the 1840s, an artist in Rajasthan portrayed a woman and her child. It was a motif popular across India—of a woman breastfeeding her infant, as in bronzes and pictures of Yashoda and Krishna. Yet something about this specific painting was unusual. The subjects were rather pale in complexion, with light brown hair. The baby was female, wearing drop earrings and sporting curls. And the costume of the mother definitely didn't resemble any local attire. As such, the image was unquestionably odd: a traditional miniature-style work, but with an unconventional, experimental quality. Luckily for us, the artist left an inscription as to the identity of the dignitaries depicted. And so, we discover, that the lady in the image—with breasts on full display—was actually one of the dearest, most prized figures of the 19th century: "Victoria Maharani", queen of Great Britain.

Art has always been one of the more fascinating sources of history. The image described above is a case in point. Had the real Victoria—who presided over a court in which, the joke goes, even displaying one's ankles was scandalous—viewed this "portrait", she'd probably have suffered a concussion. And yet, in colonial India, increasingly under British control, a local artist was attempting to "Indianise" her as a relatable, maternal figure. He'd probably never seen a picture of the lady. This explains why, while the actual Victoria had a full, round face, his "maharani" is positively geometrical. Of course, he got the complexion and such details correct, but even so had to depend on a great deal on imagination. Yet in the end, what is interesting is not whether the

image offers a convincing likeness. Instead, the very fact that a faraway monarch had entered local artists' world view suggests a growing awareness in India of colonialism and of the white man's rule.

In fact, it is entirely possible that this work was commissioned by an Englishman, precisely to cast the queen in a positive light among "natives". After all, art has always served propagandistic purposes. In 1818, for instance, Benjamin West produced a grand canvas, marking a key moment in Indian history. In it we see an enthroned Mughal emperor, Shah Alam II, handing over revenue rights over Bengal to Robert Clive. It is a durbar scene, with gravitas and drama. Yet the actual event in 1765 was less prepossessing. As William Dalrymple writes, the transfer took place inside a tent. There was no throne. Shah Alam was parked on "Clive's armchair, which for the occasion had been hoisted on to his dining room table" and covered with a bedsheet. But if that was the messy truth, imperial narratives in Britain needed a grander, more "inspiring"—indeed legitimising—picture. And so, the artist manufactured one.

Of course, the Mughals themselves were no allens to self-serving depictions. Some 200 years before West's painting of Shah Alam, the latter's ancestor Jahangir appeared in a work. In it he is shown handing over a book to a Sufi—whose company he loyally preferred—while the Ottoman sultan and King James of Britain queue up, in almost supplicant positions. Instantly the picture flatters Jahangir as politically, intellectually and spiritually superior to other leading political figures of his age. Another painting shows the same emperor shooting an arrow at the impaled head of his foe in the Deccan. The African general Malik Ambar. It is a triumphal portrayal. Except that for over two decades the Mughals had tried—and failed—to vanquish Ambar. And far from having his head severed for target practice, the Deccani hero lived comfortably to old age, secure in



A Benjamin West painting showing Robert Clive receiving the land revenues of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in 1765. GETTY IMAGES

his own territories.

Art also allowed Indian grandees to present themselves to different audiences, in special, strategically tailored ways. A single Travancore rajah in the mid-19th century thus assumed three avatars, living as he did at the intersection of several political cultures.

In one miniature, Uthram Tirunal appears in Persianate attire, with flowing robes, seated on his throne—here the Malayali appeal appears to an older, but dying court tradition inspired by the Mughals. In another, the same man presents himself in an English suit—this one advertised his position as a constituent of the emergent colonial power structure. As if to leave no doubt in our minds, several appurtenances of mod-

ernity are on display: a clock, a book, and so on. And in the third Uthram Tirunal is bare-chested, flaunting a sacred thread across the torso. For in this image, he caters to a very local, Brahminical idea of kingship, as a Hindu monarch serving his deity—a more stable, longstanding aspect of his royal identity.

Think of a little bit like politicians today. In the North-East a national leader might sport a tribal headdress before addressing a rally; in Tamil Nadu, he might parade about in a *veshti*; and in Maharashtra he could just as easily pose in a Peshwa-style turban. It isn't gimmickry as much as political signaling—precisely what historical figures did through art. Indeed, art could even

help paper over weaknesses in times of crisis. In Mysore, for instance, when the state was under British rule through much of the 19th century, its king counted on precisely this.

Krishnaraja Wodeyar III installed sculptures of himself in major temples, thus preserving his social and religious status. He commissioned portraits depicting him in pious poses with emblems and marks that appealed to different sections of his people. And in general, denied power, he emphasised what Caleb Simmons calls a "devotional sovereignty"—much of it through art.

Yet, the story can never be complete without a few naughty elements. One of the most striking 18th century propaganda posters was produced by the

French after Hyder Ali of Mysore boosted the British out of the battle field once. In it we find an English soldier bent over by the sultan, who spans his exposed (and violently red) bottom. A wily Frenchman, meanwhile, supplies Hyder with his chosen instrument of punishment, the sticks. But if this depiction was produced by Britain's rivals, another artwork emerged from an English caricaturist himself—James Gillray. Titled *The Coming-on of the Monsoons*, it shows the British general and his troops fleeing Tipu Sultan's capital in 1791. The English leader rides a mule—a far from valiant creature—while a gleeful Tipu stands on his fort walls, showering piss over the retreating enemy army. Unsurprisingly, the image won few admirers in Gillray's home country.

But above all, art tells a broader story about changing social mores and attitudes. That 1840s artist who sought to Indianise Victoria was channelling centuries of sculptural and visual tradition in which a breastfeeding mother was an idealised figure. Ironically, however, as Victorian prudishness trickled into India, Indians themselves grew less comfortable with such imagery. So, some 40 years later, when Ravi Varma was commissioned to depict Indian goddesses, he was in a quandary. Across the land, images often showed them bare-breasted. But in his 1880s and 1890s audiences this was now taboo. And so, when he painted Lakshmi and Saraswati, Ravi Varma conveniently had them appear in high-necked, long-sleeved blouses. In a generation or two, that is, we went from a bare-breasted Indianised English queen to a modestly dressed, western-inspired local deity.

The result? Today when most visualise our goddesses in "traditional" attire, it is often in those colonial-era blouses. Victoria Maharani would have approved.

Manu S. Pillai is a historian and author, most recently, of Gods, Guns and Missionaries.

Decoding the mystery of Mount Kailash

Shail Desai

The change in environment was stark. From the lonely offshore oil rigs of the freezing North Sea, Alex McKay, who was then in his 20s, landed in the oppressive heat of the subcontinent, rubbing shoulders with the multitude in unreserved train compartments and surviving on modest budgets. Overland travel on the Hippo Trail of the 1970s was as fascinating as it was frugal, the promise of an adventure enough reason to bring him back to explore a new region in spite of the hardships.

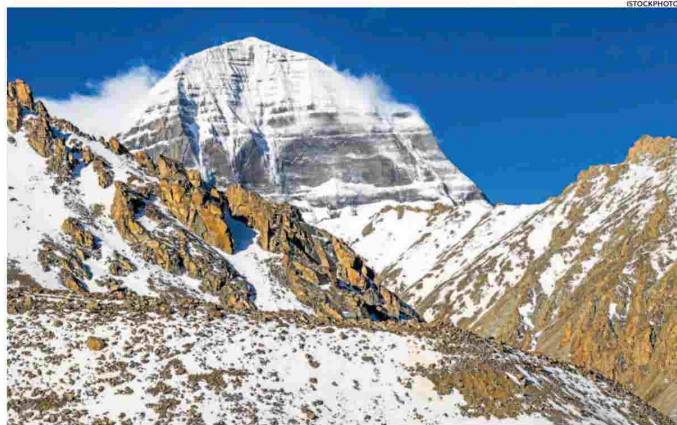
Somewhere during these journeys through India, McKay got an idea of what Tibet was like—until then he had only known it through books. He met Tibetan pilgrims in McLeod Ganj, Himachal Pradesh, who had covered long distances to seek the Dalai Lama's blessings. And Hindu ascetics who sought divinity while wandering the majestic high mountains and worshipped deities that lived on holy Himalayan peaks such as Mount Kailash (in Tibet), the abode of Lord Shiva.

The land and its stories fascinated McKay. But Tibet was still off limits for foreigners since the Chinese invasion of 1959. It remained forbidden fruit, tucked away at the back of his mind for years. He finally sneaked across the border in 1984. Though he had a permit to fly into Lhasa, he instead chose to take the land route, getting past multiple checkpoints to get there and also make a pilgrimage to Kailash. He realised he wanted to learn more.

The oil rig worker, who had settled into the life of a private detective based in Australia by then, decided to don the hat of an academician, teaching South Asian history in London, and Leiden in the Netherlands before retiring in 2006. The initial fascination of Tibet led to a deep study in order to grasp the significance and sacredness of Kailash in different cultures.

It helped him arrive at his own understanding of Kailash—both the physical behemoth as well as the spiritual idea of this mountain. A modern narrative based on the data that continues to lure thousands of pilgrims each year, besides travellers like him. McKay, 70, relives those eventful years in the book, *In Search of Mount Kailash: Travels in the Sacred Himalayas*, which won the Betsko Naoriji Book Award at The Himalayan Club's annual festival earlier this year.

McKay spoke to *Lounge* about his incredible exploration and discoveries.



Edited excerpts from the interview.

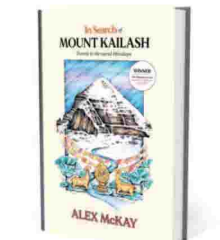
When was the first time you heard of Mount Kailash?
Around 1980. I picked up Charles Allen's book, *A Mountain in Tibet*, which told of the different ideas of the mountain held by westerners and Indians, though not so much the Tibetans. The traditional Indian ideas sounded fascinating and when it became possible for westerners to travel there, I wanted to see it for myself.

Tell us about your first journey to Tibet in 1984.
It was hard travelling through wild country by truck and local bus, and staying in rough hotels en route. Eastern Tibet was rugged, mountain country and much of it was covered in forest. It was very different from the landscape described by most travellers who went through the dry, flat and dusty landscape of central Tibet. Until we were nearly in Lhasa, my travelling companion and I were constantly concerned that the Chinese would stop us and send us back. In fact, the Chinese presence there was not as overwhelming as it has become since. We did find the Tibetans much less accessible than the locals in India—largely a language issue, but also because they were simply not used to westerners since the 1940s.

What convinced you to become a student in your 30s and pursue a degree in religious studies and history at the School of Oriental and African Studies University of London?
I felt that I know more about Tibet and I wanted to my reading wasn't enough. I needed to go deeper and I had no particular goal in life before that, so I could sense academically to be my path. I was influenced by the difference between direct experience and institutional learning. And at 30, it seemed like a logical progression to change from one path to the next. Sleeping under a bridge in the middle of nowhere is a learning experience when you are a teenager, but at a later age, it's a kind of social failure. Your body can't deal with it either, although it's nice to know you can still do it when you need to!

How has the idea of Kailash influenced Indian and Tibetan cultures?
The two are very separate. Kailash is the supreme mountain in Tibetan understanding but part of a wider sacred landscape. For Shaivites, where Shiva lives is the centre and the supreme place, whereas Tibetans have many such centres. The influence is certainly stronger in Indian culture, since the Himalaya is believed to be the home of the Gods. Tibetans don't have that concept. The

Alex McKay's fascination for Tibet led to a deep study to grasp the significance of Mount Kailash.



In Search of Mount Kailash: By Alex McKay, Rachna Books, 322 pages, ₹699.

In his award-winning new book, historian Alex McKay sets out to map the spiritual and scientific origins of the mountain sacred to Buddhists and Hindus alike

deity who resides at Kailash is Demchok—known as Chakrasamvara in Sanskrit—the patron deity of the Kargyu sect. If there are links between them (Indian and Tibetan deities), they predate Buddhism and even classical Hinduism, and could be found in the Naga deities that reside in lakes on both sides of the border—there is certainly that older strand of belief in the western Himalayas.

How was it to analyse religious texts, myths and legends around Kailash and interpret them as an academician?
That was fundamental to my findings—the realisation that the various Puranas promote different places as the sacred centre, and that the *Manasa Khanda*, which promotes Kailash, is a recent text attached to the *Skanda Purana* and not ancient at all. Then, when you closely study the older references to Kailash in the Mahabharata and Ramayana, you realise they best describe a journey to the Ganges source and/or to Sri Kailash, a mountain near the source—and not the Kailash in Tibet. Through my PhD on the British in Tibet 1904-17 and their role in shaping modern Hinduism, I realised that an early 20th century book written by Charles Sherring, the district commissioner of Almora, was fundamental to the modern Indian understanding of Kailash. And that he was no scholar but actually wrote it to promote pilgrimage in his district.

What emotions did you experience when years of enquiry led to these revelations about Kailash?
I am largely a source-based historian with my own experience of Indian and Tibetan culture, especially the religious aspect, which is a strong influence that secular western historians tend to ignore. I had spent so much time in India, not least among the Giri *swamis* who hold Kailash supreme. But I had to reconcile my experiences and my academic findings and position. I did not want to say or believe, "Oh, the Hindus are wrong. They are going to the wrong mountain." That would be simplistic and entirely superficial, since the answers were obviously more complex. And I found them really in the lives and writings of the highly intelligent lineage of upper Himalayan *swamis*. In Swami Tapovan's writings, I found the answer—that there is a divide between the

spiritual and scientific and their truths, and that it is pointless to dwell too much upon it. They are two sides of the same coin, the two truths can co-exist, and that what matters to the spiritually inclined is faith and practice. History is interesting and sometimes important, but it is not intended to produce spiritual illumination or *moksha*. So I was personally satisfied by that conclusion and certainly hope that my conclusions are accepted in that context. The Kailash of the Mahabharata and Ramayana is probably Sri Kailash (or possibly another mountain in the vicinity such as Shivaling) but modern Hindu pilgrims share an authentic spiritual quest in the modern Kailash *yatra*.

Why did you decide to explore the other Kailash mountains in India? No one else had done it. And I certainly knew that there were aspects of the history and culture of those mountains that would add to my knowledge of the Kailash in Tibet. I found that each mountain has its own history and are certainly not just "substitutes for the real thing", as has often been stated. Each is indicative of the understanding of the presence of Shiva, but Manimash Kailash and Kaplash Kailash both reflect earlier beliefs in the Naga spirits like Manasrovar.

How has your understanding of Tibet and Kailash changed over the years?
I went to university to learn more about Tibet, its history and culture, and I feel that I have achieved that, at least to my satisfaction. Tibetans are not items in a museum, nor are they all spiritual masters. They are like people everywhere and deserve the right of free expression and self government, denied to them by the Chinese. It is one of the ironies of history that if the British had drawn them closer to India—as some of their officials hoped—those Tibetans would have been better off today. As for Kailash, I still regard it as an amazing place that I understand very differently from the time I travelled there. It is an ideal location for a spiritual focus, its immensity is both humbling and enlightening. However, I do fear that the Chinese and the influx of tourists will transform it into just another place to put on a bucket-list, a kind of spiritual Disneyland.

Shail Desai is a Mumbai-based freelance writer.



Fake glitter

Rajesh Exports yet again shows up shocking audit lapses

Ordinarily, when Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) issues an order against a listed company for overstating its revenues by ₹15 lakh crore over five years, you would expect ripples in the stock market. However, SEBI's recent interim order, alleging that 99.8 per cent of Rajesh Exports' (REL) revenues of ₹15.45 lakh crore could not be verified, hasn't caused much of a furor. Most market players were hesitant to take the company's reported revenues at face value — which is why the stock traded at a market capitalisation of just ₹3,200 crore.

The SEBI investigation has uncovered many accounting irregularities. One, though REL's revenues are derived mainly from its step-down Switzerland-based subsidiary Valcambi SA, there was a yawning mismatch between its own reported annual revenues of ₹2.5 lakh crore and Valcambi's revenues of less than ₹1,000 crore between FY21 and FY25. While the Swiss subsidiary, a gold refining company, recognised only its processing charges as revenue, REL has evaluated revenues at the gross value of gold refined in its consolidated P&L. Two, REL's subsidiary Global Gold Refineries AG which owns Valcambi and whose accounts were consolidated to arrive at these revenues, wasn't audited either in Switzerland or India. Three, the promoter's personal derivative trades were recorded as REL's. Related party transactions remained undisclosed. Though the company made provisions of ₹1,000 crore towards investments in gold mines in Africa, there was no physical evidence of those gold mines. All this obviously flags gross negligence in the discharge of their duties by REL's statutory auditors.

In view of these lapses, SEBI's penal actions in its interim order seem mild. Holding off monetary penalties, SEBI has merely restrained REL's promoters from dealing in the company's shares, directed REL to make true and fair disclosures of its financials, appointed a second forensic auditor to go into accounts and flagged audit-related issues to the National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA) for further action. Whether SEBI decides to take more stringent action in its final order remains to be seen. The main lesson from the REL saga for retail investors seems to be that, when investing in under-researched small-cap companies, caveat emptor is the only rule that applies.

Successful corporate governance scandals beginning with IL&FS, have shown that companies that operate through a labyrinth of subsidiaries are suspect. Statutory auditors of the holding company don't seem to take the audit of subsidiary accounts seriously. While the REL stock is not held by mutual funds, LIC (10.8 per cent stake) features as a key shareholder along with a few FIIs (14.2 per cent). It is indeed a mystery how LIC held on to REL, for so long. It is also not clear how, despite being a past defaulter on bank dues, REL made the cut for the Production-Linked Incentive scheme for advanced chemical cell batteries. It has managed with its fake glitter for way too long.

OTHER VOICES.

The Guardian

Setback for Labour as well as Keir Starmer

John Healey's resignation as defence secretary on Thursday morning was genuinely shocking. Mr Healey is not just a veteran minister, but a Labour loyalist who previously served both Tony Blair and Jeremy Corbyn. In an interview in March, he observed that he didn't toil to rebuild confidence in Labour "just to see that wasted with internal chatter and commentary". Now he has maximised external chatter with a withering denunciation of the prime minister and chancellor. In his resignation letter, Mr Healey said that Sir Keir Starmer was "unable" and the Treasury "unwilling" to provide the budget needed to protect the UK — forcing him to make decisions that increased the risk to personnel and could make the country less safe. [LONDON, JUNE 11](#)

CHINADAILY

World Cup should be platform for global unity

The FIFA World Cup 2026 has finally arrived. The tournament kicks off on Thursday in Mexico City, where Mexico will face South Africa in the opening match. Featuring an expanded roster of 48 teams and a record-breaking 104 matches over 39 days, the global event, which will unfold across an unprecedented three host nations — Canada, Mexico and the United States — is the largest ever. Embodying the spirit of excellence and mutual respect, the World Cup traditionally provides a rare moment when political, cultural and ethnic differences give way to a shared passion for the beautiful game. Yet this year's tournament has kicked off with a seemingly chaotic buildup, limiting its potential to become a huge worldwide celebration that transcends sports. [BEIJING, JUNE 11](#)



SC order can spur insurance for homemakers

GENDER PARITY. The apex court's landmark judgment has fixed a homemaker's income at ₹30,000 per month. The financial architecture must now respond

TC SUSEEL KUMAR
SUDHAKAR RAVINDRANATH

On June 11, the Supreme Court fixed a minimum notional income of ₹30,000 per month for homemakers, created a distinct head of compensation called "loss of domestic care" in motor accident claims, and mandated a 10 per cent increase in this floor every three years. In doing so, it recognised unpaid domestic work as a measurable economic contribution and ended the discretion that tribunals had exercised, inconsistently and often inadequately, for decades.

The bench's observation carries more weight than the number itself. It is ironic, Justices Sanjay Karol and NK Singh noted, to describe a homemaker as dependent on earning members when the household's functioning depends substantially on the homemaker. Motor Vehicles Act tribunals had long valued such a life by instinct rather than principle. The June 11 judgment ends that. The homemaker is now a nation builder, in the court's own word, with a court-validated minimum contribution that claimants and their lawyers can hold to.

The economic data the bench cited deserves wider attention. Drawing on India's Time Use Survey and international studies, the court noted that women spend over seven hours a day on unpaid domestic tasks, perform nearly 2.6 times more unpaid caregiving work than men, and contribute an estimated 15-17 per cent of India's GDP

through this labour. That figure appears nowhere in the national accounts. Conventional GDP measurement excludes household production entirely. The Supreme Court has corrected one slice of that distortion. The principle it has established, however, reaches well beyond accident compensation.

INSURANCE GAP Insurance has not moved with the law, and the ruling now makes that gap indefensible. A homemaker seeking life insurance faces a framework in which her sum assured is calculated not from her own economic contribution but from her husband's income. IRDAI permits homemakers to hold term policies with sum assured typically pegged at 50-100 per cent of the earning spouse's annual income. Her human life value, in the industry's working model, is a derivative of his.

The Supreme Court has now established that her own contribution is ₹30,000 per month, ₹3.6 lakh per year, with legal authority behind it. The insurance framework has no coherent answer for why it should use a different number, or a different person's number.

The coverage data reinforces the

For the life insurance industry, the SC ruling is an instruction it should act on without waiting for a regulatory directive. A homemaker's term policy should stand on its own sum assured basis, not as a satellite to her husband's coverage

urgency. Three in four homemakers carry no critical illness cover. A 2022 Policybazaar survey of 5,000 respondents found that only 15 per cent of active term policies are independent homemaker plans, with most remaining either uninsured or covered only as an add-on to a spouse's policy. Industry practice recommends term cover of ₹25-50 lakh for homemakers; actual coverage falls far short.

For the life insurance industry, the ruling is an instruction it should act on without waiting for a regulatory directive. Applying the standard Human Life Value methodology, capitalising a ₹30,000 per month at six per cent, the accepted long-term safe rate in Indian insurance practice, the defensible term cover for a homemaker works out to ₹60 lakh. As two insurance professionals, we note this is conservative: let's at least ensure now that a homemaker's term policy should stand on its own sum assured basis, not as a satellite to her husband's coverage.

CHANGES NEEDED

Three changes follow directly. We should revise homemaker underwriting guidelines to treat ₹30,000 per month as the minimum validated income for Human Life Value computation, independent of the spouse's earnings, with 10 per cent triennial indexation matching the court's own mandate. Insurers should rebuild their HLV calculators on this basis and refrain distribution accordingly. The agent who tells a homemaker she does not need a policy of her own is now questioning against a Supreme Court ruling.

The ruling also opens a question the court's framing cannot contain, and it is worth placing on record. The bench limited the homemaker definition to the traditional image of a woman, socially homogeneously given how

domestic care is distributed in India. But the principle it constructed rests on the replacement cost of domestic work, not on the gender of the person performing it. A man who manages the household and takes primary caregiving responsibility has an identical replacement cost. The court's explicit limitation will be tested in litigation. More pressingly, consider the adult male who does not earn at all: the job-seeker between placements or a young man yet to enter employment. For each of them, a court-validated ₹30,000 floor now exists for a non-earning woman performing domestic work. A MACT tribunal will be asked why an adult male who cooks, cares and maintains a household is valued below that floor.

Whether his non-earning status reflects circumstance, active job search, inadequate wages or family comfort are questions compensation proceedings cannot weigh. The ruling, rightly focused on ending the undervaluation of women's domestic labour, has by the force of its own principle opened a far wider debate about how Indian law values any life the market has failed to price, or has priced poorly.

Parliament and IRDAI have clear lanes: align insurance practice with the court's recognition, extend social protection to caregiving, and examine pension credit for years spent outside the paid workforce. But the larger question the judgment raises belongs to all of us. The court has named the homemaker a nation builder. The financial architecture that surrounds her is yet to respond.

Kumar is former Managing Director of LIC and Sudhakar is former Executive Director of LIC. Views expressed are personal. All data are drawn from publicly available sources

Corporate governance: Lessons from the cricket field

In corporate governance, game awareness is the ability to read situations before they show up in financial statements

SN Ananthasubramanian
MS Sahoo

In cricket, as in life, it is the context which determines the text. A batter may possess flawless technique and impeccable credentials, yet fail if unable to read changing conditions, anticipate risks, and adapt to the demands of the moment. The same is increasingly true in corporate governance.

In an era defined by geopolitical volatility, rapid AI integration, activist stakeholders, and shifting regulatory demands, governance requires far more than procedural compliance. It requires the ability to be aware of the game even as it unfolds.

Recent performances on the cricket field offer valuable governance lessons for corporate boards. Take Axar Patel's pivotal innings for India under immense pressure in Barbados. It didn't feature the most spectacular, boundary-heavy fireworks of the tournament, but it won the match. Patel quickly assessed a deteriorating situation, absorbed the pressure, rotated strike intelligently, and accelerated only when the conditions allowed.

Corporate boards frequently face identical high-pressure moments, but they often struggle to respond with the same agility. Most governance failures happen in plain sight. Boards today are inundated with presentations, dashboards, compliance checklists, risk

registers, and audit observations. The challenge is rarely a lack of data, but recognising what the data signifies.

Weak signals are dismissed as noise, while emerging risks are underestimated because they don't fit neatly into quarterly spreadsheets. Cultural deterioration goes unnoticed until it hits the headlines. By the time warning signs become undeniable, the organisation may already be on a downward trajectory.

The early signs of distress are often visible long before the crisis erupts. A sudden increase in employee attrition, recurring customer complaints, persistent regulatory observations, or an unusual concentration of decision-making authority may each appear insignificant in isolation. Viewed together, however, they often reveal vulnerabilities that conventional reporting frameworks fail to capture.

Game awareness in governance is the ability to recognise changing realities before they show up in financial statements. It is the capacity to distinguish signal from noise, identify emerging threats, and understand when ordinary circumstances have become extraordinary. This demands contextual judgment. Just as a seasoned batter reads a slowing pitch or an unexpected field placement, boards must interpret shifting stakeholder expectations, technological disruptions, and organisational sentiment.

Governance is fundamentally about



GOVERNANCE. Cricketing lessons

interpreting context, not just reviewing compliance.

TRUSTING YOUNG TALENT

Young Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's success reflected an institution willing to trust talent regardless of age or seniority. There is an important governance lesson here. Many corporate boards continue to operate within insular cultures where hierarchy is absolute, and length of tenure is valued to the exclusion of fresh perspectives. Yet periods of rapid technological and business transformation often reward cognitive agility, digital fluency, and adaptive thinking as much as experience. Boards that fail to balance seasoned judgment with younger and more diverse perspectives risk strategic stagnation, while those that cultivate emerging leaders are better positioned to navigate uncertainty and change.

Importantly, game awareness is not the responsibility of the captain alone. A cricket team functions because multiple players read the field and respond collectively. Similarly, effective corporate governance cannot depend solely on the chairperson, the CEO, or independent directors. It requires total alignment among boards, executive management, risk officers, and internal auditors.

This has significant implications for governance professionals. Their role can no longer be confined to procedural compliance and administrative stewardship. Governance professionals must become active interpreters of institutional risk, organisational behaviour, and emerging vulnerabilities. In practice, this requires moving board discussions beyond retrospective reporting to identifying blind spots, emerging risks, and forward-looking scenarios. Compliance remains the baseline, but dynamic awareness sustains resilience.

Compliance is governance's scoreboard. It tells us what has happened. Game awareness helps us understand what may happen next. Boards that focus only on the scoreboard may remain compliant even as vulnerabilities accumulate beneath the surface.

The writers are former President and former Secretary, respectively, of the Institute of Company Secretaries of India

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The magic of football

This refers to the Editorial 'Game's on' (June 12). For 49 days, starting June 11, under the nimble, dexterous and celebrated feet of players from 48 nations, a round leather object will transform into a magic ball. During its 96 years of history the football World Cup has created gripping incidents like the 'Hand-of-God' goal by Diego

Maradona and legendary players from Pele to Lamine Yamal now. This Cup will see an enchanting mix of big and small nations together with veteran and young players competing in different playing

conditions being viewed by 7 billion viewers. Sadly, giant India will watch small nations like Croatia playing in the Cup. But with the moment Free the country from the clutches of cricket and nurture a game for which it has intrinsic flair?

YG Chouksey

Pune

Apropos 'Game's on', (June 12). For a year, talk about the World Cup focused on politics, visas, climate and a bigger 48-team format. Soon the action on the pitch will take centre stage. So can the old champions from

Europe and South America stay ahead of new challengers? Morocco's run to the semifinals in Qatar showed the gap is closing. Japan beat Germany and Spain, while Saudi Arabia shocked Argentina. Africa returns stronger with Salah, Mane, and Morocco's steady core. Messi may play his last Cup, Mbappe leads a deep France, and Spain's young stars grow fast.

K Chidhanand Kumar

Bengaluru

Sustainable farming This refers to the article 'Right time to focus on sustainable agriculture' (June 12). Indian agriculture is becoming highly vulnerable to fast changing weathering systems. With predictions of below average monsoon rainfall due to the El Niño induced system, the outlook for agricultural output for FY27 looks bleak. Centre has been taking several steps in insulating agricultural processes and the farmers. Yet, these measures are yet to be scaled up.

It is time for Agricultural Extension Offices at all District to take the lead in adopting water conservation technique, crop diversification, extensive use of organic manure,

pest-resistant newer crop varieties, to boost their agricultural yield.

RV Baskaran

Pune

Petrol woes

It refers to 'Petrol with 22-30% ethanol blend exempted from central excise duty'. It is a welcome move by the government to reduce imports and save forex. Ethanol-blended petrol also helps reduce carbon emissions. A balance between food security and sustainability must be ensured.

Bal Govind

Noida



A thought for today

I'm not a prophet. I'm not a teacher. I have no degrees. My degree is from the University of Life

JAMIE LEE CURTIS

Catch 'Em Young

IIT Kanpur's made a smart move by hiring Nisarga

Nisarga Adhikari, the 19-year-old who became a household name last month, after exposing flaws in CBSE's on-screen marking system, has made it to IIT Kanpur. Not as a student, but as an employee. He'll work as open-source intelligence and threat intelligence engineer...

Doubters might wonder whether 19 isn't too young for a full-time job in a critical role. They only have to look at David Dworken, now a security engineer at Anthropic, who became famous as an 18-year-old, back in 2016. He had built malware named Kronos and UPAS Kit, for which he was arrested in US. But his ethical turn as a 'white hat' saved the world a lot of trouble.

So, IIT Kanpur's confidence in Nisarga is well-founded. And Indian institutions should tap such young talent more often. In fact, Pentagon-style bounty programmes can save them the kind of embarrassment CBSE went through. They're also cheap. Where a US Dept of Defence contractor charged \$3mm over three years, and found only 10 vulnerabilities, bug hunters like David revealed more than 130 in days, for a total bounty payment of \$75,000.

Football's Much Moreness

Shakira called: Dai Dai. So, see you in July

Why is it goosebumps every time the ball rolls slow motion on wet grass? Why is it goosebumps every time the stadium erupts? We've seen these a thousand times, and yet, every time, it's a thrill like no other. For a moment there, at Mexico City's World Cup inauguration - the world was (deceptively) delightful. The beautiful life was full-on. Estadio Azteca stadium glittered and shimmered, boasting football heritage like no other, as it hosted the rare third World Cup. A trilogy of inaugurations this edition - US and Canada have their own ahead of the first match in their country - may put on spectacles too, but Azteca's already World. As Italian tenor Bocelli and singer EJAE sang: "It's more than just a game, it's our DNA" - of the three, only Mexico can claim that. And only World Cups turn emotional even before a single kick.

From Waka Waka in 2010 South Africa, to Dai Dai in Mexico, the years collapsed for World Cup queen Shakira, who hit the pitch with an electric performance. As a fan said: "I was 7 then, Shakira 22. I'm now 23, Shakira's 22." The powerhouse, of Lebanese and Catalan descent, raised in Colombia, who has said living in US as an immigrant means "living in constant fear", epitomises football beyond the sport - a hard political epic of migration & movement, contests, collaboration, conquest. No one knew this better than the protesters (unpaid teachers and families of missing people) outside Azteca - heart in the game, feet on the ground. The fight is on.

When World Cup Meets Americana

Four podcasts that decode Fifa 2026

For many, the build-up to the 2026 Fifa World Cup in US, Mexico and Canada has been confusing, at times odd, and in some cases not very surprising. With a majority of the matches slated to take place in Trump's America - a country where football (or soccer) isn't even among the top three sports - there have been concerns that the tournament will be a real dud. But football has a way of reigniting passions once there is kick-off. And football podcasts are doing a great job of bringing the conversation back to the aspects of the game that really matter.

In *Sticks to Football*, English footballing legends Gary Neville, Jamie Carragher, Roy Keane, and Ian Wright talk about what could be the most crucial factor in this World Cup - the heat. Across North America - but particularly in US and Mexico - temperatures have risen dramatically over the years, making playing conditions challenging. So, teams that are able to manage conditions better are likely to go further in the tournament.

This, in turn, puts an interesting twist on the participation of some of the new teams making their World Cup debut - Cape Verde, Curaçao, Jordan and Uzbekistan. Given their home conditions, they might be able to withstand the heat in North America better than major European squads.

In *The Rest Is Football*, another bunch of English legends, Gary Lineker, Alan Shearer, and Micah Richards, talk about prospects of different teams. For England, much rests on captain and striker Harry Kane. But pundits were also looking to the performance of England goalie Jordan Pickford who, statistically, is the best English goalkeeper in decades. And with the possibility of crunch matches going

down to penalties, Pickford's role could be crucial.

But what about France? Pundits believe they are one of the two most talented sides in the tournament - the other being Spain. But France can also suddenly implode - a case of too much talent not always working in cohesion.

Kylian Mbappé is obviously the key marksman in the squad. But he needs to do more work off the ball.

And Messi? Well, Shearer feels he is one World Cup further than optimum. But no one can dispute his place in the Argentine side - he remains their hero and talisman.

In *The Totally Football Show* with James Richardson, podcasting from Los Angeles, the discussion is on the atmosphere at this World Cup in Mexico City. It's electric with murals of players covering every bare wall. The discussion then veers to Small referee Omar Artan, talented sides in the tournament - the US, and sent back to his country. Artan is the top African referee, but Trump's tough policies on immigration and foreigners denied him his moment in the sun.

The podcast then moves to Fifa boss Gianni Infantino's pre-kick-off press conference. When pressed on Artan, Infantino told reporters to "chill out". But he was adamant that Fifa's much controversial ticketing system for this World Cup, which has led to prices skyrocket, was the way to go. The podcast says this sums up how much Fifa has had to mollycoddle Trump to get this World Cup on the road.

In *The Athletic FC Podcast*, focus was on the expanded 48-team format of this World Cup. That means an extra 40 matches, taking the total to 104 - impossible to watch all. Conversely, it means there are greater chances of upsets. So, hold on to your seats as the greatest sporting extravaganza unfolds.

SpaceX And The Business Of Hope

Buying shares, like voting, is often about getting hooked by a great story selling a dream. That's what Musk offered in his IPO, and he has the creds when it comes to promising a shiny future

Arnab Ray



LA-based computer scientist

Human beings like to imagine themselves as rational creatures. We're over our biases sheets, compare interest rates, read expert opinions, and insist that our decisions are grounded in evidence. Yet, history suggests otherwise. We don't live by logic alone. We live on stories. More importantly, we live on hope.

Poor people often vote against their immediate economic interests, because they don't think of themselves as poor, but as temporarily embarrassed millionaires. They are rich people in exile, waiting for their turn to arrive.

That same instinct shapes financial markets. People don't merely buy shares. They buy futures in which they themselves are protagonists. Every investment is, in some sense, a bet on a story about tomorrow, which helps explain why the SpaceX IPO has generated such extraordinary excitement.

On paper, this fascination can seem obsessive. Space is hard. Rockets explode. Missions fail. The economics are uncertain. Even the most optimistic projections involve technological, regulatory, political risks that would make a cautious accountant break into a cold sweat. Yet, none of that captures what investors actually see when they hear the word "SpaceX". They see Captain Kirk, boldly going where no man has gone before.

The most successful ideas are often astonishingly simple. Not simple in execution, but in explanation. Investors understand an online bookstore. They understand a social media network, a smartphone, electric cars. By contrast, companies that solve highly technical, specialised problems often struggle to attract attention, even when their businesses are excellent.

The average person can't explain what they do in a sentence. Venture capitalists may appreciate them, but the public rarely falls in love with them.

SpaceX possesses the opposite advantage. Its mission can be summarised by a child. It builds rockets. It wants to take humans into space. Eventually, perhaps, it wants to take them to Mars.

For generations, space exploration occupied a unique

place in the human imagination. Moon landing wasn't merely a scientific achievement, but a civilisational event. It represented adventure, ambition, belief that tomorrow could be bigger than today.

Then, the future became strangely earthbound. We built apps, optimised ads. We created algorithms that persuade people to click on things. Valuable, perhaps. Inspiring, not always. SpaceX reintroduced something that had been missing from business for decades: Wonder. Investors may tell themselves they are evaluating launch economics, satellite revenues, defence contracts. Some undoubtedly are. But many are responding to something more emotional. They are buying a ticket to the future.

That future may never arrive exactly as promised. Most futures don't. But that's never stopped people from

believing. Hope, after all, is one of the most powerful assets ever created. And yet, hope alone is rarely enough. Every age is littered with charismatic dreamers promising utopia. Scpticism remains the natural response whenever someone claims they're going to change the world. Or, in this case, the galaxy.

This is where Elon Musk enters the story. Ordinarily the idea of colonising Mars would sound like the sort of thing discussed at three in the morning, by someone who has had too much coffee, watched too much sci-fi. But Musk arrives with receipts.

Before Tesla, conventional wisdom held that electric cars were niche products destined for environmental enthusiasts and wealthy hobbyists. Established carmakers largely ignored the sector. Experts doubted that EVs could compete with petrol-powered vehicles

generates hype. Hype creates fear of missing out. FOMO attracts more investors. More investors generate more attention. And the cycle continues.

This doesn't mean SpaceX is overvalued. Nor does it mean the company is destined for failure. SpaceX may ultimately justify every expectation placed upon it. It may even exceed them. That isn't the point. The point is that the enthusiasm surrounding SpaceX can't be understood through financial analysis alone.

To understand SpaceX, one must understand the mind of people who regard missing out on the chance to make millions that friend at work made who bought Apple in the early 2000s, people who believe in a simple story, as old as time, to reach the final frontier, sold by a man who has made a trillion off their dreams.

How 'Biryani' Slowed The Birth Rate. Phew

That comedy show? Where guys talked about demanding intimacy because they had bought their date a meal? Obviously, that totally puts off women. And, that's good news. Because, god knows, we don't need more children

Radhika Vaz



first time, an entire generation of Indian women are saying we are DONE.

I can't tell you how excited I am. So much so that when I heard about a man who demanded physical intimacy from a woman in exchange for a plate of chicken biryani, I was thrilled. Yes, I screamed. Yes! Keep this up, men, be cruder and even more despicable. We need you and your country needs you. What every politician and social worker since independence has been struggling to do for decades, you spelt imbecility in man-children have accomplished in the blink of a viral video. Ittip my wig to you all.

We always thought that education alone would stem the tide of our exploding population. But we were going about it the old-fashioned way, with pamphlets and lectures and free condoms and forced sterilisations and pity-slogans. None of it worked and we scratched our ageing heads wondering what on earth to do. What we did not count on was our men!

Which is shocking, in and of itself, given we have put them on a pedestal, with all their entitlements from the country, to the corporate, to the community. But never in a million iron-clad years did we think they would be the ones to teach our daughters to say NO.

That being said, all this heavy lifting could not have been achieved by the incels and alphas alone. So, let me go further back and give credit where it is really due - to

the parents of our man-children. Thank you, mummy and daddy, thank you for birthing these nitwits and sending them out into the world, without any instruction on how to be men.

If you people had taken the time to teach your sons, and basic human decency, I shudder to think where we would be - a far cry from the superpower we are about to become, no doubt. Every single time that you turned a blind eye and said



'boys want to be boys' has finally paid off. Now, no one wants to be near your sons, and basic human decency, I shudder to think where we would be - a far cry from the superpower we are about to become, no doubt. Every single time that you turned a blind eye and said

This roundabout way of solving our most pressing developmental issue seems to be working. And, while I am a patriot first and last, I do believe the globe has enough Indians. So let us take a break from the breeding and see where that gets us. Or is that too scary? Do we think that if we give women some time

off from diaper duty, they might actually realise that marriage and motherhood was never a necessity but a choice - a choice that, given they have to marry, is becoming increasingly less attractive.

Thus far, we have managed to systematically fool women into believing they had to pair up. We did this by carefully curating a country in which single women feel uncomfortable and unfortunate, at best, and unsafe, at worst. We sold them the idea that they need a man for status, stability and safety, that without a man they would be socially, emotionally and physically at risk. In passing these patterns down the generations, we normalised the horrific male chauvinistic behaviour that is now on display.

So now, what we're seeing is not just pathetic dating etiquette, or one-off bad behaviour, it is a personality type - a type of man whose misogyny runs so deep that it's not just that he thinks a woman owes him for chicken biryani. He believes she owes him. Period. He believes he should be compensated for any interaction he deigns to have with a woman. She should remain in a permanent state of gratitude, always ready to give whatever he demands, and if she doesn't, well, he will just take it and later brag to everyone on the internet.

But, this time, something may have snapped. It feels like women have collectively decided chicken biryani is not so enticing after all. That they would rather go without, than get up with one more lousy plate, I mean date. And if men don't sit up and take notice, they are going to end up eating chicken biryani with each other. This is how the revolution begins, good people, and how it ends is by contributing greatly to a dwindling birth rate.

The writer is a standup comedian

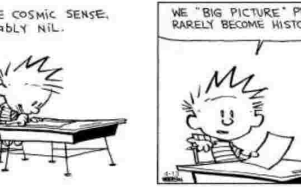
Calvin & Hobbes



What was the significance of the Erie Canal? IN THE COSMIC SENSE, PROBABLY NIL.

When was the last time you said, 'I am happy' or 'I am angry' or 'I am frustrated'? When was the last time you explained your state of being as caused by a reaction in your mind to something that happened outside of you? 'You made me angry.' 'He infuriates me.' 'I can't take her anymore.' Most of us say things like this to ourselves and others pretty constantly.

Try this first: A 60-second exercise Before reading any further, take just a moment and close your eyes. Allow the breath to slow and bring your awareness to your breath low in your abdomen, below your belly button. Just anchor there for a few seconds. Then, very deliberately, start repeating the word 'Hate' over and over in your mind. Hate. Hate. Hate. Hate. Keep repeating it for about 30 seconds. Then



nothing is ever 'just in the mind'. But the second reason is far more important. It is this: You are not your thoughts or your mind. You were there whether hate or love was being repeated. You were the conductor, not the instrument being played. You were the one in charge.

The ability to determine what we think, how we think, and the state of our minds is an inherent part of our human capacity. This is what neuroscience calls 'emotional regulation' and what the yogis have called 'sakti', witness consciousness, for thousands of years.

If we are the watcher - the witness consciousness, the one who is aware - then by definition we are not the mind. Most of us don't realise this. We say 'I am angry' or 'I am depressed', or 'I can't control my temper'. Or my anxiety. Or my

Of Life And Love

STORIES OF THE WAY WE ARE

STORIES OF THE WAY WE ARE

STORIES OF THE WAY WE ARE

Sacredspace



Most people believe the mind to be a mirror, more or less accurately reflecting the world outside them, not realising on the contrary that the mind is itself the principal element of creation.

Most people believe the mind to be a mirror, more or less accurately reflecting the world outside them, not realising on the contrary that the mind is itself the principal element of creation. The one who was always watching Anchoring our sense of identity in that pure, unchanging, unchangeable light of awareness is the key - not only to emotional and mental health, not only to healing anxiety, depression, any endless turbulence of the monkey mind - but to freedom itself. There is a teaching that says: manava manushyanam karanam bandha mokshayoh. Mind alone is the cause of both bondage and liberation. Fuse with its monkey nature and you live in constant bondage. Extricate yourself from that identification and - through re-identifying as the knower of the mind, the witness consciousness, the observer self - set your free.

CARATLANE A TATA PRODUCT

FLAT 100% Off On Making Charges

CARATLANE A TATA PRODUCT

FLAT 100% Off On Making Charges

Sensex and Nifty joined the global market rally on Friday as crude prices fell on optimism over a potential peace deal between US and Iran. They snapped a two-week losing streak to gain 1.7% and 1.1% respectively

Sensex
1.7%

Kotak Mahindra Bk
Axis Bank
ICICI Bank

Sensex Gainers

6.9%
6.6%
6.2%

Laggards

Infosys
Eternal
Tata Steel

6.9%
6.6%
6.2%

Laggards

Infosys
Eternal
Tata Steel

4.4%

GOLD
CRUDE
BITCOIN

\$71 bn
Was India's current account surplus in the Jan-Mar 2026 quarter, narrowing from \$13.7 billion from a year earlier, due to surge in gold imports and decline in merchandise trade outflowing gains in services exports and remittance inflows
Source: BSE, Reuters, screener.in

Equal AI raises \$30m in Series B funding round

Hyderabad: AI call assistant platform, Equal AI, founded by the GVK Group scion Keshav Reddy, has raised \$30 million (Rs 287 crore) in a Series B funding round co-led by Process Ventures and Tomales Bay Capital. The funding also saw participation from Think Investments, Valiant VC, PhonePe founder Sameer Nigam, Zubin Bharatwala of the Airtel family office, Skyflow co-founder Anshu Sharma, Meta India and Southeast Asia vice president Sandhya Devanathan and CTR's Datacenters chairman Sridhar Pinnareddy, N&S



'Elon Musk doesn't have net worth, he has a GDP'

Continued from page 1
Naturally the internet reacted with its usual restraint. On Musk's own platform, X, one user quipped: "Elon doesn't have a net worth anymore. He has a GDP." Another observed: "At this point, Jeff Bezos is basically middle class."

The achievement also revived one of Wall Street's favourite pastimes: arguing over whether Musk is a genius, a gambler, or some hybrid species created when Thomas Edison or Isaac Newton collided with an internet troll. His supporters see a visionary who electrified the auto industry, revolutionised space launches, and turned sci-fi fantasies into business plans. Critics argue he overpromises, under-delivers, tweets first — and increasingly racist stuff — and thinks later. Both sides can agree on one thing: the man knows how to monetise audacity.

For decades, becoming world's richest person meant controlling oil fields, banks, railroads, or software monopolies. Musk's fortune, by contrast, rests on electric cars, reusable rockets, AI bets, brain chips, and social media feuds conducted at 2am.
The SpaceX listing marks a remarkable turnaround for an industry once dependent almost entirely on government contracts. Investors are pouring money into the final frontier, proving that if there's one thing humanity loves more than exploration, it's the possibility of quarterly returns from exploration.

Sensex jumps 17k points as US, ran inch closer to deal

Crude Prices Ease To Below \$90 | Rupee Rises 65p To 95.11

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: As talks of a peace deal in West Asia revived on Thursday night, sending Dow Jones up over 900 points and pulling Brent crude prices below the \$90-per-barrel mark, the rub-off effect was felt on Dalal Street on Friday. Sensex, after rising more than 1,000 points in early trades, and dipping slightly mid-session, closed 1,686 points up at 72,231 points. The fall in crude oil prices also strengthened the rupee against the dollar.
On Thursday, after issuing threats on an imminent US strike on Iran, President Donald Trump reversed his stand, saying a deal with the country was nearing. This statement also prompted crude prices to slide sharply. AI on Wednesday, Brent crude prices fell to \$85.3, a three-month low.
Part of the rise in the domestic market, especially during the last hour of trading, was attributed to short covering by traders who had earlier

PEACE DEAL HOPES RESCUE MKTS AGAIN

Top 5 single-session points gain in sensex in 2026

Date	Close	Change (Pts)	Reason
8/4/2026	77,563	2,946	US-Iran peace deal hopes
3/2/2026	83,739	2,073	US-India trade deal
12/6/2026	75,528	1,695	US-Iran peace deal hopes
24/03/2026	74,068	1,372	US-Iran peace deal hopes
15/04/2026	78,111	1,264	US-Iran peace deal hopes

28 of the 30 stocks on BSE closed higher on Friday

er bet on a slide in the market, dealers said.
The day's rise in sensex was the third-best single-session points gain for the index in 2026. Friday's market rally made investors richer by Rs 9.7 lakh crore with BSE's market capitalisation now at Rs 462 lakh crore, exchange data showed.
According to Siddhartha Khemka of Motilal Oswal Financial Services, reports indicating that negotiations between the US and Iran were nearing completion, reduced fe-

with the US Federal Reserve's policy meeting and US industrial production data likely to provide direction to financial markets, Khemka said.
"Additionally, developments in the US-Iran negotiations, crude oil price movements and foreign fund flows will remain key factors influencing market sentiment."
The day's gains were backed by strong buying by domestic funds while foreign funds continued to be net sellers. At the close of the session, while domestic institutional investors reported a net inflow of Rs 5,341 crore, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) were net sellers of Rs 1,092 crore, BSE data showed.
The rising possibility of a US-Iran peace agreement that pulled crude oil prices down, strengthened the rupee on Friday. The Indian currency opened more than 40 paise firmer from Thursday's close at 95.76/8, briefly traded above 95 and finally settled at 95.11, up 65 paise for the day.

ars of prolonged disruptions to global crude oil supplies, pushing oil prices below the \$90 per barrel mark. "The sharp market recovery suggests that investors are beginning to price in a more favourable geopolitical outcome. While a formal agreement remains pending, the moderation in crude oil prices and the appreciation of the rupee against the dollar have improved the near-term outlook for domestic equities."
Going forward, global equities will remain important,

As losses begin to hurt, AI asked to downsize

Majority Owner Tata Group Tells Airline To Focus On Reducing Its Record Losses

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

As India is looking to de-risk aircraft deliveries, cut flights and postpone expansion plans after majority owner Tata Group instructed the carrier to focus on reducing its record losses, according to people familiar with the matter.
The change in strategy is an abrupt pivot from an ambitious growth plan. It reflects the loss of confidence in an airline that suffered a fatal crash a year ago and has since incurred an annual loss equivalent to about \$3 billion (Rs 28,500 crore approximately).
The downsizing will involve a variety of efforts to reduce costs. Air India is in discussions with Airbus and Boeing to slow down deliveries of its fleet. The airline is also reviewing its route network and cancelling some routes. The Tata Group, which took over the national carrier in 2022, now wants Air India to temper its growth strategy to focus on stabilising current operations and implement cost-cutting measures, people familiar with the matter said.

Air India's commercial operations follow a series of challenges that have pushed it deep into the red. The deadly crash last June, Pakistan closing its airspace to Indian carriers, and the war in Iran have disrupted flights, forced costly rerouting and driven up fuel expenses. The weak Indian rupee has also added to its financial woes since much of the airline's costs are in dollars. The Tata Group, which took over the national carrier in 2022, now wants Air India to temper its growth strategy to focus on stabilising current operations and implement cost-cutting measures, people familiar with the matter said.
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FLYING INTO A TURBULENCE

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planes previously ordered, enabling Air India to push back the large payments due to plane makers upon delivery.
AI is also launching some routes and postponing launches on other airports.
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The weak rupee also added to its financial woes

declined to comment.
The flag carrier, which operates its namesake Air India full-service airline and low-cost arm Air India Express, has been losing money for more than a decade even though revenue and operations have grown on the back of the country's strong economic expansion and surging travel demand. Air India previously ordered a combined 600 aircraft from Airbus and Boeing during 2023 and 2024, and then put in more orders early this year as part of an aggressive fleet expansion. The bulk of its deliveries are expected in 2027 and 2028, and the people said. Airlines typically spread out payments for jets over several years, with the biggest cash outlay — which can be about 80% of the purchase price — coming when they are handed over. [Source: Reuters](#)

Retail inflation inches up to five-month high in May

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Retail inflation based on consumer price index (CPI) inched up for the fourth consecutive month to 4% in May from 3.5% in April on account of acceleration in food prices, data released by NSO on Friday showed. The food index rose 4.8% in May, above 4.2% in the preceding month.
Despite the staggered increase in retail fuel prices during the past month in the backdrop of persisting 4% in May from 3.5% in April on account of acceleration in food prices, data released by NSO on Friday showed. The food index rose 4.8% in May, above 4.2% in the preceding month.
Despite the staggered increase in retail fuel prices during the past month in the backdrop of persisting 4% in May from 3.5% in April on account of acceleration in food prices, data released by NSO on Friday showed. The food index rose 4.8% in May, above 4.2% in the preceding month.

Crisil said food inflation rose due to persistent high temperatures, which drove up prices of vegetables, dairy products and eggs. "Part of the estimated 36 basis points (100 basis points equal a percentage) point direct impact on CPI from cumulative Rs 7.5 a litre hike in fuel prices is already visible, with the remaining pass through expected in June," she said.
Madan Sabnavis, chief economist at Bank of Baroda said inflation is expected to move upwards at a differential pace in the coming months, depending on transmission of higher energy prices to different products.
Core inflation, after stripping out volatile food and fuel components, hovers around 4%. Data showed that services under the "personal care, social protection and miscellaneous goods and services" category recorded highest inflation at 18.5% in May, higher than 17.7% in April due to slight acceleration in gold and silver prices. The other area within services where prices have gone up sharply was restaurants (5.8%), a direct impact of rising energy and food raw material prices.
Prices in rural areas rose at a sharper pace (4.3%) compared to urban areas (3.5%). DBS Bank senior economist Radhika Rao said India's inflation is still within RBI's 2-6% target, and "less of an immediate policy concern" and is consistent with the central bank's view that current inflation readings remain manageable.

Byju's founder gets relief as S'pore court stays order

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: Byju Ravendran secured a temporary reprieve after the Singapore High Court stayed the provisions of an earlier order sentencing him to six months in prison for civil contempt. In a statement on Friday, his legal counsel, Jazarett Le Barou said the General Division of the Singapore High Court stayed the commitment and surrender provisions of the May 25 contempt order against the entrepreneur.
The stay marks the latest development in a long-running cross-border legal battle involving the Byju's founder, lenders and investors.
Last month, the Singapore court sentenced Ravendran to six months in jail for contempt arising from alleged non-compliance with court's disclosure orders. The ruling became a flashpoint in an ongoing dispute between Ravendran and the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), one of Byju's investors.
The law firm also said it filed an appeal against the contempt ruling.
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Despite rocky yr, Tata Sons records high profit growth

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: Tata Sons' board met on Friday to approve the company's financial results for the year ended March 31, 2026, recommending a dividend to equity shareholders, even as it kept chairman N Chandrasekaran's reappointment off the agenda for a second consecutive time.
The board stuck to the agenda and there was no discussion on controversial matters," said a person familiar with the proceedings.
Tata Sons is understood to have recorded high-teens profit growth in FY26, a record for the company since its takeover by Tata Trusts, over losses at the company's new businesses, including Tata

Digital. Growth came despite lower dividend income from operating companies, including a reduced payout from TCS.
Proceeds from sale of Tata Capital shares via an IPO last Sept bolstered profits.
In FY25, Tata Sons paid a dividend of Rs 64,900 per ordinary share.
The board also approved remuneration for directors and key management personnel, following a recommendation by the nomination and remuneration committee chaired by Harish Manwani. Chandrasekaran, whose remuneration stands at Rs 156 crore, ranks among the highest-paid professionals in India's public listing of Tata Sons.
A smiling Chandrasekaran declined to comment on the board meeting or other matters as he left Bombay House, Tata Group's HQ.

Avataar unveils India-focused AI video model Varya

Aabhas Sharma @atimesofindia.com

New Delhi: India's efforts to build indigenous AI models received a boost this week as Avataar AI unveiled Varya, a video generation model designed to better understand Indian cultural contexts while significantly reducing the cost of AI video creation.
The Bengaluru-based startup, backed by Peak XV Partners and selected under gov't's India AI Mission, said the model can recognise local nuances including festivals, clothing, food and regional dialects — areas where global AI models have often struggled or produced stereotypical outputs.
The launch comes as India is looking to establish a stronger presence in AI development. Electronics and IT secretary S Krishnamoorti said Varya represents the kind of research-led capability building that we seek to enable. Instead of building a model from scratch, Avataar used Alibaba's open-source Wan 2.2 video model and applied a technique known as distillation to create a smaller and faster version tailored to its requirements.

Meesho to acquire B2B hub Kirana Club in ₹202cr deal

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: Meesho is buying RBI commerce platform Kirana Club in a ₹202 crore deal, marking its first-ever acquisition, the company said in an exchange filing on Friday.
Founded in 2020, Kirana Club connects scores of small town kiranas with FMCG brands directly through its online marketplace. The move could open up scope for Meesho to foray into the grocery space going ahead. "By integrating with Meesho's broader ecosystem... Kirana Club could expand its category coverage, improve fulfilment economics and accelerate its retailer acquisition across underserved markets," the listed startup said. Kirana Club's acquisition will be completed in three tranches as part of the deal. Meesho will acquire 100% of shares of Kirana Club. Kirana Club and 0.4% of share capital of its Indian subsidiary Retail Pulse Labs. Kirana Club will continue to operate independently within Meesho Group and all its existing investors will exit after the transaction is completed.

US court dismisses patent claims against Hexaware

Bengaluru: IT firm Hexaware said a US court dismissed all claims brought against it by Natsos and its affiliate, Infrapart, in a patent infringement lawsuit involving the company's automation and AI tools.

The IT services company's exclusion reflects its relative market capitalisation higher than its peers in operating performance. An intraday market capitalisation of about \$24.5 billion on Friday, Cognizant's valuation has lagged many peers even as investor enthusiasm for AI-native firms has surged over the past two years.
The Nasdaq-100, which tracks the 100 largest non-financial companies listed on the Nasdaq exchange, is among the world's most closely watched equity benchmarks. More than 200 investment products track the index, and over \$800 billion in assets under management globally. Inclusion in the index often boosts visibility and attracts passive investment flows, while exclusion can trigger selling by index-tracking funds. Analysts said the risk of Cognizant losing its place in the benchmark had been apparent for several months as its market value failed to keep pace with newer technology companies tied to AI infrastructure, cloud computing and semiconductor ecosystems.
Some analysts also viewed Cognizant's accelerated share repurchase programme over the past year as an effort to support shareholder returns and bolster market

AI darlings, semicon cos elbow Cognizant out of Nasdaq-100

Shilpa Phadnis @timesofindia.com

Bengaluru: Despite posting a strong first quarter and raising its full-year guidance, Cognizant is set to be dropped from the Nasdaq-100 index after more than two decades, making way for a new crop of companies benefiting from artificial intelligence boom.
The IT services company's exclusion reflects its relative market capitalisation higher than its peers in operating performance. An intraday market capitalisation of about \$24.5 billion on Friday, Cognizant's valuation has lagged many peers even as investor enthusiasm for AI-native firms has surged over the past two years.
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buildout, while more traditional technology and IT services firms have struggled to match their valuation gains.
For Cognizant, the move comes despite improving business performance under CEO Ravi Kumar. The company has positioned itself as an AI services provider, highlighted a growing AI-led product ecosystem, and reported improving demand across key verticals. However, those gains have not translated into the kind of market-value expansion seen among competitors at the centre of the AI ecosystem.
In May, Cognizant's board approved a \$2 billion increase to its share repurchase programme and doubled its 2026 buyback target to \$2 billion from \$1 billion previously. The additional \$1 billion in repurchases is expected to be completed during the Sept quarter.
The board also authorised a further \$2 billion increase to the company's existing stock repurchase programme, making the total remaining repurchase capacity to about \$3.4 billion. An email sent to Cognizant did not elicit a response till press time.

Wipro ordered to honour full bonus promise

Shilpa Phadnis @timesofindia.com

Bengaluru: A UK employment appeals tribunal has ruled that Wipro must pay the full value of a performance bonus linked to a major contract win. The ruling rejects the company's attempt to cap the payout at \$150,000 and potentially leaves Wipro liable for an additional payment of about \$347,000 (around \$300,000).
The Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT) found that former Wipro employee P Chandrasekharappa was entitled to receive 1% of the first-year revenues from a contract he helped secure with UK retailer John Lewis Partnership (JLP), less the amount the company already paid. The ruling overturns an earlier employment tribunal decision

that had sided with Wipro. According to the judgment, 1% of the first-year revenues from the John Lewis contract amounted to £50,082, or roughly ₹697,000. Chandrasekharappa was paid only \$150,000, after Wipro imposed a payout cap, leaving a shortfall of approximately ₹547,000.
The dispute centres on a "kitty bonus" scheme Wipro introduced in March 2020 to reward employees for winning new contracts. Under the programme, sales personnel could receive up to 1% of new customer revenue from a new contract during the first year, subject to approval by a sector head. No cap on payouts was mentioned when the scheme was presented to employees. Chandrasekharappa, who worked in Wipro's Cloud and Infrastructure Services Division,

played a key role in securing the John Lewis account. After the deal was signed in June 2020, his manager sought approval for the bonus from Kiran Desai, then senior vice-president and global head of the division. Desai approved the recommendation that the employee receive the full 1% payout.
However, the tribunal found that Wipro's HR and compensation teams later introduced additional conditions, in-

cluding a requirement for higher-level approval and a \$150,000 cap. Internal emails cited in the judgment showed the company's concerns about introducing restrictions after the scheme had already been communicated to employees. An earlier employment tribunal had accepted Wipro's argument that the bonus remained discretionary until formally communicated to the employee and therefore could be capped. The appeals tribunal disagreed, ruling that Desai approved the award under the terms originally communicated. Chandrasekharappa acquired a legal entitlement to the full bonus, judge Justice Carr KC said. Wipro was not entitled to "move the goalposts" by subsequently imposing new approval requirements or a payout cap.

Nestle rejects Maggi insect allegations

New Delhi: Nestle India has rejected allegations of presence of insect infestation in Maggi noodles, circulating on social media.

"We are yet to receive the complaint, as the account is unreachable. A detailed representation, supported by all relevant facts, quality records from batch and market samples, test reports, has been submitted to the competent authorities," a company statement said. Reacting to news, Nestle closed over 3% on Friday to close at Rs 1375.8 on BSE.

After Musk, Aur Kaun Banega Trillionaire?

Symbol of capitalism's capacity to think big

To be a trillionaire is not merely to stack a million million dollars in a vault and admire the zeroes. It's to embody a philosophical shift in capitalism itself. Elon Musk, now the world's first trillionaire, has not so much broken record as crossed a threshold in the evolution of wealth. The US already is home to 24 mn millionaire households with a combined \$50 tn wealth. Larry Page, the runner-up, sits at \$300 bn. Musk had traversed most of the way to his trillion before the SpaceX IPO. His \$1.1 tn fortune is tethered not to yachts or palaces but to promises: colonising space, solving labour shortages and harnessing unlimited energy. These are not balance-sheet items but wagers on civilisation's trajectory. Tesla, SpaceX and xAI form a Muskonom— an ecosystem where reusable rockets enable orbital data centres, which, in turn, power robots that may one day replace human drudgery. Each breakthrough is a lever, each lever a multiplier.

Economically, the trillion marks the point where wealth ceases to be personal and becomes planetary, a claim on the future. It channels risk capital into frontier technologies, turning imagination into collateral. The trillionaire is more a mechanism within the latest iteration of post-industrial tech-driven capitalism: a feedback loop between investor faith and technological possibility. Philosophically, the milestone is both banal and profound. Banal, because it was predictable— wealth scales with innovation, and Musk has monopolised the frontier. Profound, because it reframes aspiration. The billionaire on the street is nudged to think beyond restaurants and apps, to imagine colonies and robots. Musk's wealth, at one point, stops being a number and starts being a narrative, a pathfinder's beacon even.

In time, the trillion will be forgotten, subsumed by the next revolution. But, for now, it's a symbol of capitalism's restless capacity to think big and then turn those big thoughts into digits. Musk's triumph isn't in reaching this figure, but in making the trillion feel like a new beginning.

The larger story of Musk, the first trillionaire, lies not in wealth, but in power, tech and governance

\$1,000,000,000,000



Srinath Sridharan

For much of modern history, capitalism has been making the unimaginable seem ordinary. Millionaires once inspired awe. Billionaires subsequently stretched the boundaries of wealth beyond everyday comprehension. Now, with SpaceX's public debut propelling Elon Musk beyond the trillion-dollar threshold, another milestone has entered the economic lexicon.

On paper, the world's first trillionaire now commands wealth exceeding the annual economic output of many countries, a comparison that says less about one man than about the changing scale of capitalism itself. The world's first trillionaire is less a curiosity of arithmetic than a signpost of something larger. The real significance of this milestone lies not in the number of zeroes attached to one man's fortune, but in what it reveals about the changing relationship between wealth, technology and power.

True, a trillion-dollar fortune is largely a valuation, not a vault. But it influences the real world, not just in the number of zeroes attached to one man's fortune, but in what it reveals about the changing relationship between wealth, technology and power. True, a trillion-dollar fortune is largely a valuation, not a vault. But it influences the real world, not just in the number of zeroes attached to one man's fortune, but in what it reveals about the changing relationship between wealth, technology and power.



And a drumroll, too

new phase now appears to be emerging, one characterised by founder-led technological ecosystems whose influence increasingly extends across industries, borders, and even traditional distinctions between public and private capabilities.

John D Rockefeller accumulated wealth through oil. Henry Ford reshaped manufacturing. Bill Gates wrote the software revolution. Jeff Bezos has harnessed the internet. Their enterprises, however consequential, remained largely confined to identifiable sectors. Musk's constellation of ventures presents a different phenomenon altogether. EVs, reusable rockets, satellite communications, AI and autonomous technologies are no longer isolated domains. They increasingly reinforce one another, creating interconnected networks whose strategic significance extends well beyond their immediate commercial applications.

Traditional valuation methods were built around visible revenues, predictable cash flows and clearly defined industries. 20th-century capitalism sought separate institutions from individuals, with professional managers and governance frameworks designed to ensure that companies outlived charismatic founders.

The trillionaire phenomenon also reflects a deeper shift within capital markets. Investors are assigning extraordinary value not merely to present profits, but to the ability to shape technologies and industries still in their infancy.

fancy effectively transforming imagination itself into a source of economic power. Markets are increasingly financing possibilities rather than products, rewarding those capable of defining future economic landscapes.

Health alone has never been the defining source of power. Influence over infrastructure, communications and technology may ultimately prove more consequential. Satellite networks underpin strategic communications. AI promises to reshape industries and labour markets.

Space technologies possess commercial as well as geopolitical significance. In an earlier era, entrepreneurs depended upon governments for infrastructure and strategic capabilities. Increasingly, governments themselves are becoming users of private networks and technologies. The relationship between political authority and economic power may be undergoing a subtle, but profound, inversion, with implications extending far beyond commerce.

Perhaps for the first time, capital markets are conferring upon private actors forms of influence once associated primarily with states, making the governance of economic power an increasingly geopolitical question. Markets can assign extraordinary valuations. But legitimacy has traditionally flowed from institutions and democratic consent.

Political institutions evolved to oversee railroads, industrial trusts and

energy monopolies. Regulatory frameworks were conceived for an earlier technological landscape. Whether existing arrangements are sufficiently equipped to address corporations operating simultaneously across AI, communications, mobility and space infrastructure remains an open question.

None of this diminishes the extraordinary achievement represented by SpaceX. Few entrepreneurs have repeatedly converted improbable odds into commercially viable enterprises. Privatisation of space exploration, once the preserve of governments and science fiction, is now among the most dynamic sectors of the global economy.

Industrial capitalism produced empires. Digital capitalism created platforms. The emerging era appears to be generating technological ecosystems whose scale increasingly resembles that of nations. Their founders command levels of influence that earlier generations associated with industrial empires.

Perhaps the most unsettling aspect of the trillionaire era is that markets can create contractions of power faster than societies can create mechanisms to govern them. Technological revolutions move at exponential speeds while institutions rarely do. History, more often than not, is written in the wake of the technology.

The challenge confronting societies is no longer wealth without precedent, but power without precedent. The most consequential challenge is whether institutions, governance frameworks and democratic accountability can evolve rapidly enough to accommodate concentrations of economic power unprecedented in modern history.

Future historians may regard this moment not as the triumph of one remarkable entrepreneur but as the beginning of a new chapter in capitalism itself— one in which the distance separating corporations from nations, and founders from institutions, becomes progressively harder to discern. The world's first trillionaire may ultimately be remembered not for the wealth he accumulated but for the questions his rise forced capitalism itself to confront.

The writer is a corporate adviser



Markets are increasingly financing possibilities rather than products, rewarding those capable of defining future economic landscapes

City Maidans Mustn't Be Perks for a Few

Delhi High Court's sharp remarks on Gola's plan to take over green spaces occupied by Delhi Gymkhana Club and Indian Polo Association have thrown up an important question: what value do open spaces like maidans and large parks hold in a city? The court's warning that 'Delhi will choke' if its 'green lungs' disappear isn't rhetorical. In the world's most polluted capital city, every acre of open space matters as expanses like Lodhi Garden remind us.

Clubs and institutions are exclusive spaces, their facilities and grounds open only to members. Yet, ecological benefits of green cover of many of these places are not confined within their walls. Open spaces provide environmental services that extend well beyond club precincts. But India can't stop at having such enclaves as accidental providers of urban greenery. Every citizen should have access to expansive, free public spaces comparable to London's Hyde Park, New York's Central Park, or even Kolkata's Maidan and Mumbai's Shivaji Park. Even (read: especially) in space-starved cities, public commons should not be luxuries but essential infrastructure. Ecologist Harini Nagendra's research on Bengaluru's lakes, parks and neighbourhood greens tells us that urban commons also strengthen ecological resilience and social cohesion. Her work shows how citizens collectively restoring and managing shared spaces foster trust, belonging and civic participation across classes and communities.

As India urbanises rapidly, we can either continue treating open spaces as vacant land awaiting commercial use, or recognise them as indispensable public goods. The right to clean air, expanses—and grass—can't remain privileges for a few. Open spaces must be embedded in the very design of our cities.



THINK ABOUT IT

Seldon Search will (correctly) predict events from the future

Ask the Only Questions That'll Be Left to Ask

The internet has already become a vast mausoleum of everything that has ever happened, every sneeze of a celeb, every parliamentary walkout, every cat video uploaded... With the current pace of AI and data harvesting likely to quicken even more, soon, every query about the past—even the immediate past we quaintly call the present—will be answered. Which leaves us with only one frontier worth salvaging over, and inevitably cursing about before it comes to pass: a search engine that answers questions about the future. Enter Seldon Search, named after Hari Seldon, Isaac Asimov's great psychohistorian who theorised that with enough inputs and parameters fed into the equation, the trajectory of human society can be computed. Except, we'll go one step further and will be able to predict everything. You'll get (correct) answers for 'When will my boss resign?' 'When will India qualify for the football World Cup finals?' (actually, don't ask that), 'What's the right time to sell my SpaceX shares?' 'When will achhe din end?'

Seldon Search will make frustration futuristic. Instead of yelling at Google or Claude for finding you a restaurant that's shut down, you'll yell at Seldon for predicting your divorce date with unnerving accuracy. And, yet, you'll keep asking. Because once the past is fully indexed, the only thing left to search is tomorrow.

Oh, It's Much More Than Football



Prateek Singh

Football World Cup 2026 is well underway. Global sporting events of this scale are, at their core, economic events wearing football jerseys. A March 2025 FIFA-WTO Socioeconomic Impact Analysis 'pegs this year's tournament's contribution to global GDP at \$45 bn. That's not seen as a change, even by Nifty standards. For Indian markets, effects are already measurable. Consider media and broadcasting. After weeks of drama over who would carry the tournament in India, Zee Entertainment secured exclusive broadcast and streaming rights just 10 weeks before kick-off. On June 1, the day the deal was announced, ZEE's

stock surged nearly 7%, on a session when the Nifty itself was in red. The market wasn't watching football. It was watching the rights deal. Content is king, and a live FIFA World Cup is the kind of blockbuster no OTT platform can afford to miss.

Then there's travel and aviation. India's air traffic authority is seeing a surge in bookings from passionate fans who book flights for big tournament fans. India to North America traffic sees a measurable uptick during World Cups, lifting airlines, forex platforms and hotel aggregators. Back home, late-night matches mean late-night night drives; food delivery platforms see spikes well past midnight. Res-

taurant and sports bar footfalls climb through the knockout rounds. OTT subscriptions jump. LED TV sales tick up, and for digital ad platforms, a global event translates directly into brand spending. None of this is coincidence. Just predictable consumer behaviour that's undergirded by an increasingly globalised world.

However, most Indian investors



Not just market cap but market sombrero

still see FIFA as entertainment. Smart investors see it as a demand signal. The challenge isn't data. It's connecting dots in real time, before the crowd catches on.

This shift is increasingly giving rise to opinion-led investing, where market participants are not just reacting to financial results, but interpreting real-world events and their potential economic impact. In this environment, a FIFA broadcast rights deal, a budget announcement or an IPL playoff result can become catalysts for structured market conversations.

You may find it odd. You see life-threatening conditions. You're thinking, 'It bridges the distance between 'I have an idea' and 'I have a thesis'. Because your neighbour who is excitedly watching the World Cup may be unknowingly setting the media stock before most fund managers did. The game goes beyond the pitch. And, in 2026, so does investing.

The writer is CEO, Pocketful

Don't Weigh Pharma Down



Sandeep Das

Over the last year, the market for cheaper generic anti-obesity drugs has grown 10x in India. However, after weeks of drama over who would carry the tournament in India, Zee Entertainment secured exclusive broadcast and streaming rights just 10 weeks before kick-off. On June 1, the day the deal was announced, ZEE's stock surged nearly 7%, on a session when the Nifty itself was in red. The market wasn't watching football. It was watching the rights deal. Content is king, and a live FIFA World Cup is the kind of blockbuster no OTT platform can afford to miss.

persive option, with monthly treatment costs ranging from ₹13,000 to ₹25,000 a month. In contrast, Novo has reduced the prices of Ozempic and Wegovy, bringing monthly costs down to between ₹5,000 and ₹16,500. However, following the expiry of semaglutide's patent in March, an influx of cheaper generic versions, led by Torrent Pharmaceuticals, has entered the market, generating estimated sales of over ₹200 cr in the last 21 months.

In India, the biggest concern surrounding weight-loss drugs is misuse. They are increasingly being incorporated into pre-wedding weight loss regimens, particularly for brides, reflecting the growing pressure on young women to conform to societal beauty standards. Although these Schedule H drugs require a valid prescription, and cannot legally be sold over the counter, reports suggest that they remain easily accessible through chemists in major cities. Regulators recently intervened to halt Eli Lilly's 'We Know Now' obesity awareness campaign, warning that indirect or surrogate promotion that creates brand recall could violate advertising norms.

Weight-loss drugs also raise concerns about side-effects and long-term outcomes. According to British Medical Journal, people who discontinue these medications regain weight at an average rate of 0.8 kg a month, often returning to their baseline weight within 1.5 yrs. Rapid fat loss associated with GLP-1 drugs has also given rise to 'Ozempic face', referring to hollowed cheeks, sunken eyes, wrinkles and skin sagging that can make signs of ageing appear more pronounced.

The rise in sagging and wrinkled skin linked to rapid weight loss has also fuelled demand for dermatological clinics, plastic

surgery and cosmetic fillers in urban India. A larger concern, however, is the growing influence of weight-loss drugs on pharma research priorities and investments. According to Deloitte's May 2026 report, 'Navigating the GLP-1 Boom: Measuring the Return from Pharmaceutical Innovation', obesity treatments have, for the first time in 10 yrs, surpassed oncology as the largest contributor to late-stage pipeline value. Monjaro, for example, has life-threatening conditions.

Weight-loss drugs have clear clinical value for severely obese individuals and patients with diabetes, or other lifestyle-related diseases. However, is that an increasing share of demand appears to be coming from relatively healthy individuals seeking cosmetic weight loss, often influenced by social pressures, beauty standards or celebrity culture, rather than from those with the greatest clinical need. That trend raises important questions about the future direction of healthcare priorities and pharmaceutical innovation.



THE SPEAKING TREE

Turn Chaos Into Calm

SANT RAJINDER SINGH

While technology has brought the world closer together, it has also created a continuous bombardment of information that increasingly disturbs the mind and adds stress to daily life. The more information we are forced to process, the more difficult it becomes to find calmness within ourselves.

Meditation offers a refuge from the turbulence of the outer world. By withdrawing our attention from the outer world and focusing within, we gradually connect with the source of peace already present inside each of us. Desires and attachments constantly pull our attention outward and keep us entangled in the world of maya, or illusion. Through meditation, the mind gradually becomes focused on the Divine rather than the outer world. As concentration deepens, seekers begin to experience the soul's longing for the divine. The Divine Music reverberating within, the divine current through which all creation came into being. The Divine and the soul both reside within the human form, but the mind acts as the barrier separating the two. Through meditation on the divine Light and Music, the soul gradually transcends the mind. Through regular practice, we gradually experience calmness, peace, love and spiritual awakening within ourselves.



LOLLING ON SATURDAY

On Astro Turf

A startup promised to revolutionise World Cup football analytics by predicting odds using astrology. Investors poured in. After hearing that Mercury in retrograde explained why top strikers kept missing goals, investors advised coaches to bench certain key players during new moon and full moon. The company collapsed when fans realised horoscopes couldn't stop defenders from raising their hands and shouting 'Offside!' or players from diving.

United Ltd

Two rival football clubs merged with two rival corporations. The new entity was called 'United Limited'. The boardroom was filled with tension as executives wearing shaggy guards. Every quarterly report was presented as a match commentary: 'Profits are up, expenses are down, and the CFO has been cleared for insider trading. Trebling profits is our goal.' Fans loved it, until they realised that prices were never listed in stock options.

Boardroom Shootout

A CEO decided that all major business decisions would be settled by penalty shootouts. Marketing vs Finance quarrelled in the boardroom, with interns acting as goalkeepers. When Finance missed three shots, Marketing won the right to blow the annual budget on Instagram ads featuring Buddhist monks in SUVs. The CFO protested. But the CEO declared: 'Rules are rules. Next quarter, we'll settle dividends with a VAR review.'

Chat Room

But First Address Iniquity in Equity

Apreros' C'mon SEBI, Step Out & Save' by MCG Govardhana Rangan (June 12), the issues raised there to be deliberated by Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) and its Early Warning Group whose remit covers inter-regulatory issues is a bold time of a crisis. Yes, we are in the midst of a crisis yes, FSDC should periodically amend its charter to include emerging issues that merit consideration at the highest level. MNCs raising money in India is welcome, but pushing the can on to exuberant new-age retail investors doesn't bode well for our capital-hungry nation. It's time we made a distinction between OFPS and IPO as both have different intent, not loudly visible to ordinary investors. Private to Ferra, dilution was royalty loot by MNCs; now it's in the shape of OFPS. This 'ease of doing business' should be remedied. C/N Rath, Hyderabad

Opinion

SATURDAY, JUNE 13, 2026

Answers, not assumptions

Air India crash victims' families need closure, but the truth matters more than the timeline

THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY of the Air India Dreamliner crash in Ahmedabad has arrived without the one thing that the families of the 260 victims have been waiting for: answers. The failure of investigators to submit a final report within a year is unfortunate. International aviation norms envisage that accident investigations should ordinarily be completed within 12 months. Where that is not possible, investigating authorities are expected to provide updates on the progress of the probe and explain the reasons for the delay. The Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) has issued a status report, which will be followed by a final report in the coming months. For grieving families, every additional week extends an already painful wait. Yet if there is a choice between speed and certainty, the latter must prevail. Closure rests on incomplete facts, not on closure at all.

The Ahmedabad crash was one of the worst aviation disasters in India's history. It immediately raised difficult questions about aircraft systems, operational procedures, regulatory oversight and safety culture. Yet the preliminary report released by the AAIB last July succeeded mainly in deepening the mystery. The reference to the fuel cutoff switches moving from the run to the cutoff position within seconds of take-off, leading to the shutdown of both engines, was startling enough. The inclusion of a brief cockpit exchange between the pilots, without adequate context or explanation, proved even more consequential. While the report stopped short of drawing conclusions, it created a vacuum that was quickly filled by speculation. Sections of the international media interpreted the findings as evidence of pilot error. Pilot associations strongly objected. The result was a public debate driven more by conjecture than evidence.

That outcome should serve as a cautionary lesson for the final report. The purpose of an accident investigation, as recognised under Annex 13 of the Convention on International Civil Aviation, is not to apportion blame or determine liability. Its objective is to establish facts, identify causes and recommend measures to prevent similar accidents. This requires painstaking analysis of technical data, maintenance records, cockpit recordings, aircraft systems and human factors. Such work inevitably takes time, especially in a case involving multiple international stakeholders, including the aircraft manufacturer, engine maker and foreign regulators. The investigators must therefore resist any pressure to produce a report simply to satisfy a calendar deadline. What matters is not when the report arrives but whether its conclusions are comprehensive, transparent and capable of withstanding scrutiny.

A great deal rides on that credibility. Boeing's recent history of safety controversies and Air India's own operational challenges have already fuelled public suspicion. The perception, however unfair, that authorities may be shielding powerful corporate interests has gained traction in some quarters. That makes transparency all the more important. India is one of the world's fastest-growing aviation markets, with airlines placing record aircraft orders and carrying millions of first-time flyers each year. Public confidence in aviation safety cannot be sustained through assurances alone. It depends on trust in the institutions responsible for oversight and investigation. The final report on the Ahmedabad tragedy must therefore do more than explain what happened on a June afternoon a year ago. It must demonstrate that India's investigative machinery is capable of uncovering uncomfortable truths wherever they may lead. The families deserve closure. The flying public deserves confidence. Both require answers before anything else.

Benne it like Bengaluru

FOR A CITY whose benne dosa has taken the country by storm and earned global recognition as well, Bengaluru is basking in some culinary spotlight right now. Time Out's ranking of our desi Silicon Valley as the 13th best city globally for food, the only Indian contender in the top 20, is worth raising a toast to — with a filter coffee, or a lokum cocktail. Flavour-rich in its diversity that balances tradition with novelty, Bengaluru is joined on the list by destinations that have embraced multicultural influences equally, such as Lima, Ho Chi Minh City, Lisbon, Cape Town, and Osaka. With other expected A-listers such as New York, London, Bangkok, and Hong Kong, it is clear that cosmopolitanism and diversity unite all these cities. Food today is no longer just about traditional flavours or iconic dishes. It is also hugely about excitement, experience, and novelty. It is about an accepted common vocabulary where an American knows what *paalak* is and an Indian knows what *ceviche* is. Palates are no longer restricted to regions or nations. Flavours on a plate can be a beautiful amalgamation of ingredients and influences, as shown by the wildly popular Nikkei — a fusion of Japanese and Peruvian cuisines.

Home to well-travelled tech yuppies and numerous startup founders, Bengaluru today speaks that global language, which is amply reflected in its numerous bars and cafes. It balances nostalgia and modernity with aplomb with its decades-old tiffin rooms where you can eat to your fill in less than ₹200, or have a farm-to-fork haute cuisine experience priced at tidy thousands. For any brand targeting millennials or Gen Z, a presence in Bengaluru is imperative. This includes exciting new restaurant and hotel launches, giving the city a vibrant dining-out culture where the cocktails are creative, the coffee is strong, the pizzas are unique, and the biryani is as done as the dosa is benne.

The city is also unique in being a melting pot of culinary influences from neighbouring states of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala, not just within Bengaluru. In Delhi, a hot contender for one of India's favourite food destinations, the longest queues currently are for the benne dosa, Bengaluru's best-known culinary export. Restaurants offering cuisine from the southern part of the country boldly advertise the availability of this particular dosa to attract crowds. A food startup with the same name as the dosa variety became a huge hit when it launched in Mumbai and later Delhi, with serpentine waiting lines reminiscent of people lined up for a US visa. So hectic is business that they don't even offer seating, lest customers get too comfortable. When a popular Bengaluru cafe opened its doors in Pune a few months back, the crowd resembled a mini stampede.

Importantly, a global recognition for an Indian city not known for its orange curries and *tandoori* items — dishes most synonymous with Indian food worldwide — is also a recognition of India's culinary diversity. It is an acknowledgment that India is more than butter chicken and biryani, and that there are myriad flavours that remain to be explored. And that should be enough to silence the social media flutter questioning the choice over Delhi, Lucknow, Kolkata, or Amritsar. Much unpalatable outrage has been posted overlooking the culinary riches of other cities famous for their iconic dishes and choosing Bengaluru instead. The naysayers can step aside with their chat, *chole bhature*, kebabs, *pankakes*, and *bulachas*. It is time to move beyond food parochialism and add a new gastronomic gem to India's acknowledged hotspots. Let Bengaluru have its culinary moment. It might be Bhubaneswar next with its *dahibara aloo dum*, Shillong with its *jadoh*, or Benaras with its *tamatar ki chaat*. That is some promising food for thought.



IWINDER GILL

iwinder.gill@expressindia.com

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AUGMENTING NARI SHAKTI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi

I am particularly happy to see India's *Nari Shakti* make a mark in sectors like science, space and innovation. Their growing participation in emerging fields such as drone technology is opening new avenues of opportunity and transforming development landscape across the nation

INDIAN SOLAR POWER

INDIA IS EXCEPTIONAL AT INSTALLING SOLAR CAPACITY, BUT THE CONTEST LIES IN MANUFACTURING

The gigawatt and the gap

AMIT KAPOOR

Chair, Institute for Competitiveness
X@kautilya



panel imports from China collapsed by over 85% in value from ₹23,678 crore to ₹3,430 crore, cell imports rose by 75% in value and nearly three times in volume. The total solar import bill tells its own story — ₹19,669 crore in FY23, peaking at ₹54,208 crore in FY24 as India rushed to commission projects ahead of tightening domestic content rules, and moderating to ₹31,572 crore in FY26. Therefore, even when the composition of the imports changed, the underlying dependency remains unchanged.

Move one step further up the supply chain and the picture sharpens considerably. Undiffused silicon wafers, the substrate from which solar cells are made, more than doubled in import volume between FY25 and FY26, with China supplying over 99% of India's needs. This is simply where the current buildout ends and the next one needs to start.

There are early signals of diversification at the margins worth noting. Indonesia, which barely registered in India's cell import data two years ago, supplied ₹2,186 crore worth of cells in FY26. Ethiopia, improbably, emerged as an entirely new source at ₹1,396 crore, essentially from zero the prior year. Thailand and Vietnam also hold meaningful shares. While the supply base is not static, it is also worth stepping back to note that this challenge is not uniquely India's.

China produced 92% of cells and 85% of finished panels as recently as 2023. India, Indonesia, and Turkey together account for 75% of China's cell exports in 2025, hence every major solar market is navigating the same upstream dependency. India, however, with its growth aspirations, needs to think deeply about building resilience.

The Indian government is aware of this, which is why the June 1 deadline for ALMM List II has become one of the most

The logic that drove India to build solar in the first place applies just as much to the cells and wafers inside those panels as it does to the fossil fuels they are replacing

watched policy moments in Indian solar this year. The rule is straightforward — from that date, every module used in government-backed, open-access, and net-metering projects must be made with cells sourced from an approved Indian manufacturer. What List II did for modules by forcing a domestic manufacturing buildout that few thought achievable at the time: List II is now attempting for cells. The challenge is that the two transitions are not equivalent. India has around 27-28 Gw of total installed solar cell manufacturing capacity behind an enlisted module assembly base that has crossed 100 Gw, and the gap is not simply a question of investment. Newly commissioned cell lines, as developers point out, typically need 6-8 months to stabilise before they can deliver the consistency that large-scale project execution demands. Manu-

facturers who have committed capital on the basis of the June deadline see any extension differently as an erosion of the policy certainty that justified their investment in the first place. How that tension resolves will shape not just this deadline, but the credibility of every upstream policy signal that follows it.

Beyond the immediate policy debate sits a structural reality that no single deadline can resolve. The IEA in 2026 noted that China controls over 95% of global wafer production. When Beijing imposed export controls on seven heavy rare earth elements in April 2025, the solar sector was spared. The lesson, however, was not subtle — concentrated supply chains are concentrated risks, and the concentration in solar runs deep. India has spent the better part of a decade building a solar industry to reduce its historic dependence on fossil fuel imports. The logic that drove India to build solar in the first place — reducing exposure to concentrated external supply — applies just as much to the cells and wafers inside those panels as it does to the fossil fuels they are replacing.

None of this diminishes what India has built or the speed at which it has built it. India added more solar in FY26 than most countries have built in total. The compression of time in its solar story reflects something real about what the country can do when policy, capital, and industrial ambition align. What comes next is upstream — cells, wafers, ingots, and then polysilicon. The government has already signalled the ALMM List III for wafers by 2028. The direction is unambiguous, but the question is whether India can move up that chain fast enough to matter before the geopolitics of clean energy hardens into a structure as difficult to escape as the one it is trying to leave behind.

With inputs from Meenakshi Ajith, development policy lead, Institute for Competitiveness

From ambition to execution



NIKHIL KAMATH

Co-founder, Zerodha and True Beacon

The transition from digital India to a powerful deeptech India will represent a crucial maturity milestone, signalling that we are ready to co-author the future of foundational tech

INDIA'S STARTUP ECOSYSTEM has undergone a quiet but decisive transformation over the past decade. In 2010, when Zerodha started, India had fewer than 1,000 registered startups. Today, we have crossed 2.3 lakh. Indian entrepreneurs are no longer just service providers to the world. They're solving problems that have traditionally required imports, building defensible intellectual property (IP) at home, and competing globally.

Not long ago, the Indian startup narrative was all about building software cheaper, supporting Western companies better, and optimising margins. Today's ambition is significantly different. Founders are asking — what have we historically imported that we could own? What can we build in India that has not been attempted before?

In defence, startups are developing indigenous imaging systems previously unavailable domestically. In semiconductors, we're designing chips, the capability we had outsourced in the past. In renewable energy, deep tech ventures are engineering battery storage and systems that compete with international alternatives. In manufacturing, precision-engineering startups are designing critical components.

Clearly, Indian startups are no longer building service layers. They're identifying gaps in critical infrastructure and building defensible IP around them. This shift has been driven by four key developments.

The first is funding, which has evolved significantly in structure and intent. Government-backed support through Small Industries Development Bank of India, expanded from ₹10,000 crore scheme to

₹20,000 crore now, signals that private investors can bet on Indian deeptech without bearing all the downside alone. Alongside this, the ₹1 lakh crore Research, Development & Innovation Fund (2025) tolerates the 15-20 year timelines required for semiconductor startups, advanced biotech, and materials science, unlike venture capital, which optimises for 7-10 year exits. The RDI Fund is structured as mix of equity, low-cost debt, and grants, explicitly designed to support the long tail of research & development that venture capitalists naturally avoid.

The second is demand. Policy matters most when it creates demand, not just incentives. The Production Linked Incentive scheme, the request-for-quotation preference for Indian solutions in government procurement, and the mandate for defence platforms to integrate indigenous solutions are all important steps. For instance, a startup building a renewable energy management system knows the grid operators will deploy it. This changes the pitch, timeline, and capital path. Instead of hoping for adoption, founders know the addressable market is real.

The third is skilling. Capital and market signals create conditions for growth, but skilling ultimately determines the output. Indian companies are creating their own talent pipelines and building training programs. This works, but it's expensive and inefficient.

The fourth is the university layer. Thousands of startups are now emerging from campus ecosystems where faculty,

researchers, and students work together on real-world problems instead of only theoretical ideas. Universities are providing structured incubation platforms and also producing more patents. Research is increasingly moving out of labs and into practical use, with solutions being built in the campuses of India for challenges faced around the world.

But while important, these developments only capture one side of the story. The next phase will test whether the momentum can translate into sustained capability at scale.

Indian startups are no longer building service layers. They're identifying gaps in critical infrastructure and building defensible IP around them

And this harder part of sustained capability isn't behind us; it's ahead. Over the next 20 years, India's startup ecosystem will be tested on a few things — can we staff 500 active deeptech companies? Do we have the training infrastructure to produce the number of material scientists, semiconductor engineers, and advanced manufacturing technicians required? Do we have world-class labs to prove our products to global buyers, or do we remain dependent on foreign test facilities, pushing costs and timelines? Do we have the initial public offering market and strategic merger & acquisition depth to create wealth that can be reinvested?

India is also enabling several programs through the ecosystem and government that act as platforms for startups in critical deep-tech sectors — such as semiconductors, space, and biotechnology. Programs such as Bharat Innovates of the ministry of education that support deep-tech startups will be effective

in shifting the narrative of Indian tech from standard software-as-a-service (SaaS) models to hard-engineered, IP-driven solutions. Through this the startups emerging from education institutions across the country are also supported.

This transition from digital India to a powerful deeptech India will represent a crucial maturity milestone, signalling to global venture capital and research consortia that we are ready to co-author the future of foundational technology.

As India attempts to move from startup scale to technological depth, initiatives that create space for industry-government, researchers, investors, and young innovators to engage with the harder questions around execution, capability-building, and long-term competitiveness will be essential.

Sustaining this progress will require action on three fronts. First, unblocking capital disbursement is imperative. The grants already exist, but they must be made to flow on time and at scale. Second, demand certificates must be created through publicly committed five-year roadmaps, where government procurement consistently prefers Indian deeptech. This will allow founders to plan with confidence. Third, the middle layer — vocational skilling, industry apprenticeships, and supply chain development — must be built, as it matters far more at this stage than another round of startup incentives.

The next few years will show whether we can sustain the momentum or if it was a cyclical aberration. Should these conditions be met, we will see a different India in a decade.

This is where the next phase of India's innovation system will be defined.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Leverage deals, AI

Apropos of "PM urges states to harness trade deals, AI" (FE, June 12), Prime Minister Narendra Modi's exhortation at the NITI Aayog meeting to states to capitalise on trade agreements and artificial intelligence reflects a pragmatic recognition of evolving global economic dynamics.

Subnational governments must proactively position themselves to attract investments and augment export competitiveness. Equally transformative is AI, whose integration into various aspects can substantially elevate productivity and efficiency. Yet, the dividends of these opportunities are contingent upon robust digital infrastructure,

regulatory agility, and human-capital development. States that successfully synchronise technological innovation with trade-led growth will emerge as engines of India's economic resilience.

—N. Sathish Reddy, Bangalore

Let football shine

As another Fifa World Cup begins, India's step-motherly treatment of

football while cricket enjoys a monopoly over state funding and media attention is a systemic tragedy.

The government must mandate corporate-sponsored district leagues and build at least five high-quality synthetic turf in every district.

—Vijaykumar HK, Raichur

Write to us at letters@expressindia.com

Economy

SATURDAY, JUNE 13, 2026

IN THE NEWS

INDIA WILLING TO LET FISCAL DEFICIT WIDEN

India is preparing for a wider-than-expected budget deficit this year, Bloomberg News reported on Friday, citing an official familiar with the matter, as the war in Iran drives up energy subsidy costs and adds pressure on government finances.

INDIA-EU DEAL TO SPUR TRADE WITH GERMANY

THE PROPOSED India-European Union Free Trade Agreement (FTA) will give a fresh momentum to Germany-India trade ties and create new opportunities for German companies to expand their presence, Germany's Consul General in Mumbai Christoph Hallier said. Germany is one of the founding members of the European Union.

Customs duty relief granted for nuclear imports

THE FINANCE MINISTRY has waived customs duties on all goods imported for nuclear power generation, covering imports made between April 1, 2019, and January 31, 2026, as per government order on Thursday. The exemption was extended to 2035 in the February Budget.

Some Jan Vishwas Act provisions to come into force

A NUMBER OF provisions of the Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Act, 2026 will come into force from June 19 this year, according to an official notification issued on Friday. In April, Parliament passed the law which amended 784 provisions in 79 central laws for decriminalising and rationalising minor offences to further improve the country's business environment.

MOVE TARGETTED AT INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL CONSUMERS

Govt restricts bulk fuel buying at retail outlets

● Daily diesel sales capped at 200 litres per vehicle

SAURAV ANAND
New Delhi, June 12

THE GOVERNMENT HAS barred industrial, commercial and institutional fuel consumers from purchasing petrol and diesel at retail stations and capped daily diesel sales to 200 litres per vehicle amid disruptions to global supply chains from the war in West Asia, pressure on fuel availability, and a sharp rise in retail fuel purchases across the country.

The restrictions, imposed through the Petrol (Motor Spirit) and Diesel (High Speed Diesel) (Temporary Regulation of Supply through Retail Outlets) Order, 2026, will initially remain in force for 90 days. The move was necessitated by rising fuel demand, elevated crude oil prices and widening under-recoveries incurred by state-run oil marketing companies.

The petroleum ministry said in a notification that the "current prevailing geopolitical situation affecting certain regions of the world has adversely affecting international petroleum supply chains, shipping logistics and availability of petroleum products necessitates prudent management and conservation of available supplies and raises the need to deal with such unpredictable situations in a formal manner."

The government said it had observed "abnormal increases in sales of Motor Spirit (MS) and

CURBING ACCESS

Industrial, commercial users have shifted bulk fuel purchases to retail pumps because of the widening gap between retail and bulk fuel prices

■ In Delhi, retail diesel is priced at ₹5.20 per litre, while bulk diesel costs ₹134.50 per litre, creating a difference of nearly ₹40 per litre

■ Industrial and commercial customers shifting to retail stations was resulting in diversion of supplies intended for retail consumers

High Speed Diesel (HSD) through Retail Outlets in certain parts of the country" driven by industrial, commercial and institutional consumers shifting from bulk procurement to retail pumps because of the widening gap between retail and bulk fuel prices. According to the notification, the shift "resulting in diversion of supplies intended for retail consumers and creating the potential for localised shortages and disruption of essential services to common man."

Meanwhile, oil marketing companies witnessed a 58% decline in HSD sales in May due to higher prices. The current situation reflects "uneven extraordinary demand growth in some retail outlets due to shifting of bulk diesel volume to PSU Oil Marketing Retail Outlets," the ministry added.

According to the order, "Institutional & Direct or Industrial & Commercial customers shall not procure or cause to be procured MS and/or HSD from



■ Nearly 20% of India's 784 districts witnessed unusually high growth in petrol and diesel demand

■ 327 districts saw over 10% growth in diesel sales via PSU retail outlets, while 80 districts registered growth exceeding 30%

Retail Outlets and shall only source their MS/HSD requirements from their own consumer pumps."

The government also directed that retail dealers shall dispense diesel "only in a vehicle tank, or PISO-approved containers, and not exceeding 200 litres in a day to a customer/vehicle and this HSD cannot be resold."

The diesel cap could impact segments of the transport sector. Multi-axle trucks and tractor-trailers used for interstate logistics typically carry fuel tanks ranging from 365 litres to 600 litres, while intercity and sleeper buses generally have capacities of 350-600 litres, substantially above the newly prescribed daily purchase limit.

The order comes after the country witnessed a sharp rise in fuel sales. According to the oil ministry, nearly 20% of India's roughly 784 districts have witnessed unusually high growth in petrol and diesel demand, driven partly by agricultural activity

and partly by industrial consumers crowding retail outlets for cheaper diesel supplies.

"This graduated price support is intended to protect retail consumers and ensure affordability of fuel for households, farmers and other end-users. This support is not meant for industrial and bulk supplies, where pricing continues to track international market prices, resulting in retail diesel being around ₹40 per litre cheaper than bulk diesel," it said.

In Delhi, retail diesel is priced at ₹5.20 per litre, while bulk diesel costs ₹134.50 per litre, creating a difference of nearly ₹40 per litre.

The ministry said the measures were aimed at large consumers seeking to take advantage of the price arbitrage between retail and bulk diesel.

The government maintained that the order is a temporary measure and "not a rationing measure," adding that there is no shortage of petrol or diesel in the country.

Retail food inflation spikes to 4.78% in May

SANDIP DAS
New Delhi, June 12

FOOD INFLATION, AS measured by the recently revised Consumer Food Price Index, rose sharply to 4.78% in May, primarily because tomatoes and ginger became costlier. Sequentially, the all-India Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI) rose by 0.91% in the month. Food inflation was 4.2% in April 2026, and it was in the negative territory for seven months through December 2025.

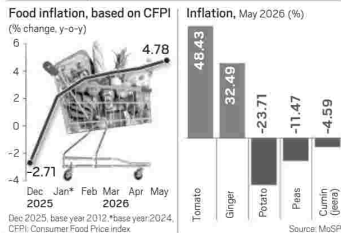
Food inflation was 2.13% in January, when the new consumer price index (CPI) series with a base year of 2024 was introduced by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

Using both the current and previous Consumer Price Index (CPI) series (the latter with 2012 as the base year), food inflation in May was the steepest in 16 months.

Despite the rise in food inflation, prices of potato (-23.71%), peas (-11.47%) and cumin (jeera) declined in May 2026 on a year-on-year basis. These three commodities have a combined weightage of 1.24% in the CPI basket. However, inflation in tomato (48.43%) and ginger (32.49%) reported steep hikes, according to the official statement by the statistics ministry.

Experts say that below-normal monsoon rains are likely to

TOMATO, EDIBLE OILS DEARER



hit crop output and could lead to even higher food inflation in the coming months.

Madan Sabnavis, chief economist, Bank of Baroda, said, "Food price inflation has been high due to specific products witnessing higher prices such as tomato even as others showed declines. Edible oils continue to witness higher price increases." Sabnavis said the monsoon impact will be reflected in food product prices.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) last month downgraded its forecast of "below normal" southwest monsoon rainfall for June-September this year to 90% of the long-period average, from 92% stated last month, with a high 84% chance that the rains will fall in the "deficient

to below normal" range. The Met department stated that India is likely to experience "moderate to strong" El Niño conditions during the southwest monsoon season.

Rahul Agrawal, principal economist, ICRA, said inflation movement would depend on how geopolitical and macro developments, including the severity of the El Niño, translate to a generalisation of inflationary pressures.

The ministry had stated that from the beginning of 2026, the base year for measuring CPI has been revised from 2012 to 2024 using the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey 2023-24. The weightage of CPI in PPI has declined to about 36.73% from 45.86% in the new series.

El Nino active, to strengthen during monsoon, says IMD

SANDIP DAS
New Delhi, June 12

THE INDIA METEOROLOGICAL Department (IMD) on Friday confirmed the emergence of El Niño conditions over equatorial Pacific Ocean, which is likely to strengthen further during the ongoing southwest monsoon season (June-September).

The latest monsoon mission coupled forecast system plume and probability forecasts suggest "moderate to strong" El Niño conditions during the monsoon season. "Sea surface temperatures in the central tropical Pacific exceeded the El Niño threshold in June 2026," the met department stated. El Niño is a natural climate pattern associated with warmer-than-normal sea surface tempera-



tures in the equatorial Pacific Ocean. In India, it has been linked with weaker monsoon rainfall, higher temperatures, and a decline in crop production.

These southwest monsoon rains during their four-month sojourn, account for around 75% of the country's annual precipitation. Adequate rainfall during monsoon boosts kharif

crop prospects while providing adequate soil moisture for rabi crops.

The Met department stated that while weak El Niño conditions are likely in June, "weak to moderate" conditions would prevail subsequently in the July-August period. In September, "moderate to strong" El Niño conditions may prevail.

It also stated that "neutral" Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) conditions, which aid monsoon progress, are currently present over the Indian Ocean. The latest forecast indicates these conditions are likely to continue till the end of the monsoon season.

IMD said that monsoon advanced into some more parts of West Bengal, Bihar, and some parts of Odisha and Jharkhand on Friday.

SWITZERLAND, INDIA DISCUSS PHARMA OPPORTUNITIES



Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal chairs a meeting with State Secretary for Economic Affairs of Switzerland Helene Budigger Artieda and others, in Berne on Friday. Goyal discussed strengthening innovation, as well as exploring new investment opportunities for Swiss pharma companies in India's healthcare and life sciences sector

SC's AI road map favours caution over haste

JYOTSNA BHATNAGAR
Ahmedabad, June 12

THE SUPREME COURT'S recent draft guidelines on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in courts have stirred a debate among various stakeholders on whether these guardrails will enable wider adoption of technology or slow it down.

The draft is open for comments until June 20, after which final guidelines are expected to be put in place.

A contentious aspect of the proposed regulations is the requirement that lawyers disclose the use of AI in their filings and verify what the technology produces. While AI tools assist lawyers in searching case law, reviewing documents and preparing drafts in a fraction of the usual time, sources said the technology can "hallucinate," citing the possibility of AI suggesting judgments that do not exist. The draft regulations, however, make it abundantly clear that when this happens, the lawyer, not the machine, will be answerable.

Broadly welcoming the framework's intent, Ranjana Adhikari, partner at Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas, maintained that the regulations represent

JUDGMENT CALL

■ Law firms, while broadly welcoming the Supreme Court's draft guidelines on use of AI in courts, have raised some concerns on its wider adoption

■ Courts are concerned that AI technology can "hallucinate," and may suggest judgments that do not exist



review the output that the platform produces," said Amit Kothiyal, India Head of Stockholm-based Legora, one of the world's largest legaltech AI companies.

Part of the time AI saves would "now go into checking its work." Most lawyers are now investing some of that time back to verify and validate the citations before finalisation. The role of the lawyer in some sense is changing to verification as opposed to drafting," he said.

Aparajita Rana, technology partner at AZB & Partners,

responsible way. "This will help in advocating AI with cautious optimism."

Priyanka, chief operating officer of Manupatra Information Solutions, a pioneer in legal online research in India, said safeguards such as disclosure, verification and audits "should be viewed as trust-building mechanisms rather than barriers to adoption. She said that research that a lawyer can cross-check against linked sources should not face the same scrutiny as output that could sway a case. "AI-assisted legal research supported by verifiable citations and traceable source links should not be subject to the same scrutiny as AI-generated evidence of substantive adjudicated recommendations." Whatever the calibration, human in the loop is non-negotiable, he emphasised.

Rana of AZB pointed out that the draft provides only for internal audits of AI use, with no duty to share findings. "However, having only in-house audits to check AI use, not disclosing the actual risks visible from such audits, will not help awareness of AI incidents in the sector," she said, making the case for independent third-party audits.

Edible oil imports rise 6.7% in May

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, June 12

INDIA'S EDIBLE OIL imports rose 6.7% in May to nearly 1.4 million tonne, mainly due to increase in shipments of crude soyabean oil, according to industry body Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEA).

Edible oils imports were around 1.3 million tonne in the same month last year. The year-on-year increase in imports was driven by imports of crude soyabean oil, which rose to 493,854 tonne from 398,585 tonne in May 2025, data showed.

Inward shipments of non-edible oils jumped over twofold to 26,202 tonne last month from 12,040 tonne in May 2025. As a result, India's imports of vegetable oils — which comprises both edible and non-edible oil — increased 8% to 1.37 million tonne last month compared with 1.27 million tonne in May 2025.

During the first seven months of the 2025-26 oil year, total vegetable oil imports rose 1.2% to 9.4 million tonne from 8.4 million tonne in the corresponding period last year. Edible oil imports between November 2025 and May 2026 grew 13% to 9.2 million tonne. Non-edible oil shipments fell to 147,710 tonne from 207,505 tonne during this period.

NCLT dismisses insolvency plea against NMRC

MANU KAUSHIK
New Delhi, June 12

THE NATIONAL COMPANY Law Tribunal (NCLT) rejected an insolvency petition filed against Noida Metro Rail Corporation (NMRC), stating that the claims raised by the opposing party — Empire Transport Services (ETS) — stem from a pre-existing dispute, and hence can't be pursued under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC).

The NCLT bench noted that the dispute between NMRC and the operational creditor (ETS) existed before the insolvency notice was issued against the state-owned metro operator. Relying on the Supreme Court's landmark ruling in Mobilox Innovations vs Kirusa Software, the tribunal said the existence of a genuine dispute prior to the demand notice is adequate to dismiss a plea for initiating the corporate insolvency resolution process (CIRP).

The case pertains to an agreement between ETS and NMRC under which the former was supposed to provide day-to-day running of 100 low-floor air conditioned CNG-fuelled buses in Noida, Greater Noida and the Noida-Greater Noida connectivity routes. But just 50

PAY DISPUTE



■ ETS had agreed to provide 100 CNG buses in Noida, but delivered 50

■ ETS issued a notice under IBC, claiming that NMRC delayed payment

■ NMRC argued that no payment default had occurred under IBC

buses were put into service. Following the alleged delay in payment by NMRC, ETS issued a notice under Section 8 of the IBC, claiming default of payment and subsequently filed a petition against NMRC.

NMRC argued that no payment default had occurred under the IBC. It also alleged that ETS failed to provide services as per the specifications of the contract in addition to committing multiple breaches of their agreement, which was communicated to ETS via several show-cause notices.

China's quest for a global role for the renminbi

The weaponisation of financial markets is driving the search for less risky alternatives, and China is stepping into the breach



SHYAM SARAN

willingness to step into the breach. The Chinese option is beginning to command serious attention. William White, a former chief economist of the Bank of International Settlements, foresees a "stagflationary world marked by the formation of two blocs, one dollar-based, the other renminbi-based, with Chinese currency backed increasingly by gold." (*Financial Times* June 6)

China has been seeking to internationalise its currency, the renminbi (RMB), for several years now. This effort has acquired greater urgency of late. In February, the Chinese party journal *Qiushi* published remarks made by President Xi Jinping in 2024, calling for the RMB to become a "global currency" that is "widely used in international trade, investment and foreign exchange markets and holds global reserve currency status."

The unpredictability of the United States' economic policies, its mounting market for US Treasuries, reports that gold has, for the first time in the post-World War II era, overtaken the dollar in the foreign exchange reserves held by central banks, and Donald Trump's wholesale weaponisation of trade and financial markets are prompting a search for less risky alternatives. China is signalling its



ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

It was the Global Financial Crisis of 2007-08 that led China to seek to diversify away from a dollar-centric international currency and financial system. In 2009, China initiated a policy of progressively enhancing the cross-border use of the RMB, leveraging China's emergence as the world's largest trading nation, accounting for 15 per cent of global trade. The use of RMB in cross-border trade settlement now accounts for about 35 per cent, compared to 10 per cent in 2017. China and Russia now settle 90 per cent of their \$245 billion trade in their national currencies. China and Brazil settle 41 per cent of their trade in RMB.

In 2015, China sought and obtained approval for the inclusion of the RMB in the International Monetary Fund basket of reserve currencies despite not being a convertible currency like the US dollar, the euro, and the British pound. This was more a symbolic move than a

substantive one. Nevertheless, the RMB is now 2.3 per cent of global foreign exchange reserves, up from virtually zero in 2015.

In 2010, China forayed into the international debt market by launching offshore RMB-denominated dim-sum bonds in Hong Kong and subsequently, the onshore RMB-denominated panda bonds in mainland China. The outstanding volume of dim-sum bonds is now \$79 billion, and these can now be listed and traded in London and Luxembourg. The total outstanding volume of offshore RMB-denominated bonds stands at \$53 billion. Both these instruments are showing strong growth and rising popularity as China continues to maintain relatively low interest rates, which makes RMB-denominated debt sig-

nificantly cheaper than loans in the US dollar. China has a large and growing inter-bank bond market, which is now \$2 trillion, second only to the US market of \$58 trillion. It is now open to international investors, though the offtake is currently modest at \$430 billion. The Hong Kong-Mainland Bond Connect, set up in 2017, has also made it easier for foreigners to invest in Chinese bonds through Hong Kong's more highly developed international financial market. This reached a peak of \$180 billion in monthly turnover in March 2026. As the dollar begins to carry more risk, Chinese bonds will attract more foreign interest.

China's securities market is also progressively being opened to foreign investors. It is a large and liquid

market, with a market capitalisation of \$7 trillion, still far behind the US (\$70 trillion) but steadily gaining in volume. This has also been promoted by the Hong Kong-Shanghai Stock Connect and the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Stock Connect. This allows mainland residents to invest in securities listed in Hong Kong and for foreigners to invest in Chinese securities listed in Shanghai. Foreign holdings are 5 per cent but rising. This reverses the trend of the past few years, when there was growing pessimism about the prospects of the Chinese economy, beset, as it has been, with a persistent property crisis and low consumption.

While integrating itself more extensively in the international financial market, China has pursued

a parallel international payments system. This has accelerated with the weaponisation of the dollar by the US, in particular the freezing of nearly \$300 billion of Russian assets in foreign banks since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The China International Payment System (CIPS) was set up in 2015 and worked closely with the dominant SWIFT system. Its messaging system conforms to international standards and works seamlessly with SWIFT. It has witnessed rapid progress with 193 direct participants and 1,514 indirect participants registered with it, comprising 4,900 banking institutions in 189 countries. In 2024-25, CIPS handled \$2.8 million transactions worth \$25 trillion. The Iran war and the sweeping sanctions imposed by the US have led to a major spike in the use of CIPS, whose average daily transaction value reached \$157 billion in March.

China is a pioneer in establishing a Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) and this is at the core of the mBridge project, which allows central banks of participating countries virtually instant and direct cross-border currency settlements. Currently, the central banks of China, the UAE, Thailand, South Africa and the Hong Kong Monetary Authority are participating and the current volume of transactions handled is \$55 billion, mostly involving the RMB.

The mBridge arrangement allows China to avoid the full convertibility of its currency and yet participate in an efficient cross-border currency exchange. China is promoting mBridge among Brics-plus countries. The final component of China's pursuit of RMB internationalisation is the Shanghai International Energy Exchange and the associated Shanghai Gold Exchange. The so-called petro-yuan market based in Shanghai offers RMB-denominated oil futures. Yuan holdings can be converted into gold at the Gold Exchange, thereby reducing currency risk. The Shanghai oil index is already ranked third after Brent and West Texas Index. Estimates suggest that oil trade settled in RMB remains low at about 5 per cent but is steadily rising in volume.

What do these developments add up to? One, China's strategy has been to pursue deeper integration into the global economy and its financial markets before considering the full convertibility of its currency with its attendant risk of volatility.

Two, it has offered RMB-based transactions not as a substitute for the dollar but as a means of reducing risk in a global economy roiled by unpredictability and the eroding credibility of the US currency.

And three, this shift will have geopolitical consequences including the possible emergence of an RMB-dominated Asian economy.

The writer is a former foreign secretary

Centres of concern



VIEWPOINT DEVANGSHU DATTA

centres for AI innovation.

Many companies are salivating at the prospect. The DC build-out, driving demand for turbines (Tribeni Turbine), specialty cables (APAR Industries), transformers (Siemens Energy, CG Power), chillers and cooling towers (Thermax) and skids (Praj Industries). Diesel Genset maker Cummins says DCs already contribute 30-35 per cent of domestic revenue. Plus, of course, there's an opportunity in construction.

Once operational, DCs generate employment. Workers include mechanical and electrical engineers, cooling plant operators, cybersecurity experts, and a whole bunch of specialised operatives. DC Data Centre Infrastructure Management (DCIM). DCIM involves using the software and tools required to monitor and manage servers, power units, cooling systems, etc. Given appropriate skills, DCs could help mitigate the unemployment crisis.

All this states win-win and states are competing to host DCs. If successful, such plans also fructify, and PLI (production-linked incentive) schemes result in the local manufacturing of some of the gear, that would add more domestic layers to the ecosystem.

So where are the hurdles? DCs are siphoning water. It comes to power and water consumption. By 2030, they would generate 8-10 percent of global power demand. They require huge quantities of water for cooling. Moreover, they can be very noisy and polluting because the nature of power demand (100 per cent uptime) leads to the need for diesel gensets. It is water-stressed, and it struggles to meet peak power demands. It is also the world's most polluted place. While policymakers are pushing DCs,

doing so without due regard to addressing these challenges could lead to a sustainability crisis, and, ultimately, political backlash.

Recent experience in the United States (US) is worth quoting. In the first half of calendar 2025, Harvard economist Jason Furman calculated that investment in DCs and cloud-related infrastructure accounted for roughly 4 per cent of US gross domestic product (GDP) and contributed over 90 per cent of GDP growth.

But a recent Gallup poll showed that 71 per cent of Americans now oppose the construction of DCs in local communities, with 48 per cent strongly opposed. Only 53 per cent of Americans oppose nuclear plants. Forty-eight US DC projects, worth \$156 billion, were blocked or stalled in 2025, and another 20 were killed by March 2026. In Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, and other nations have seen similar civil society pushback against DCs. These are now the major flashpoint for NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) activism.

This growing resistance is being driven by concern over water and energy consumption, inflated utility bills, and noise pollution. Those worries will inevitably arise in India as well and rolling out DCs without due regard would be inconsistent with sustainability goals.

These concerns can be addressed by good design policies that pay heed to sustainability, for, instance, using and recycling wastewater, inducing renewables with battery storage and the need for diesel gensets, etc. But sustainability has to be built into the policy structure and it must be stringently enforced in design. Otherwise the DC buildout could be derailed.

Modi past 12, five challenges

After what Mr Modi and the vast numbers of his supporters believe he has done for India, it's time we started looking at what lies ahead. Or at his challenges in the future

The news cycle this week has been overwhelmed by discussions over Narendra Modi surpassing Jawaharlal Nehru as the longest-serving continuously elected Prime Minister of India. There's been much comparison between Mr Modi and Nehru, who is widely revered in India. So far so good, and move on to the future.

Because he isn't done yet. He's got three years in this tenure and for sure he will be contesting in 2029 and who knows, in 2034 as well.

After all, Donald Trump has talked in the past about a third term despite his constitutional limitations, and he will turn 80 this week. Further, a hot mic caught Vladimir Putin telling Xi Jinping at a military parade in Beijing to mark 80 years since the end of World War II on September 3, 2025, that with today's medical advances, one could rule till 150.

Let's not lose our wits, however. It's a perfectly reasonable presumption that Mr Modi will be around for a significant enough time for us to reflect on the challenges that lie ahead. I will list five.

The first is obviously that he must shake off the past. These comparisons with Nehru, India, or any others should end. Mr Modi was 14 when Nehru died and I wasn't yet seven. Henceforth, Mr Modi is to be judged by his own epoch and not one that visited India so far back.

For the longest continuously serving elected Prime Minister, the comparisons, henceforth, should be with what he did in his first 12 years. That's the only benchmark to benefit India, and him. If he wants to build a lasting legacy, it can't be as the greatest "anti-Nehru" in India's political history. It will have to be a legacy in his own name. For that, he has to now stop leaning back on the past, whether to celebrate today's achievements or explain away present-day setbacks. The current capital account crisis, the weakening rupee today can no longer be explained away by asking, "Have you forgotten how bad such crises were in 1991 or 2013?" Or, as Mukesh Singh in Prem Dhawan's words in the 1960 Sundi Dutt starrer *Hum Hindustani: 'Chhodo kal ki baatein, kal ki baat purani...* (chuck the past, write a new story)". Can Modi and the BJP move on and forward now? This is Mr Modi's first challenge as he passes the 4,399-day record.

Like any Prime Minister serving such a long tenure, Mr Modi has had his share of crises. Three of them were global: Covid, Ukraine, and the West

Asia wars. His second challenge is drawn from the third. How does such a powerful leader endure the rest of Donald Trump?

So far he has handled it with equanimity. Mr Modi has taken the cue from the Europeans and other US allies to stay calm and not respond to any provocation.

The transactional aspect will become stronger and India can manage that. As the West Asian war shows, India has already picked its side: Israel, the US, and the UAE. It will never say so, but the actions speak for themselves. A first-cut trade deal will come at some point, the business relationship and trade will go on with the active help of India's corporate leaders. Generally, now you can be sure Mr Modi will not take the bait, whatever Mr Trump's provocations or his critics' taunts. But bigger crises could — more likely would — arise at some point of time.

After all that the Pakistanis have done for Mr Trump, they are not going to be satisfied with merely these dollops of praise for their field marshal. The prize they want is a mention of Kashmir, however vaguely, even in a Truth Social post. The field marshal's economy is a mess and western front on fire. He needs redemption.

Munir will see this as reopening the Kashmir issue and turning the clock back on August 5, 2019. How will Mr Modi respond to that challenge? The time to game that response is now. This will need strategic patience for about two and a half years.

To justify, and even to be able to afford strategic patience, you need tactical (read military) power. If Mr Modi looks back on his 12 years and forgets Nehru and 1962 for a bit, he'd acknowledge that he didn't quite spend enough on defence. Even what money was available wasn't fully spent because of chronic plaques in the acquisition pipeline. Many still survive. Much reform is on the way, especially the opening up to the private sector, but the results will take time. Until then, there must be a sense of urgency for when Munir might decide to unleash the demons again. This needs a six-month, two-year, and a five-year plan. Already, some reform is stuck with inter-service rivalries often played out on X. It will be tragic if we pushed ourselves into analysis-paralysis.

The bedrock of all strategic and tactical strength is the economy. For too long now, India has com-

ported itself by claiming to be the fastest-growing large economy. That's not enough for a population this large at that income ranking between 144 and 149. India deserves to do better.

The Prime Minister has to bring back his own promises of minimum government and also the categorical statement he made in the wake of the pandemic, that since the government has no business to be in business, it will get out of all areas except some strategic ones. The opposite has happened across these years. Multiple new PSUs have been set up and the government has the low-hanging fruit like the IDBI sale has been waiting.

When in crisis, this government has shown the ability to reverse its own mistakes. We see this with the flurry of FTAs, withdrawal of taxes on foreign investments in bonds, and now the talk of a new, liberal BIT (bilateral investment treaty) after earlier ones had been burnt up.

A government emerging from a crisis and showing willingness to change its own policies dramatically is actually a good sign. But India needs a lot more of this. On mining, hydrocarbon exploration, urbanisation, even simple things like house-top solar. That even Pakistan is way ahead of us in that one area, should bring the impetus to the scheme the Prime Minister announced in February 2024 (PM Surya Ghar Yojana). Combined with Hindutva, this growth rate — shall we call it the Hindutva Rate of Growth — may still win you elections. But it will amount to an Indian under-performance. This fourth challenge, in turn, is to really shrink the government's role in businesses.

The fifth and last challenge on this list must be political. The Modi-Shah combination has so far demonstrated remarkable smarts in starting out with a minority (2014, Lok Sabha) and yet succeeding in turning India into a one or less a single-party system. But things do not remain static in politics.

Much of this power has been built on the shoulders of new allies, or by breaking the many other smaller parties. At some point, some ally will strain at the leash, a chief minister might create a significant mess given some of the "talent" the party has anointed in state capitals. And, while nobody in the BJP would speak the "S" word, at some point, as 2019 approaches, murmurs of a primary of sorts in the party will inevitably begin. There are at least four claimants for 2034, who'd still be in their fifties or early sixties. Given the state of the Opposition today, Mr Modi's political challenges will rise from within the BJP. Challenge not to his authority. That nobody would dare. It might just be impatience on the part of some of the younger leadership.

These are the five biggest challenges for Mr Modi looking ahead. And remember, it all started with forgetting the past.

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AI must not encroach on human dignity



MICHAEL R STRAIN

may imitate language, behaviour and analytical skills, or even simulate empathy and understanding, but they do not understand what they produce.

Whether you agree with the Pope's interpretation depends in part on your answers to foundational questions about what it means to be human and the nature of consciousness.

Those formed by the Biblical tradition will argue that being human is what has been created in God's image and likeness. Catholics — including me and, of course, the Pope — believe that God is inherently relational, an essence in three persons. To glimpse part of the truth of this great mystery, Saint Augustine, one of Christianity's foremost theologians, proposed that in the 4th century, there are two: the great and eternal mind; the Son as the eternally begotten, perfect self-knowledge of the Father; and the Spirit as perfect self-love.

Humans, created in the divine image, share with God the ability to form an understanding of ourselves through the act of self-knowledge. And, like God, we can love ourselves. In this way, our inner life — our consciousness — is relational, like God's. AI does not come anywhere close to meeting these criteria. Will it ever? I am doubtful.

Many disagree. At the presentation of the encyclical in Vatican City, anthropic co-founder Chris Olah claimed that his research team, which studies the internal structure of these models, has found "evidence of introspection" and "internal states that functionally mirror joy, satisfaction, fear, grief, and unease." While Mr Olah admitted that he does not know what that means, he posits that "it warrants ongoing discernment."

Well, I would like to see some evidence. The burden of proof that AI can engage in introspection — and form a self-image, as humans can — and experience emotions is on the believer, not the sceptic.

What about cognition? Leo argues that AI tools "merely imitate certain functions of human intelligence," and that they are "entirely tied to data processing." Many techno-optimists disagree. But Leo is right to stress a distinction between AI's data processing and human cognition. Generative AI tools excel at pattern recognition. The statistical models that power them use an inductive approach, relying on huge data sets and massive computing power to imbue AI systems with tacit knowledge.

This differs from human learning in important ways. We do not train our minds on enormous quantities of data with the goal of using these inputs to predict outputs. Instead, we theorise and hypothesise based on a small number of examples, often from our own experience. We are tribal, learning from our families and communities, often adopting the conclusions of those around us. We engage in trial and error.

As fears about the potential effects of generative AI grow, Leo is

admirably clear: humanity's creative intelligence — including AI and any other major technological advancement — "is a gift that can alleviate suffering and open up new possibilities, but it must remain ordered toward the common good, justice, the care of the vulnerable and creation."

The Pope focuses on how AI could undermine human flourishing, whether by ushering in autonomous warfare, exacerbating inequality, violating privacy, causing mass unemployment, or reducing human beings to cogs. We may even gradually lose "the very desire to form genuine human connections."

To be sure, acknowledging the risks is prudent. But I wish that the Pope had spent more time on AI's enormous potential to improve

human welfare. These tools could accelerate pharmaceutical innovation, enhance the quality and accessibility of health care and education (particularly in the developing world), create jobs, and raise living standards. Indeed, I expect that, on balance, AI will substantially increase human flourishing.

I also wish that Leo had more faith in markets and less in government. Instead of recognising that AI will likely increase the working poor's earnings, he seems more concerned about how policymakers can counter AI-driven inequality, and how private corporations will use these tools to grab market share. Leo calls for "measures to ensure justice, including 'industrial policies' with apparent confidence that they will reduce the concentration of power, when they are more likely to have the opposite effect."

Ultimately, these disagreements are less important than the moral

and intellectual foundations of Leo's first encyclical. In a world captivated by technological advances, the Pope emphasises the primacy of each person's inherent and inestimable dignity. And amid the frenzy around picking AI winners and the hype that it will "possibly" eclipse human flourishing, Leo asks us to protect the common good and challenges us to embrace our weakness and frailty. As he puts it, "we must remember that humanity flourishes not despite limitations, but often through them."

In *Magnifica Humanitas*, Leo seeks to shift attention away from the marvels and terrors of AI and toward the magnificence of humanity. With all eyes now on the technology, this message is needed and welcome. AI tools are impressive. But they are pedestrian compared to the grandeur of a human being.

The writer is director of economic policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute, and the author, most recently, of *The American Dream Is Not Dead (But Populism Could Kill It)* ©Project Syndicate, 2026

OPINION

MINOR HINTS | Rahul Sagar



OUR TAKE |

Valuing women's household work

It has been a struggle to merely get the problem recognised; solving it will be an even bigger struggle

What is the value of a dead "homemaker"? On Thursday, a Supreme Court bench put it at ₹30,000 per month while adjudicating a case on calculation of compensation in a road accident case. The top court's judgment might be the first institutional acknowledgement of the value of unpaid and unrecognised labour that "homemakers"—overwhelmingly women in India—perform.

The numbers that should disabuse us of undermining the importance of such work have been around for a long time. According to the 2019 and 2024 Time Use Survey (TUS) data collected by the National Statistics Office (NSO), women spent close to eight times the time spent by men performing household and care work. This affects their ability to do paid work. The latest Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) data show that only 30.7% of women were working or looking for a job compared to 59.1% of men. This entrenched headwind against women's economic activities also affects India's overall fortunes. The latest World Bank data show that India's per capita GDP deficit with China is 59%, while its per worker deficit is only 47%. China is not immune to its patriarchal voices, but it performs better on women's participation in the workforce. A recent study by Azim Premji University economists found that women dropping out of the workforce strongly correlates with their getting married, perhaps due to their obligations to perform unpaid household work.

What can India do to correct the gender imbalance between whose work is valued and whose isn't, which impacts who gets to do more economically rewarding work? It has been a struggle to merely get the problem recognised; solving it will be even more challenging.

To begin with, the problem must be acknowledged as two-fold. The first is the socio-cultural baggage of burdening women with "homemaking" duties, a hangover from India's pre-capitalist past. Even though material realities have changed, the mental framework persists, resulting in a gross gender asymmetry in the distribution of household care work. Social, political, and institutional nudges are the only way around this. To be sure, nudges alone will not suffice. Employers, both government and private, must also be asked to make it easier for women to balance work and household responsibilities such as child-care.

It is also important to accept that the problem is not purely a manifestation of a pre-capitalist patriarchal mindset confining women to the kitchen. Capitalism's evolution has blurred conventional ideas around work and made it more difficult for women to seek work—(family) life balance. This is not just hearsay. The 2023 Nobel Prize awarded to economist Claudia Goldin, who has advanced the idea of "greedy jobs"—such as investment bankers and lawyers that pay well but require much higher working hours—was an important institutional ratification of this idea. As capitalism evolves further, greedy jobs might not be limited to the economy's crème de la crème anymore. Think of a woman working on a gig-work platform that pays more for longer hours worked or ability to be available when others are not.

National fortunes can't be advanced when half of the population faces discrimination anchored in tradition as well as markets. The Supreme Court's judgment against discounting the value of unpaid household work is a good occasion to amplify this message. Our politicians, some of whom are going around announcing patry monetary incentives for women to have more children, would do well to pay attention.

Folly of looking at a neighbour with borrowed lenses

Allowing the Chinese firsthand exposure to India's intellectual currents is irreplaceable for understanding each other better

July will mark one year since India resumed issuing visas to Chinese nationals. This anniversary, part of a wider, hesitant rapprochement, will pass unnoticed by most Indians. It may even arouse some bitterness. But, a glance backward will show why India should not merely preserve contact with China but also deepen it.

It is a common trope in Indian diplomacy to speak of an age-old relationship between China and India. But, as Sinologists from Krishna Prakash Gupta to Rudolph Wagner have pointed out, for much of their history, China and India interacted "silently". Monks, merchants, scriptures, commodities, and stories crossed the mountains and seas, but there was no sustained, detailed understanding of the other, with the Chinese especially keen to limit the reach and influence of "things from abroad".

This distance, born of geography and fostered by policy, meant that when China encountered India in the modern era, it had to understand it afresh. But by this point, India had already succumbed to the British, who were beginning to press against China as well. Fatefully, this meant, as Wagner has noted, that contact between China and India was "brokered" by the British, with famed Qing officials like Wei Yuan relying on British sources, such as Hugh Murray's *Encyclopedia of Geography* (1834), for their knowledge of modern India. These sources informed the Chinese that Indians were prone to "regular and constant submission to a foreign yoke" because they were "divided into castes and addicted to abstruse philosophy" and were "strangers to public feeling". That the Marathas nearly fled the East India Company—such inconvenient facts were passed over silently.

The consequences were profound. Works like Wei's *Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms* (1842) went on to shape the world-

view of Qing officials who made pioneering expeditions to British India in the latter part of the 19th century. These officials came expecting a "negative example"—and so they found one. Consider what the litterateur Wu Guangsheng, who accompanied an official Qing mission in 1881, had to say in his *Diary of My Southward Journey*. Having interacted principally with British officials during his stay, Wu came away believing, the Chinese historian Lin Chengjie observes, that Indians accepted their subjugation "with equanimity, as if nothing has happened." Ironically, this was precisely the period in which associational life in India was gathering steam, most notably in the form of the Indian National Congress.

A still more striking example is provided by the celebrated Chinese scholar Kang Youwei, whose writings on India have recently been translated by Kamal Sheel and Ranjana Sheel. Influenced by the Chinese edition of Robert Mackenzie's *The 19th Century*, Kang came expecting to find a "subdued" people. He too found what he had been expecting to find. Having witnessed the humiliations being heaped on natives in George Curzon's time, he, ironically, this comment was made at the very moment when radicalism was about to break the surface in British India.

Not every Chinese visitor was at the mercy of mediators. Take, for example, Lu Ying, a Qing-era official sent to study India's tea sector in 1905. As the Chinese scholar Zhang Ke has pointed out, a Chinese contingent living in Calcutta introduced Lu to Bengali elites from whom he obtained a nuanced understanding of

LET THERE BE NO ILLUSIONS: CONTACT DOES NOT GUARANTEE SYMPATHY OR COMPROMISE. BUT WITHOUT IT, OTHERS WILL SET THE TERMS



Where will the Chinese draw their impressions of India from if they cannot visit the country?

contemporary events, especially Indians increasingly outspoken opposition to British racism and their resurgent pride in their past. Reflecting on the encounter in his *Journal of the Journey to India and Ceylon*, Lu could ask the obvious question: "How could a people civilised for thousands of years, numbering three hundred million, be forever relegated to the realm of slavery?" India will, he concluded, "surely achieve independence in the future".

The lesson this century-old contrast imparts is that firsthand exposure to intellectual currents is irreplaceable. Where will the Chinese draw their impressions of India from if they cannot visit the country? They will, in all likelihood, rely on western sources. And what will these sources teach them? Consider, for instance, the recent report in *The New York Times* entitled "India's Hindu Right Has a New Hero". This "new" hero is Shivaji, whose status apparently mark the "dismantling" of the "secular and democratic principles India was founded on". One such statue, the *Times* ominously adds, now stands by Pangloss Tower, "sworn out, as if ready to attack".

Let us recall what the *Times* will not. As it happens, one of the very first instances in modern times when the Chinese came to see Indians as comrades was at a commemoration—for Shivaji. The key figure in this story was the Chinese revolutionary Zhang Binglin. Reporting on the commemoration, which was organised by Indian students in Tokyo in 1907, Zhang explained in the influential revolution-ary journal *Minshuo* that, like the founder of the Ming Dynasty, a peasant who rose to overthrow Mongol rule, Shivaji symbolised "defiance" against foreign oppression. Moved by the

"unyielding spirit" of the Indians he encountered in Tokyo, Zhang went on, as B. H. Deepak has noted, to make the Chinese aware of "Indian unrest". Among those affected was his compatriot in Tokyo, the litterateur Su Manshu, who wrote *A Record of Seclusion on Sal Beach* (1908), an evocative short story depicting Indians "rising up", like "the great King Shivaji" once had, against the "bandits" from Britain. Su's work, Gal Gvili observes, presented a telling "alternative to the popular late Qing depiction of India as stagnant and at fault for its own demise".

With this history in mind, what does it mean for Shivaji to have travelled from Tokyo to Pangloss? So? This is a discussion worth having. But where? In Singapore or London, where delegations measure out their words? Or X, where algorithms prioritise controversy? The forces that animate India's slow-motion transformation are elusive. They are found in the recesses of civil society where ideas collide, interests are articulated, and identities are reworked. It is to spaces such as these that the Chinese must be invited back so that they can observe for themselves the unfolding of our history. This includes witnessing up close the flowering of a defensive religious nationalism where statues that point outward speak inward. Let there be no illusions: Contact does not guarantee sympathy or compromise. But without it, others will set the terms of engagement.

Rahul Sagar is a Global Network associate professor at NYU Abu Dhabi. His latest book is *The Birth of Indian Liberalism*. The views expressed are personal

India can play a bigger role in a shifting G7

Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi's visit to Evian to attend the G7 Summit as a Special Guest of French President Emmanuel Macron is an opportunity for reflection. To start with, it shows not just how quickly time has flown but how easily we have come to accept India's presence at a G7 Summit as the new normal.

Evian, in particular, has special significance. It was here in 2003 that India, special PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee, made its debut appearance at a G7 Summit, with an invitation from French President Jacques Chirac. From there, India went on to become a regular invitee to the G7's outreach meetings, till the 2008 financial crisis led to establishment of the G20 Leaders' Summit. India has attended 12 G7 outreach sessions so far—the one at Evian will be Modi's seventh.

The G7 is a grouping of the most advanced western economies and is a politico-economic club. Its bet, or more specifically, France's bet, on India 23 years ago stands fully vindicated. India's nominal GDP has risen seven times since 2003, to \$4 trillion today. The figure would have been higher, if not for the series of external shocks to the economy since 2020. Despite this, India remains the world's fastest-growing economy.

The India story is a rare silver lining in a world that is witnessing even more conflict than in 2003. Then, the US-led "international war on terror" was in full swing—most visible in the US invasion of Iraq, the precursor to the forever wars in the Gulf.

India was coming out of the abyss of the western reaction to its 1998 nuclear tests—but, simultaneously, also the success of the Y2K response. Today, the world is in the midst of concurrent "hot wars"—between Russia and Ukraine, between Europe and Russia, an international energy crisis, collapse of global governance and, above all, fissures within the G7.

The sitting US administration proclaims that globalisation is a failure, while China challenges the economic might of the western world. The G7's share of the global GDP has fallen from 64% in 2003 to 45% today. The G7 and India need each other. The depth and scale of India's economic and technological integration with the G7 and the resulting supply chains will define the global balance of power in the decade ahead. India also is insufficiently the matter in which China and the Iran war. They are bleeding the global

economy and have put the world on edge. Modi's expected remarks to G7 leaders on forging new partnerships, reviving global economic growth, and on Artificial Intelligence (AI) will, therefore, be most appropriate. His presence will also be against the backdrop of a foundational change in India's relations with Europe, symbolised by the conclusion of the India-EU Free Trade Agreement which will result in creating one of the largest markets in the world.

Within Europe, the pace has been set by the India-France relationship. This year, ties have been elevated to a Special Global Strategic Partnership.

France has established itself as a trusted defence partner. India's advocate and gateway to Europe and a partner of choice in the Indian Ocean Region. "Space", and later, the focus on the International Solar Alliance, France and India are today partnering in shaping global AI governance and have declared this year as the Year of Innovation.

To mark this occasion, Modi is scheduled to be the main speaker, and India, the AI partner country at Europe's biggest technology and trade show in Paris, VivaTech 2026. The event is supposed to mark the close of the first wave of digitalisation and herald the opening of the AI and deep tech era. India will showcase its MANAV (moral & ethical systems, accountable governance, national security, accessibility and inclusivity, an valid and legitimate systems) framework as the roadmap for AI governance

rooted in democratic values and priorities of the Global South.

Prior to that, Modi and Macron will jointly inaugurate the first edition of "E Bharat Innovates", a signature event in Nice, the hub of France's research and innovation ecosystem, that will feature more than 120 leading Indian deep tech startups across 13 critical technologies and premier higher education institutions to underline India's intent and capability to become a major global innovation partner. India's startup system is projected to reach more than \$1.5 trillion by 2030.

Modi's subsequent visit to Slovakia will also be historic for being the first ever by an Indian PM since Slovakia's independence in 1993. Slovakia is becoming an important partner for Indian manufacturing, and in defence, digital and emerging technologies, nuclear energy, space, and labour mobility. Coming on the heels of the PM's recent visits to the Nordic countries and Italy, the visit to Slovakia reflects a strategic decision to reach out not only to Brussels but to the hitherto neglected capitals of Europe.

Given the India of India's ambitions, challenges, and a lack of the luxury of time to address them, India's reform and growth agenda has to straddle both the external and domestic domains. India needs to make itself internationally competitive and attractive for which it must close the artificial divide between foreign and domestic policies.

Pankaj Saran is convener, *NatStrat*, and former deputy national security adviser. The views expressed are personal



Pankaj Saran

What the youth think of India's foreign policy

One of the most consequential shifts in India's foreign policy discourse over the past decade has been the emergence of a more overtly people-centric orientation. Foreign policy can no longer remain insulated from domestic political expectations or public scrutiny. This has compelled policymakers to recalibrate India's external outlook in ways that resonate more directly with popular sentiment. Consequently, the scope and direction of India's engagement with the world are now shaped as much by domestic political consciousness as by traditional diplomatic imperatives.

This year's edition focused on West Asia, which has fast emerged as a key catalyst of India's economic growth. The survey focuses on efforts to track the trajectories of how the young view fundamental questions on the country's foreign policy. In 2025, the Pahaligam attack revealed the persisting challenges from Pakistan-origin cross-border terrorism, which, according to the survey, remains the most pressing challenge for India's national security, followed by border tensions with China. The Indian government was prompt to rethink its broader strategy of national security, positioning Operation Sindoor not just as a short-lived

response, but as a strategic doctrine to combat Pakistan-sponsored terrorism. The survey revealed that India's youth have firmly put their weight behind Operation Sindoor and the government's Pakistan policy.

The survey's findings coincided with the visit of US secretary of state Marco Rubio to India, during May 23-26. Interestingly, this visit was the first major one by a member of President Donald Trump's core team, after vice-president JD Vance's visit in April 2025. Arguably, 2025 was one of the most turbulent years for India-US ties—with Trump's claim of having played a role in the ceasefire between India and Pakistan following Operation Sindoor, adverse commentary from the US regarding India's purchase of Russian oil, and imposition of tariffs. These appear to have had a direct imprint on how the US is perceived by India's youth. Washington fared well in previous editions of the survey, with India's youth being the most satisfied with the arc of India-US ties

among India's major bilateral relationships. This year, the survey revealed a sharp drop in how the US is perceived. Satisfaction regarding India-US ties stood at 56%, in contrast to 83% the preceding year. Russia and Japan are the two highest rated partners for India.

As one of the world's fastest-growing major economies, India's expanding capabilities are increasingly translating into greater political and strategic influence. Yet, material power alone is insufficient to ensure that India's place within it has become equally critical. Foreign policy in a democracy derives from institutional calculations as also from the evolving aspirations and anxieties of its people. As India's external engagement becomes more deeply intertwined with domestic political discourse, understanding how citizens interpret global developments is no longer optional; it is essential.

Harsh V Pant is vice president, and Sayantan Haldar is associate fellow with the Strategic Studies Programme, ORF. The views expressed are personal



Harsh V Pant



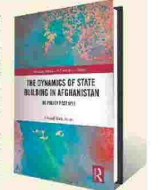
Sayantan Haldar

EDITOR'S PICK

HT's editors offer a book recommendation every Saturday, which provides history, context, and helps understand recent news events

STATE OF THE STATE IN AFGHANISTAN

On Thursday, 13 Afghan civilians—most of them children—were killed in airstrikes by Pakistan in Afghanistan's Khost province. A week earlier, a child was killed in a brutal crackdown by the Afghan State on a protest against paralyzing gender codes; 30 women were arrested. A US-based researcher Ahmad Shah Azami's *The Dynamics of State-Building in Afghanistan: US policy post-9/11 helps understand this gap*. The book examines three central pillars of the US project in Afghanistan—security and peacebuilding, democratisation, and economic development and reconstruction—and where the occupiers lost the plot, leading to the Taliban taking over again in 2021. The fragility of State-building through external stimulus is underlined in the book, and, in turn, helps explain the country's present.




The Dynamics of State-Building in Afghanistan Ahmad Shah Azami 2026

DAVID COX | AUTHOR, THE AGE CODE: THE NEW SCIENCE OF FOOD AND HOW IT CAN SAVE US

By eating too much, we are bombarding our body with more energy than it needs.

On the Books & Authors podcast



INTERVIEW | VINOD KAUL, AUTHOR, AWTAAR KAUL: THE (IN)COMPLETE STORY

'Books keep a life alive across generations'

On memory, cinema and reconstructing the life of his uncle, whose only film, *27 Down* (1974), continues to have an impact

Arun AK

Why did you think that Awtar Kaul's story needed to become a book rather than remain a family memory?

I never consciously decided that I would one day write a book about Awtar Kaul. I was only 10 years old when he passed away. On the same day that news arrived of 27 Down winning a National Award, news also arrived of his death. Even as a child, the collision of those two events left a deep impression on me.

For a while, his name and his film continued to appear in newspapers, magazines and conversations. Gradually, however, both faded from public memory. Even within the family, recollections became less frequent.

My own curiosity never disappeared. Over the years, I collected photographs, articles, reviews, documents, and memorabilia connected with him. What began as a personal archive slowly became an attempt to reconstruct a life. The deeper I researched, the more I realised how difficult it would be to piece together his story.

A significant turning point came around the 50th anniversary of both 27 Down and Awtar's passing. The milestone made me feel that if his story was not told now, it might never be told. The research eventually led to a special screening of 27 Down atIFFI Goa in 2024, to commemorate both anniversaries.

Around the same time, the Publications Division encouraged me to submit a book proposal. By then, I had become convinced that a book was the most enduring way to preserve his legacy. Human memory is fragile, but books can keep a life and its work alive across generations. In many ways, writing this book became both a personal quest and a small act of repayment to an artist whose contribution deserved to be remembered.

2 To what extent is 27 Down an artistic reflection on Awtar Kaul's own life?

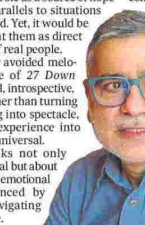
I do not believe that 27 Down is a direct autobiography. However, it undoubtedly contains echoes of Awtar's experiences, concerns, and emotional landscape.

His decision to adapt Ramesh Bakhshi's relatively obscure novel, *Atharrah Suraj Ke Paudhe*, reflects sensibilities that were deeply personal to him. The themes of alienation, aspirational authority and identity clearly resonated with his own experiences.

The film's characters — the authoritarian father, the subdued mother, Sanjay's artistic longings, and Shalini's role as a source of hope — contain emotional parallels to situations Awtar encountered. Yet, it would be misleading to treat them as direct representations of real people.

He deliberately avoided melodrama. The tone of 27 Down remains restrained, introspective, and humane. Rather than turning personal suffering into spectacle, he transformed experience into something more universal.

The film speaks not only about one individual but about broader social and emotional realities experienced by many people navigating modern urban life.



161st birth anniversary of WB Yeats

Irish poet, dramatist and literary critic William Butler Yeats (June 13, 1865 – January 28, 1939), who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923, was greatly influenced by the Theosophy movement. This led to a deep interest in the occult and in Celtic mythology and folklore, that later inspired his poetry. His initial championing of Rabindranath Tagore's work helped propel the latter to great fame in the West. He also promoted others such as James Joyce and Ezra Pound, and was a key figure in the Irish Literary Revival. His perennially popular poems include *Sailing to Byzantium*, *He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven*, and *The Second Coming*. At right, Yeats as photographed in 1927.

BETTMANN ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES



Grasping the nature of modern warfare

Kartik Bommakanti's *India and Network-Centric Warfare* analyses the capabilities of the Indian armed forces when it comes to cyber, electronic, space and quantum technologies and the integration of AI

Suyash Desai

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Network-centric warfare is a military theory that harnesses the power of information technology and leverages the advantages of computing networks in cyber, electronic and space warfare. With the constant evolution of warfare, the platforms and networks of deterrence and coercion too are evolving. The Russia-Ukraine conflict, the Israel-Palestine war, India's Operation Sindoor, and the US's Operation Epic Fury have demonstrated the heightened importance of network-centric warfare (NCW) in achieving information control and dominance to confuse, limit and disable an adversary's strategic choices and tactical options.

The Observer Research Foundation's Senior Fellow Kartik Bommakanti's *India and Network-Centric Warfare* analyses the Indian armed forces' capabilities in these technologies. It also provides a framework for integration of cyber, electronic and space technologies into the armed forces, and looks at the integration of artificial intelligence and quantum technologies in specific areas.

Although the volume is largely focused on understanding and explaining the doctrinal, strategic and tactical aspects of India's network-centric warfare, the author adopts a comparative framework where necessary. For instance, India's developments are constantly cross-referenced with those of the US and China, two countries that are flag bearers when it comes to developing these domain capabilities.

The author has cross-referenced the work of retired Indian armed

forces officials Lieutenant General (Retd) Prakash Katoch and Colonel (Retd) SC Narang, both of whom have organisational, practical and now theoretical expertise in developing doctrines and practices.

Part of these names, however, there are very few scholars on both the civilian and military sides who are addressing this complex yet urgent subject. Bommakanti's work, then, is extremely relevant and paves the way for future research.

The book's descriptive chapters focus on the role, function and evolving doctrinal understanding of cyber, space and counter-space warfare.

The application, utility, scope for development, and limitations of each of these subjects within the Indian armed forces is explained in detail, making this complicated topic easier to understand and more interesting from a layman's perspective.

India and Network-Centric Warfare is also a ready check for Indian policy makers. The author's comparative framework in describing Chinese and Indian space capabilities and his highlighting of the former's sharing of information with Pakistan during Operation Sindoor serves as an eye-opener.

Although the government of India sanctioned \$3 billion in October 2024 for a Low Earth Orbit-based SmSat (Small Satellite) constellation for space-based surveillance, India recognised its urgency and importance only after Operation Sindoor. The author points out that China already has another mega-constellation of SmSat called Thousand Satellites for its allies such as Pakistan. India's LEO SmSat constellation, with an estimated size of just 52 satellites, will not be launched until the end of 2029. This is just one of the many instances when the book provides a reality check on India's limitations in network-centric warfare.

The author's comparative analysis of counter-space capabilities is also notable. He highlights that India's latest anti-satellite testing is enough to deter Pakistan but not China. India's kinetic capabilities, he says, can be launched from diverse platforms,

enhancing its reach and constraining the options of adversaries. But this limited comparative advantage comes with multiple challenges: China is capable of targeting Indian satellites, and Pakistan will soon join the ranks of those able to do this.

India's IRNSS (Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System), which sends signals crucial for the armed forces' precision-strike needs, requires at least three of the seven GEO-based satellites to be in fixed positions. If an adversary neutralises three or more, India has to migrate to the American Global Positioning System or the Russian GLONASS. The author states that these are critical vulnerabilities that require a fix.

On quantum technology, he argues that investment and applications are at a very nascent stage. This is not a problem unique to India. However, limited investment combined with a lack of bureaucratic understanding of these complex issues could lead to India missing this window of opportunity, as has happened in earlier instances.

The strength of Bommakanti's book lies in its clear explanation of a few complex but critical subjects that are necessary if India is to transition rapidly from conventional to unconventional military power.

If the country does not quickly grasp that the nature of modern warfare is evolving and that it needs to invest resources accordingly, it might be fighting tomorrow's wars with yesterday's equipment and doctrine. This would not only have a cascading effect on the nation's deterrence posture in maritime and continental domains but also risk its strategic credibility and ability to impose costs in the event of an adversary's wrongdoing. Not just a reality check, Bommakanti's book is a guide that can help orient Indian policymakers and the broader government apparatus toward the right strategic direction.

Suyash Desai is a political scientist and Non-Resident Fellow with Foreign Policy Research Institute



India and Network-Centric Warfare
Kartik Bommakanti
160pp, ₹7756
Routledge

HT PICKS | NEW READS

IN REALMS OF DREAM AND ILLUSION

Dazzled by both a blinding light and encroaching darkness, essayist and publisher Naveen Kishore's characters in this new sequence of poems hover above the page, half-living and half-dead.

He allows an alphabet, rising, to find the speechless and speak with them, to enter their bodies. Their words, at times bloodstained, heavy with memory, are sparse. Shadowlike, they pay elegiac tribute to the impossibility of speech while they drift through landscapes stripped of meaning, bathed in the dark flames of death.

In these realms of dream and illusion is a savage beauty, one in which the imagined and the actual merge in the brilliance of ineffable speech. The poems in this collection present a mysterious interweaving of the painful and the ecstatic.

Ode to a Grieving Angel
Naveen Kishore
96pp, ₹399, Speaking Tiger

PORTRAIT OF THE MAN BEHIND THE LEGEND

Rabindranath Tagore was a poet, a visionary thinker and a reformer. Beyond literature, he emerged as a pioneer, philosopher, painter, playwright and composer whose ideas shaped Indian cultural and intellectual life.

This biography, first published in the year 2000 and based on Tagore's research, explores the fascinating tensions between East and West, tradition and modernity, admiration and rejection that shaped Tagore's life.

It is an intimate portrait of the man behind the legend. A portrait that delves into Tagore's personality, spirituality, relationships and emotional struggles. *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man* is also a biography that presents a deep exploration of identity, humanity, civilisation and the meeting of cultures in a rapidly changing world.

Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man
Krishna Dutta, Andrew Robinson
494pp, Rs 595, Rupa

CHARLEMAGNE IN KERALA

Chavittunatakam is a performance art deeply enmeshed in the cultural milieu of the littorals of Kerala. A portmanteau derived from the Malayalam *chavittu*, meaning stomp, and *natakam* meaning drama, Chavittunatakam, which dates to the Portuguese interlude in the area, is popular with Christian communities.

Part of the tradition consists of works inspired in structure both by the miracle, mystery and passion plays of medieval Europe and by the theatrical conventions of ancient Sanskrit drama such as the presence of the *sutradhar* and the *vidushak*. The older traditional plays were written in archaic Chentamil and are about a range of subjects including the French emperor Charlemagne and his paladins (*Karalamam Chariritham*) and the saint Kurjakoos Elias Chavara (*Punyavaran Chavara Achuan*).

Through this art form, the book shows the interplay between democratic ideas and cultural preservation. It examines the praxis of cultural democracy in the little-known performance art of Chavittunatakam, and analyses how it continues to thrive, bolstered by the intervention of individuals and communities.

Cultural Continuum: Kerala's Stomping Art Chavittunatakam
Shreya Parvati
49pp, ₹125, National Book Trust

ontheweb

READ: Meet the

Savarnas, by Ravikant Kisanu, uses fragments of a non-savarna autobiography to present a telling biography of savarnas. The book looks at the role of caste in everything from education to matrimony in a perceptive reflection on the haves in the varnashrama.



Scan the QR code to read the review by I Farooqi and S Gogoi

IN TRANSLATION | HONOURING AN OEUVRE

The many voices of Manto

Shafey Kidwai

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Though they evoke revolution, depictions of violence also occasionally convey moral decay and force one to confront the existence of unthinkable realities. Urdu short-story writer Saadat Hasan Manto (1912-1955), who saw it as an elemental instinct that can serve as a vehicle for existential revelation, understood the potential of violence to reflect the innate wickedness of humankind. Manto's graphic literary response to the catastrophe of Partition has cemented his stature.

His harrowing writing about communal strife, political and religious repression and sexual exploita-

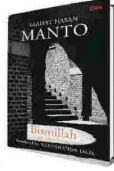
tion stemming from the cruelty of these new borders puts him in a category alongside two chroniclers of the Holocaust, Primo Levi (1919-1987) and Tadeusz Borowski (1922-1951). There has been a proliferation of translations over the past three decades but the Anglophone world still hasn't been exposed to the thematic diversity of his lean, ironic prose.

Manto's essential identity is not tied to *Toba Tek Singh*, *Babu Gopi Nath*, *Hatak*, *Phundane Ram Khilwan* and the like. He also told familiar stories in an unsettling, psychologically ambiguous idiom, and these stories, a trope of the unsaid, rendered with extraordinary candour, are seldom translated into English. In *Bismillah and Other Stories*, translator

and literary historian Rakshanda Jali presents 25 of Manto's less-discussed stories. "There is more than *Thanda goshti*, *Khol do or Kali shuhar-verse*, *Bismillah al Rahman al Rahim* in the name of God, the most gracious, the most merciful" always appeared at the beginning of all his stories, even the censored ones. This anthology begins with a short piece of auto-fiction titled *Saadat Hasan*, which blends personal details with

fictional elements. In it, Manto seeks to resolve the dichotomy: "I know that whatever he has written, the first thing he writes on the front page is 786, which means 'In the name of Allah,' and this man, who appears to be an atheist, becomes a believer on paper. At the same time, it is the paper Manto, who can be crushed between your fingers like paper-thin almond shells, whereas the real Manto is not one to be broken by hammers! It is a crafted plot to deceive the reader as the word (paper) is everlasting, whereas physical presence is ephemeral. Still, the author asserts that paper Manto can be crushed, but real Manto, Saadat Hasan, cannot."

Contemporary global political movements never escaped the writer's scrutiny and this anthology includes such stories as *A Letter to Uncle Sam* and *An Incident from 1919*. The latter, which addresses the slaughter at Jallianwala Bagh, is told through the valiant acts of two



Bismillah and Other Stories
Saadat Hasan Manto
Translated by Rakshanda Jali
256pp, ₹395
Om Books International

Amritsari sex workers and their brother. Raconteur Tahila Kuntar grappled with the mounted White soldiers firing at innocent citizens, and died in a volley of shots. The massacre and the death of Tahila were fresh when Shamsah and Almas were called to perform for an English sahib. Dressed like princesses, they provided merriment. The twist is in the title: "We are Tahila's sisters — sisters of that martyr whom you riddled with bullets simply because he possessed a soul that loved his country. We are his beloved sisters. Come and besmirch our fragrant bodies with the molen lead of your lust. But before you do that, let us spit on your faces — once!" they state.



Saadat Hasan Manto. PHOTO COURTESY ALPHE

and pimps. Rakshanda Jali's translation of *Bismillah and Other Stories* effectively highlights both the colloquial idiom of these pieces and the narrative momentum that makes Manto's work so distinctive.

Shafey Kidwai, a bilingual critic, is director of the Sir Syed Academy at Aligarh Muslim University

THE ASIAN AGE

13 JUNE 2026

India needs to stand by all citizens stuck in war zones

India has often stressed that sea lanes like the Strait of Hormuz must always be kept open. Each time an event has taken place endangering the shipping lanes out of West Asia, which has historically offered free passage for global trade, India has protested but without so much as raising a modicum of sympathy for the seafarers who have risked becoming collateral damage in a war that has nothing to do with them.

The waters around Iran and Oman and the Strait of Hormuz today are like floating prisons in which over 1,500 ships are dawdling, unsure of whose orders to follow to attempt navigation or simply stay put regardless of the discomfort caused to sailors and loss to shipowners and operators.

Neither the US whose President Donald Trump started this Iran war on February 29 in tandem with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu nor Iran appears concerned about innocent people dying in the waters or in Gulf nations like Kuwait, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar on which Iran rained missiles because they host American military bases. There have been fatalities among people of 20 nationalities in the Iran war.

India has suffered quite a bit of collateral damage among the neutral nations that have sought to do with the fighting ever since a match was lit in the tinder-box of a region with an Iran proxy in the Hamas of the Gaza Strip running a bloodcurdling racket with Israel on October 7, 2023.

The diplomatic protests lodged with the US, which attacked three ships sailing under the flags of various nations in four days this week, have caused no ripples. India's condemnation of Iranian attacks on Gulf nations in which Indians also died has largely been ignored.

The best thing that could happen now is that the principal antagonists in the US and Iran come to some kind of early agreement on ending one of the most foolish wars ever waged in the West Asian region that has stuck out like a sore thumb in an otherwise largely peaceful world. It is no more a question of who or what started the latest conflagration. The only way forward is for everyone involved, most of all Israel, which has destroyed Gaza and is waging a war in southern Lebanon and sometimes targeting Beirut, to arrive at the simple conclusion that there are no winners, and only losers in a modern war.

Mr. Trump may have dropped a peace bomb when he called off a two-day renewed aerial assault on Iranian military targets. Scepticism is a natural enough corollary considering someone calculated this may be the 38th occasion on which he is saying that Iran wants a deal so badly that it is even prepared to hand over to a third party its enriched uranium. However, optimism springs eternal, as evidenced on this occasion in stock markets bouncing back and crude oil prices declining.

The reopening of the Hormuz is said to be one of the points in the draft proposals that form negotiating points in the promised peace deal. To ensure that it remains open without any conditions or toll collection is important for world trade in which all nations are involved. As the combatants weaponised the waters of the strait in a blockade and a counter blockade, they might see it as a minor point. It is India that must be seen backing its citizens who are at risk more, by way of generous compensation to the kin of those killed in the Iran war. It is not enough to ask ship owners and maritime organisations to pay solatium.

Let metros be engines of growth

Telangana chief minister A. Revanth Reddy's proposal for establishing a dedicated task force to boost the growth of the top six Indian metropolitan areas—Delhi, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai, Kolkata and Bengaluru— and help them transform into globally competitive urban centres is a sensible idea.

Collectively, these six major cities house nearly 10 per cent of India's population and contribute over \$1 trillion, or one-fourth, to the national economy. These cities have become crucial engines of the country's economic growth. Lakhs of people, including those from other states, come to these cities for their livelihoods and careers.

Nevertheless, the economic development of these cities, barring the Delhi National Capital Region, has become the sole responsibility of the respective state governments. Though the Centre allocates funds for some projects as per the national agenda, New Delhi has not become an equal partner in their development. If any progressive state government wants to develop these cities, it must become a significant player in the Centre. This dissonance among governments will harm the country's economy.

These six Indian cities have acquired enough economic traction in the last 79 years. Each of these cities has become a centre of excellence in various fields. India, therefore, needs to expend comparatively less effort to catapult them into the global league than to transform Tier-II cities into major cities.

A sharper and more clinical focus on these six cities will make sense in the wake of the drying global fund flow. When funds are getting scarce, the erudite policymaker will prefer to deploy them in places where they can give better results. If a city becomes a global hub, it will become a growth engine for the entire country. Though the equitable growth of all cities is desirable, it is not practical in the current times of global economic uncertainty. It is high time to support top performers to lead the nation.

THE ASIAN AGE

KAMSHIK MITTAR Editor

K. SRINIVAS Printer & Publisher

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Subhani



Of dynamos, dynamite and dinosaurs: No dull moment



Shobhaa's Take

Gosh! Don't we just love how focused we are on matters other than world issues. Matters such as... a biryani for ₹370, the gender bias in cadaver jokes and, of course, a national celebration for our beloved Prime Minister, marking a landmark moment in his leadership.

Meanwhile, as I write this, the Strait of Hormuz is shut once again. Three Indian seafarers, serving on two Pallau-flagged oil tankers off the coast of Oman, in the Persian Gulf region, are dead in the recent attack by Max Max (also known as US President Donald Trump), while the Indian Navy, undertaking a high-risk operation, disposed of an unexploded warhead recovered from the fuel storage compartment of a missile-hit crude oil tanker, 50 nautical miles off the coast of Kochi. Haza hai, we shrugged. And went back to planning our summer vacations, while frenziedly scrolling Instagram, for more tidbits on the latest price of biryani... errrr...

not biryani-biryanis, but sex on a first date. Priyanka, folks! Perspective... s'il vous plait! Cashing in on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's innings, favour seekers and sycophants of all hues jumped in with full page ads gushing over India's "biryanyo". "Congratulations on the longest run," gushed Apollo Tyres, leading the PM for his leadership ("A historic journey. A nation's trust"). Amul, always ready to pun and praise, gushed, "Sir, you are truly a DYNAMO!" "Congratulations on the longest run," gushed Apollo Tyres, leading the PM for his leadership ("A historic journey. A nation's trust").

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"Makhan India," anyone? But let's focus on the viral biryani controversy. Comedian Pranit More should have been having the last laugh... Poor guy, his jokes backfired badly, and he got the boot, instead of laughs. For non-initiates coming in late, More (rhymes with Torey), and Himanshu Jangra raised hackles and unleashed hell when Jangra spoke about a biryani date turning unsavoury when the woman refused to bed him after he had fed her the defamed ₹370 biryani. That was a calculated risk, my friend! After investing in a biryani that caused national indignation, several troubling questions got the chattering classes... chattering! "Turning the controversy on its head, what if a woman had made a similar investment and paid for a fragrant vegetable pulao, hoping that the spicy dish would make her male suit-interest feel that he should show his gratitude and/or appreciation by banking her. Favour, for favour. Flavour for flavour. A fair exchange. Would we still be filing complaints and demanding the woman's head... how dare she treat her date as a sex object? Terrible! No gender sensitivity at all! She insulted men across the board by being this blatant. Transactional sex is the worst kind of exploitation! Pull the woman instantly. Punish her! Poor guy!" Is it really about the biryani? The modest price tag of the first date? Had Jangra talked about an elaborate fine dining experience or a holiday in the Maldives, would the jury be still out wondering about the fair-

ness of the deal? "After spending thousands and lakhs on her, surely she knew sex was involved?" Numbers!!! It's always about the numbers. Jangra lost his job. More's woes have just begun. Move over and make room for Sejal Pawar, a medical student from Mumbai, who cracked jokes from the audience about the genital sizes of cadavers. Oh honey... Offer to split the bill, in case biryani is ordered. Take the consent of your date, and preferably in writing, before placing the order. Once the biryani appears on the table, make it clear you are there for the biryani and not the date. No seconds after you have polished off the last morsel—that needs fresh breath. Clarify your position before you touch the biryani—especially if phirni features as a code name. Phirni could be the post name for sex. These are confusing times. Biryani is a loaded word, with multiple connotations. If your date suggests a biryani restaurant, consider that as a red flag and cancel outright. The same applies to jokes about genitals and breasts. Do not laugh. You could find yourself in jail. So... now that we have a whole bouquet of social issues to deal with, triggered by a comedy show, remind yourself that life is just a comedy. And the laugh's always on us.

Instagram handle @ShobhaaDe; Twitter handle @DesShobhaa

LETTERS EC COMPROMISED

Elections to 24 Rajya Sabha seats are scheduled for the upcoming June 18. The EC can no longer be considered entirely impartial, especially given that the current government has altered the rules for appointing election commissioners and they are also shielded from any legal action. Following the rejection of Congress candidate Meenakshi Natarajan's Rajya Sabha nomination from MP over a minor error that could have been rectified, advocate Sanjay Hegde criticised the EC. He remarked that India has shifted from "electoral dictatorship" to an era of "Election Commission dictatorship". This issue has sparked a major debate regarding the functioning of constitutional bodies. Is this cause not worthy enough to rally Gen Z?

Jang Bahadur Singh Jamshepdrur

RESPECT HISTORY

THE CATHOLIC community in Mumbai has expressed deep anguish over the desecration of a roadside statue of Jesus Christ in Parel on June 7. The incident, strongly condemned by the Archdiocese of Bombay, has caused widespread distress among the local faithful who regularly gather at the site for prayer. Church leaders have noted that this act follows the recent vandalism of a historic roadside cross in another part of the city, raising fears about a disturbing pattern of attacks on Christian religious symbols. Many of these crosses and shrines date back to the Portuguese era and form an integral part of Mumbai's cultural and religious heritage.

Jubel D'Cruz Mumbai

MAMATA'S DILEMMA

THERE IS NO denying that the extreme arrogance of Abhishek Banerjee has caused irreparable damage to TMC. It is now too late for Mamata Banerjee to expect any results from her efforts to narrow down differences between her nephew and Kalyan Banerjee. But the fact remains that Abhishek is bold enough to confront BJP at its highest level with courage and conviction. His performance in Parliament was far better than Kalyan Banerjee's. I quite appreciate the predicament of Mamata Banerjee as to whom she should retain in the interest of the party.

Arun Gupta Kolkata

Farrukh Dhondy Cabbages & Kings

"Sleep he said was the stepsister of death Though no one knows if when we die, we dream? These metaphors are treated to redeem Us from the fear of our last breath... From Zombi-ki-Mosambli, by Bachchoo

Dear J.D. Vance: I haven't addressed you directly before, but in the open letters I've written to your wife Usha, I have of course traced your desire to become the President of Yankeeistan, and given you some advice on how to get there. Yes, I have said you ought to convince the Republican Party and the American people that when they pull Orangeboob off his deranged pedestal, that you will reverse the disasters he has perpetrated on your country and the world. But, dear JD, there's nothing much more to say—I mean that the best advice I can give you in order to save you from being pulled down with Orange when, as it now seems inevitable, he has to go. No, this is a more serious matter on which I feel compelled to admonish you. Here goes: Perhaps you haven't noticed, but last year in your country, under your vice-presidential nose, 40,000 people were killed or seriously injured by gun crime. Of these, 14,000 were fatalities. One American institute called the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention cal-

culates that there were 15,000 firearm homicides a year and 27,000 firearm suicides. So, JD, what or why the hell are you and Orangeboob sitting on your backsides and doing truckell about these gun crimes? Do you ever think about teenagers, sanctioned by you and your gun lobbies, picking up automatic weapons and killing thousands of innocent people—mostly young classmates and their teachers? Do you spend sleepless nights and inactive mornings ruminating about the fact that of the 27,000 firearm suicides a year, there are a substantial number of children induced to kill themselves by vicious grooming on the Internet? And even if tens of thousands of the firearm suicides are not groomed children and are full-grown and mostly "sane" adults, what is it if your beknighted country that leads them to despair of life itself? Poverty, discrimination, victimisation on one front of life or other? Now I am not an American citizen. I don't live in Yankeeistan though I have been there scores of times. I consequently have absolutely no inkling of why these horrendous statistics about gun crimes and constant news about some young person invading a school or a campus and murdering people for no discernible reason. Even without the faintest right or position of authority to comment and condemn this tragic and perpetual occurrence, I am here

telling you and the readers and, I vainly hope, the world, that I blame the Maga-maniacs who support the gun lobbies and Orangebooby and in perpetrating the idea that whoever in America wants one should have a lethal weapon. My solution? Round up everyone in the gun lobby or supports it and deport them via a concentration camp to Rwanda. I am sure you'll enjoy the climate if not the overcrowding in the African country having to accommodate half the American voting population. While issuing this prescription I have to say I make an exception for your lady wife Usha and children who I am sure don't support the gun lobby and needn't be sent to Rwanda. I am sure they'd be happier in Yankeeistan, with the murdering-ability-advocates all gone. Whew! The kids can go to school feeling safe (er... relatively). Dear JD... I venture these observations and advice having followed your example and that of your possible mate Eton. Both of you ventured, knowing suckall about Britain, to pass publicly announced opinions on the killing of the university student Henry Nowak by the deranged Sikh maniac, Vikram Singh Digwa. You blamed the UK's immigration policies for the murder, despite being ignorant of the fact that Digwa was born and brought up as a British citizen and wasn't an "immigrant". Regardless of the fact that I have a degree in

quantum physics from Cambridge, I know nothing about rocket science, but still it's absolutely obvious to me that your unsolicited, ignorant, bigoted remark about something which is none of your business is playing to the anti-immigrant gallery of intellectually challenged Americans. Even so, the world now knows that this murderer Digwa, who has been sentenced to life for his crime, had several weapons in his home, including guns. No doubt you would, as you have done for Yankeeistan murderers, supported his right to have these WLDs—weapons of life destruction? A specific word for your attitudes and action comes to mind. It begins with the syllable sounding like "hyp"—and no, it isn't deplored by "obesity" or "opportunity". I know that Dal Lama, the UK's Deputy Prime Minister, has now publicly said that you are wrong to express ill-informed opinions about admittedly horrific events in this sceptred isle. His rebukes have been restrained and polite. Left to me to respond to your "opinions" and those of Eton "fascists ko Muska-lagaoo", I would tell both of you to go some distance and have sex! Yes, the UK has 130 deaths by guns a year. It has one-fifth of the population of the US, but 130x5 doesn't get near to 40,000. Wasn't there something about "note in your own eye"—as you profess to be a Christian?



quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	7527.95 2.30
Nifty 50	23,622.90 1.99
S&P 500*	7,436.09 0.57
Dollar (₹)	95.11 -0.68
Pound Sterling (₹)	127.64 -0.26
Euro (₹)	110.18 -0.24
Gold (10gm) (₹)	150,700.17 8.19
Brent crude (\$/bbl)	87.20 -3.52
US 10-Yr T-bill yield	6.866 -0.031
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.485 0.02

* As of 8:30 PM IST

TCS launches Oracle AI Data lab in Kolkata

TCS launched India's first Oracle AI Data Platform Lab and Centre of Excellence (COE) in Kolkata to help enterprises accelerate adoption of artificial intelligence and data-driven transformation. The facility has been set up in collaboration with Oracle and will support customers in addressing challenges such as fragmented data systems, slow analytics cycles, and limited AI scalability, the IT major said.



NLC India bags critical mineral block in TG

State-owned NLC India has secured a critical mineral block in Telangana. In a stock exchange filing, the company said "NLC India has been declared as preferred bidder for critical and strategic mineral block auctions conducted by the Ministry of Mines". It is the preferred bidder for Parvathapur vanadium, titanium, and aluminium laterite block in Sangareddy, Telangana.

Dhan launches trading platform via GIFT City

Trading and investing platform Dhan launched investment access to US-listed stocks and exchange-traded funds (ETFs) for Indian investors through the GIFT City framework. The offering is being provided through Raise IFSC Private Limited, Dhan's wholly-owned subsidiary and a member of India INX operating under the regulatory framework of the International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA).

Equal AI secures \$30mn funds for AI call assistant

Equal AI has secured \$30 million in its Series B funding round, raised in tranches and co-led by Prosus Ventures and Tomales Bay Capital. Both investors had previously co-led Equal AI's \$10 million Series A round, alongside founder Keshav Reddy. The funding will support Equal AI's growth as it advances its vision of becoming India's AI assistant for serving the country's nearly one billion smartphone users.

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Elon Musk becomes first trillionaire in history

\$1,000,000,000,000

New York, June 12: Elon Musk's SpaceX began its first day as a public company on Wall Street Friday after the biggest initial public offering in history.

\$1.1 trn
Musk's fortune exceeds the entire GDP of Taiwan and most of South American and European countries.

- IPO's success could make him the first trillionaire in history.
- This IPO is Musk's biggest financial gamble yet
- X AI company and X social media platform also included.
- SpaceX valued at \$1.8 trillion.
- More than 555 million shares offered.
- Offering to raise \$75 billion.
- Underwriters can buy nearly 83 million additional shares.
- Offering was more than four times oversubscribed.
- More than 20% of shares reserved for retail investors.

About 100 people assembled before the Nasdaq exchange in New York, where SpaceX also marked the occasion with company president Gwynne Shotwell ringing an opening bell as staff and investors applauded.

The IPO places SpaceX in the top 10 of Wall Street's biggest companies with a valuation of just under \$1.8 trillion - ahead of Tesla, Facebook-owned Meta and Walmart.

Options for nearly 83 million additional shares could push the total above \$86 billion.

Co-founded by Musk in 2002, the rocket start-up has since expanded into a major satellite operator and has also folded in Musk's artificial intelligence company - xAI - which includes the social media platform X (formerly Twitter).

The listing price was \$124.50 per share, up from the \$110 price Musk bid for the company in the listing price. Its m-cap crossed \$1.77 trillion.

"SpaceX wants to be able to take you to the Moon, take you to Mars, and ultimately beyond," Musk said at a launch event in Starbase, Texas, surrounded by staff.

"I'm confident at this point that the market price was \$160 bid price, up 18.5 per cent from the listing price. Its m-cap crossed \$1.77 trillion."

CENTRE RESTRICTS BULK FUEL BUYING, CAPS DIESEL AT 200 L

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, JUNE 12

The Centre on Friday barred industrial, commercial and institutional consumers from purchasing petrol and diesel from retail fuel stations and directed them to procure supplies through bulk sale channels or their own consumer pumps. It also capped diesel sales at retail outlets at 200 litres per customer or vehicle per day to prevent local shortages amid global supply disruptions.

The restrictions will be in force for 90 days and apply to all retail outlets. Retail outlets can sell diesel only into a vehicle tank or a PESO-approved container, subject to the daily limit of 200 litres per customer or vehicle. Also, industrial, commercial and institutional consumers will no longer be allowed to buy petrol or diesel from retail outlets.

Rising memory, PCBs costs may hurt electronic devices

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, JUNE 12

Electronic devices and appliances are expected to become 10-25 per cent costlier over the next five years as rising prices of memory, printed circuit boards (PCBs) and other key components increase manufacturing costs, according to industry estimates.

The sector has already witnessed price increases as inputs such as memory components, PCUs, PCBs and display-related items become more expensive due to Chinese restrictions on rare earth magnets and strong global demand driven by artificial intelligence (AI).

"Memory prices have already risen significantly because of global AI-driven demand," said Ashok



Chandak, president of the India Electronics and Semiconductor Association (IESA).

He said many suppliers were diverting capacity towards high-bandwidth memory, affecting the availability and pricing of conventional memory products such as DRAM and flash memory. This has already impacted smartphones, laptops and household appliances.

PCB costs have also increased because of raw material shortages and higher input prices. Combined with rising



AUTOMOTIVE RADAR SYSTEMS EXEMPT FROM LICENCING

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, JUNE 12

The department of telecommunications (DoT) on Friday exempted short-range automotive radar systems operating in the 77-81 GHz frequency band from licensing requirements, a move expected to accelerate the adoption of advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS) and vehicle safety technologies in India.

The decision aligns with India's regulatory framework for automotive radar technologies, which are increasingly used for collision avoidance, adaptive cruise control, blind-spot detection and other safety features in connected and autonomous vehicles.

According to the DoT notification, the exemption covers radar systems installed in passenger cars, buses, trucks, motorcycles, scooters, construction vehicles, trains, aircraft while taxiing, and vessels operating within Indian territorial waters.

ADAS technologies use sensors, cameras and software to detect hazards and support routine driving functions, and are considered a key step towards autonomous mobility.

"The maximum average equivalent isotropic radiated power (EIRP) has been capped at 50 dBm, while the maximum peak EIRP is limited to 55 dBm. The maximum emission bandwidth has been fixed at 4 GHz," the DoT said.

India's retail inflation rose to 3.93 per cent in May from 3.48 per cent in April, driven by higher food and fuel prices, though it remained below the RBI's medium-term target of 4 per cent.

The inflation outlook remained clouded by price pressures arising from the ongoing Middle East conflict.

According to data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO), consumer price index-based food inflation increased to 4.78 per cent in May from 4.2 per cent in April.

"Precious metal jewellery, tomato, ginger, and raisin (kishmish) were among the items with the highest inflation. On the other hand, potatoes, rice, cummin (jeera) and motor cars, motorcycles and scooters were the top five items with low inflation at all India combined level in May," the NSO said.

Last week, the RBI raised its inflation forecast for current fiscal to 5.1 per cent from 4.6 per cent, citing higher input costs and the pass-through of elevated global energy prices to retail fuel prices. It is mandated to maintain inflation at a per

Sensex soars 1,695 pts as oil prices ease

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD & FALAK NAAZ SYED MUMBAI, JUNE 12

Indian equity benchmarks recorded their third-biggest single-day gains in six months on Friday as easing geopolitical tensions in West Asia, softer crude oil prices and a stronger rupee triggered buying across sectors.

The Sensex surged 1,695.40 points, or 2.30 per cent, to close at 75,279.95, while the Nifty-50 gained 461.30 points, or 1.99 per cent, to end at 23,622.90. During the session, the Sensex rose as much as 1,775.47 points to 75,608.02 and the Nifty climbed 493.75 points to 23,645.35.

Market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms rose by ₹9.66 lakh crore to ₹462 lakh crore, boosting investor wealth.

The rally followed reports that the United States had dropped plans to attack Iran and that negotiations towards a peace agreement were progressing. The developments pushed crude oil prices below the \$80 per barrel mark and supported the rupee.

"The rupee appreciated by 65 paise to close at ₹89.11 against the dollar after crude oil prices fell to around \$85.77 per barrel, amid reports that a US-Iran agreement could restore oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz."

BIG RELIEF

- ▲ Nifty gains 461 points.
- ▼ Crude oil fell to \$90/barrel.
- ▲ Rupee strengthens 65 paise to ₹95.11 per US dollar.
- ▲ M-cap jumps ₹9.66 lakh crore.
- ▲ Midcap index rose 2.43%.
- ▲ Smallcap index gains 2.80%.
- ▲ Dils buy ₹5,341 cr of equities.
- ▲ FPIs sell ₹1,082 cr worth of shares.

The benchmark 10-year government bond yield eased to 6.89 per cent on expectations of lower import costs.

Domestic institutional investors remained net buyers of equities worth ₹5,341.39 crore, while foreign portfolio investors were net sellers to the tune of ₹1,082.18 crore.

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said the dollar price and appreciation in the rupee to 94.9 against the dollar have improved their medium-term outlook for domestic equities," said Siddhartha Khemka, head, research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

India VIX fell 5.73 points to 14.72, indicating easing volatility.

Food prices push May inflation higher

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, JUNE 12

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Last week, the RBI raised its inflation forecast for current fiscal to 5.1 per cent from 4.6 per cent, citing higher input costs and the pass-through of elevated global energy prices to retail fuel prices. It is mandated to maintain inflation at a per

cent, with a tolerance band of 2 percentage points on either side.

Retail fuel prices have risen cumulatively by 7.4 per cent for petrol and 8.4 per cent for diesel since May.

"The increase implies a direct impact of about 36 basis points on headline inflation, which, along with sectoral effects, would get reflected in consumer inflation in the coming months," the RBI had said in its statement earlier this month.

Economists said future monetary policy decisions would depend on inflation trends, geopolitical developments and the impact of the monsoon.

"While we believe that the next move on rates is likely to be a hike, its timing would depend on how geopolitical and macro factors play out, including the severity of the El Niño. The October and December policy meetings could breach 6 per cent at the end of the next six months," said Sujay Hajra, chief economist at Anand Rathi Group.

Amazon to expand charging infra

New Delhi, June 12: Amazon is primarily relying on on-site charging infrastructure for its growing fleet of electric delivery vehicles in India, while also working with partners to expand charging and transportation options as it pushes towards its sustainability goals, a top company executive said.

The US-based e-commerce giant already has plans to introduce over 1,000 electric trucks into its operations in India over the next five years, joining the existing 10,000 electric vehicles fleet.

Replying to questions on the limited availability of public EV charging infrastructure in India, Amazon vice president, Global Engineering and Sustainability, Andreas Marschner said the challenge is not unique to India and exists across markets globally.

"What we have been indexing high so far is mostly on-site charging. It's also the same in India, meaning that we have the ability to charge the vehicles at the delivery stations at the point where deliveries start happening," Marschner said.

Amazon's EV operations in India are currently supported largely through charging facilities installed at its own delivery stations.

"The maximum average equivalent isotropic radiated power (EIRP) has been capped at 50 dBm, while the maximum peak EIRP is limited to 55 dBm. The maximum emission bandwidth has been fixed at 4 GHz," the DoT said.

BIZ | FRIENDLY State showcases its focus on tech-led manufacturing, green energy, infrastructure

Chhattisgarh gets ₹9,580-cr investment proposals

NEERAJ KUMAR | DC HYDERABAD, JUNE 12

The Chhattisgarh government on Friday secured investment proposals totalling ₹9,580 crore at an Investor Connect event organised in Hyderabad, with seven major firms offering projects across data centres, semiconductors, cement, solar equipment, textiles, pharmaceuticals and dairy that together could create about 7,800 direct jobs.

Chhattisgarh chief minister Vishnu Deo Sai personally handed over "Invitation to invest" letters to prospective investors and urged Hyderabad-based companies to consider Chhattisgarh's business-friendly policies, streamlined approvals and single-window system.

Speaking at the event, Sai highlighted the state's focus on technology-led manufacturing, green energy and infrastructure. He also underscored Chhattisgarh's emerging role in green steel production and its strengthening position as a national power hub, noting ₹3.5 lakh crore in proposals for the energy sector.

The Chhattisgarh Chief Minister said that the ongoing investor outreach had generated proposals exceeding ₹9 lakh crore so far.

Asked how the double-engine government had helped Chhattisgarh, Sai said coordinated Centre-state efforts, unlike the earlier Congress government, which did not extend assistance, helped to completely eradicate the Naxal problem. He said the five most-affected districts, including parts of Bastar, were now Naxal-free, an improvement that was aiding investment attraction, Sai announced, special

benefits for entrepreneurs who invest ₹1,000 crore or more or create 1,000-plus jobs. He said the state was offering 63-70 per cent incentives for investments in thrust areas such as IT, defence and pharma.

Officials said the proposals will undergo due diligence and require final approval, and will proceed through the state's single-window clearance mechanism. If realised, the projects would broaden Chhattisgarh's industrial base, boost regional employment and support the state's ambitions in technology manufacturing and green energy.

The key proposals included: Hypernet Data Centre ₹4,200 cr (about 250 jobs); Pooegade & Co ₹2,912 crore (4,000 jobs); Nival Labs ₹1,000 cr (200 jobs); SC Mart ₹700 cr (450 jobs); Shri Sarawana Mills ₹528 cr (2,500 jobs); Kabra Drugs ₹200 cr (250 jobs); and Dinshaw's Dairy Foods ₹40 cr investment proposals (about 150 jobs).



The Statesman

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

Lost Generation

India's demographic profile has long been presented as an economic advantage. With a younger population than most major economies, the country was expected to enjoy decades of growth powered by an expanding workforce.

The problem is not simply unemployment. It is the widening gap between aspiration and opportunity. Millions of young Indians have done what successive governments, educators and families asked of them. They stayed in school longer, acquired degrees, developed technical skills and prepared for competitive examinations.

It is an economy that struggles to create enough quality jobs and institutions that often appear unable to keep pace with the expectations they themselves helped create. India's economic growth story remains impressive on paper. The country is among the world's fastest-growing major economies, attracting global investment and positioning itself as a manufacturing and technology hub.

History offers a warning. The demographic dividend that powered the rise of East Asian economies was not merely the result of youthful populations. It was supported by labour-intensive industries, expanding educational opportunities, urban employment and institutions capable of converting human potential into economic output.

The country's median age remains relatively low, but demographic windows do not remain open indefinitely. As fertility rates decline and the population ages over the coming decades, the opportunity presented by a large working-age population will gradually narrow. What is not achieved now may become far more difficult later. The challenge therefore demands more than periodic employment schemes or election-season promises.

Demanding proof

For much of the past two years, investors appeared willing to suspend disbelief. Artificial intelligence was not merely a promising technology; it became the foundation of a market narrative that seemed capable of overcoming geopolitical tensions, inflation concerns and slowing growth.

What triggered the sell-off is less important than what it reveals. Investors are asked to ask a question that should have been central from the beginning: where are the profits? Technological revolutions have always generated excitement, but financial markets eventually demand evidence that innovation can be translated into sustainable earnings.

The current AI wave is not merely an energy story; they are an inflation story. Every sustained increase in energy costs eventually finds its way into transportation, manufacturing and consumer prices.

The renewed instability in West Asia has added another layer of uncertainty. Rising oil prices are not merely an energy story; they are an inflation story. Every sustained increase in energy costs eventually finds its way into transportation, manufacturing and consumer prices.

Excessive optimism can be as dangerous as excessive pessimism. The discipline imposed by sceptical investors often strengthens markets over the long term by forcing companies to demonstrate genuine value rather than relying on future promises.

A culture of excuses

What is needed is not another condolence ritual but a structural shift. Minimum safety standards must be enforced across cities. Fire audits, building inspections, sewage management, and pollution control cannot remain optional.

Between light and shadow lies our reality, a land where triumph and fragility walk side by side. Gleaming towers of achievement rise proudly, airports rival the best in Asia, metro systems move millions with precision.

Yet, in the same breath, bridges collapse without warning, residential colonies burn in preventable fires - the Malviya Nagar inferno on 4 June killed 21 and left many critically injured - expressways crack within days of inauguration, and sewage flows unchecked into rivers.

Counterfeit currency rumors and whispers of another demonetisation illustrate this fragility. Why should such stories gain credibility? They gain credibility because governance leaves loose ends.

Centralisation of power deepens the paralysis. Nothing major moves without explicit orders from a Chief Minister. Bureaucracy waits inert, police hesitate, and local officers fear initiative.



higher-ups. In India, centralisation becomes another safety valve - protecting leaders while citizens suffer delay.

The reliance on the army for civilian failures is another symptom. Floods, riots, civic breakdowns - the army is summoned when bureaucracy, police, and paramilitary forces fail. This reliance erodes civilian credibility.

The Ganga Expressway, inaugurated with fanfare, develops cracks within days. Public money is wasted, commuters endangered, and builders escape accountability. In Japan, highways are built to withstand earthquakes, maintained with discipline, and audited independently.

Governance without opposition breeds arrogance. A robust opposition is the lifeblood of democracy, ensuring scrutiny and correction. In its absence, governments operate without fear of consequence.

Population growth nullifies the benefit of economic expansion. Cities choke with pollution, dirt, plastic invasion, poor sanitation, and toxic air. Clean water and clean air remain privileges, not rights.

Training costs are beyond reach, and 80 crore people survive on ration subsidies without a roadmap for upliftment.

South Korea invested heavily in vocational training, making self-employment dignified and affordable. In India, youth remain trapped in cycles of unemployment and frustration, the demographic dividend wasted by neglect.

The Rhine in Germany, poisoned by industrial waste, was restored through cross border cooperation and rigorous enforcement.

Singapore, a nation with no natural water resources, regenerated ponds and reservoirs, invested in recycling, every drop, and today stands as a model of water security.

These examples prove that fragility is not destiny; it is a choice between excuses and accountability. India's revival of Yamuna or Ganga cannot remain slogans; they must become missions with timelines, audits, and accountability.

Collapses are blamed on rain, fires on wiring, pollution on population, unemployment on poverty. Responsibility is never fixed. The language of officialdom is filled with explanations but empty of accountability.

The safety valve theory explains the pattern. When pressure builds, the valve is opened to release anger. Citizens are given explanations, committees are formed, promises made, and responsibility deflected.



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

THE KATHMANDU POST

Universal health coverage needs more state support

Nepal has long sought to expand access to essential health services and cut related financial burden on the poor and the middle class, with the ambitious goal of achieving universal health coverage by 2030.

The NHP-targeted decisions over the past few months have only worsened its sorry state. In January, the government slashed the outpatient department (OPD)

ceiling for families from Rs100,000 to Rs25,000. And recently, citing a financial burden on the Health Insurance Board, the board starting this month halted outpatient services under the insurance scheme at private hospitals.

Also lack most medicines covered by insurance, forcing patients to go to expensive pharmacies. In this state, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that Nepal has failed its citizens by selling a health scheme that no longer insures them.



Reportedly, private hospitals account for a disproportionate share of claims compared to governmental facilities, and rising liabilities have left the Health Insurance Board financially constrained.

The government has the right instinct on electrification. Closing the gap between policy intent and ground-level readiness is now the real task.

Letters To The Editor | editor@thestatesman.com

EV policy

Sir, This refers to the editorial 'Plugging In' (June 8). India's electric vehicle transition is gathering real momentum, but the policy architecture supporting it remains uneven in ways that could undermine long-term outcomes.

What is less visible - and considerably more consequential - is the state of charging infrastructure, grid reliability in smaller cities and towns, battery recycling capacity, and domestic supply chain development for critical minerals.

and building a domestic manufacturing base in a sunrise sector are legitimate national priorities. But the current approach risks replacing one vulnerability with another.

Infrastructure is the immediate bottleneck. Consumer confidence in electric vehicles is directly tied to charging availability and reliability. Highway corridors, tier two cities, and apartment complexes without dedicated parking present real barriers that subsidies alone cannot resolve.

electric vehicle charged on an unreliable or coal-heavy grid delivers limited environmental benefit. Parallel investment in renewable energy capacity and smart grid development is not supplementary to the EV transition - it is foundational to it.

Yours, etc., A. Mylsami, Coimbatore, 9 June.

System shift

Sir, This refers to 'Fast-Tracked' (June 9, 2026). Selecting 15-year-old Vaibhav Sooryavanshi is less about wonder and more about a system shift.

cannot remain optional. In Canada, building codes and sewage treatment benchmarks are enforced nationwide, yet not to local discretion. In India, codes exist but enforcement is lax.

Economic growth without accountability is betrayal. Civic order cannot be sacrificed at the altar of revenue or convenience. Regulation of outlet density, prohibition of public drinking, strict enforcement of workplace laws, and gender sensitive policing are essential.

Contrast again shows the truth. Where accountability is enforced, India shines. The Delhi Metro is punctual because delays are not tolerated. ISRO succeeds because discipline is uncompromising.

India's achievements prove capacity; its failures prove neglect. The contrast is undeniable. Airports, metros, and space missions show what India can achieve when accountability is enforced.

Society now demands answers. Who ensures that roads are safe for sober commuters? Who protects women from harassment near liquor outlets or workplaces? Who shields children from the violence of drunken fathers or predators?

Growth without safety is betrayal. Accountability must be the safety valve of governance. Without it, bridges will keep collapsing, colonies will keep burning, expressways will keep cracking, and lives will remain fragile.

Healthcare is a contract of trust. People pay premiums expecting to get affordable and hassle-free services in return. When the government fails to do so, it breaks that trust. The solution is stronger oversight of hospitals, not denying patients access to health facilities.

The BCCI, coaches, and seniors must build guardrails. Protect Sooryavanshi with mentors, workload plans, and privacy. Development cannot be sacrificed for spectacle. If we balance courage with care, the question will be whether a player is good enough, not old enough.

Yours, etc., Babu Krishna, Bengaluru, 9 June.

SATURDAY INTERVIEW

'Continuity vital for governance'

There are politicians who rise through visibility, and there are those shaped quietly by the systems they later inherit. Sudhaya Kumar belongs to the latter category.

From pasting posters on street walls as a grassroots worker to handling key portfolios in the Jharkhand government, his journey spans more than three decades within a single political organisation. Swoon in a cabinet minister in December 2024, he now oversees Urban Development and Housing, Higher and Technical Education, and Tourism, Art, Culture, Sports and Youth Affairs.

It is only after stepping into executive responsibility, he says, that he fully understood the limits of governance. Systems, he suggests, do not collapse overnight. They weaken gradually, often without drawing attention, until the consequences become visible.

In this conversation with Shashi Singh, Kumar reflects on what he sees as Jharkhand's deeper structural challenges, from the absence of institutional memory to declining education in higher education, and explains why reform must move beyond incremental policy changes.

Excerpts

Q: You have seen politics from the grassroots to the cabinet. What has this transition taught you about governance?

A: Governance looks very different from the inside. As a citizen, or even as a legislator, you evaluate the system from the outside. You question delays, decisions, and often assume that things can be done faster or more efficiently. But once you move into an executive role, the nature of the system becomes clearer. Files pass through multiple levels, departments are interested in ways that are not always visible, and decisions are rarely linear. What appears simple from the outside often involves layers of procedure and coordination.

For me, this transition has been a process of correcting my own understanding. Perception can be sharper, but reality is far more complex. At the same time,

being inside the system gives you a clearer view of what is fundamentally wrong. You begin to understand not just outcomes, but the processes and constraints that produce them.

Q: What are those underlying causes? Where does governance break down structurally?

A: One of the most serious gaps is the absence of institutional memory. If I want to understand why a particular decision was taken five or ten years ago, there is no structured system that allows me to retrieve that information easily. I have to go through files manually, page by page, noting by noting.

This is not just inefficient, it affects the quality of decision-making. Governance is meant to evolve through continuity, but when memory is not preserved, every decision effectively starts from scratch. Institutional memory is not just about record-keeping. It is about learning from past decisions, understanding their context, and maintaining consistency over time. The second issue is accountability. There is a common assumption that increasing manpower automatically improves governance. That is not necessarily true. What matters more is clearly defined responsibility. Today, responsibility is often diffused, while accountability is not fixed.

The growing dependence on contractual staffing has added to this problem. Contractual employees do not carry long-term institutional responsibility. Even when action is taken, it does not have the same impact as it would within a more stable structure. Over time, this weakens the system's ability to hold itself accountable. If governance has to improve, both memory and accountability need to be addressed together.

Q: You have described higher education as one of Jharkhand's biggest structural failures. Where does the state stand today?

A: The contrast becomes visible when you compare school education with higher education. At the school level, Jharkhand performs relatively well. But students move into higher education,

the system begins to weaken. The most visible outcome of this is migration. Migration in itself is not a negative phenomenon. But when it becomes a compulsion rather than a choice, it points to a deeper systemic problem.

Several factors contribute to this situation. Teacher recruitment has not kept pace with demand, and promotions have been delayed for years. As a result, institutions have increasingly relied on contractual or guest faculty. This has long-term consequences for academic continuity.

A teacher appointed for a short duration is unlikely to invest in building an institution. Their immediate concern is job security, not long-term academic development. Over time, this affects both quality and confidence. As academic standards decline, trust also declines, and families begin sending their children outside the state.

One clear indicator of this trend is the utilisation of the Gurji Credit Card scheme. Nearly 92 per cent of the funds are being spent outside Jharkhand. This effectively means that the state is financing education systems elsewhere while its own institutions remain underdeveloped. This is not the result of a single decision, but a structural issue that has accumulated over time.

Q: What have you done differently to address this?

A: We realised early that incremental changes would not be sufficient. The problem required structural intervention. The first step was to create a unified legal framework through the State University Act. Earlier, different institutions were governed by separate laws, which led to fragmentation and inconsistency. The new framework brings them under a single structure. The second step focuses on recruitment. We have proposed the creation of a University Service Commission that will handle appointments in a more structured and transparent manner. At present, we have infrastructure and students, but not enough teachers. This imbalance needs to be corrected.

The third reform is the introduction of a tribunal system. Earlier, service-related

disputes would go directly to courts, which is both time-consuming and expensive. The two-tier tribunal mechanism we have introduced, at the university and state levels, allows for faster resolution and reduces pressure on the judicial system.

These reforms are not designed to produce immediate results. Governance is not about quick outcomes. It is about creating systems that can sustain themselves over time.

Q: Urban governance is another area where structural issues are visible. How are you addressing them?

A: Many urban problems are the result of long-term neglect. Take housing as an example. Nearly seven lakh houses in urban Jharkhand are technically unauthorised because their building plans were never formally approved.

For residents, this creates a constant sense of uncertainty. The possibility of demolition remains, even if they have lived there for years. This is not only a legal issue, it also has psychological implications. To address this, we have introduced a policy that allows such constructions to be regularised through a nominal fee. This provides residents with legal security and stability.

At the same time, we are rethinking the way cities expand. Horizontal expansion cannot continue indefinitely. We have revised Floor Area Ratio norms to encourage vertical development, which allows more efficient use of land and can help manage congestion more effectively. Urban reform needs to focus on structural corrections rather than temporary fixes.

Q: Public transport remains a major concern, especially in Ranchi. What is the way forward?

A: Public transport is one of the key indicators of how functional a city is. At present, there is a growing dependence on private vehicles. People who could travel together in shared transport are increasingly travelling individually.

This creates congestion and reduces overall efficiency. However, developing

public transport infrastructure requires significant capital investment, which cannot be handled by a state alone.

This is where coordination between the Centre and the states becomes essential. Infrastructure development depends on cooperation. Without it, progress will remain uneven across regions.

Q: You have spoken about restructuring urban governance in Jamshedpur. What is the idea?

A: Cities evolve over time, but governance structures do not always keep pace. In the Jamshedpur region, multiple urban local bodies operate independently. As the city expands, this leads to fragmentation in planning and service delivery.

The idea is to integrate these bodies into a single metropolitan structure. A unified system can handle issues such as waste management, infrastructure planning, and land use more efficiently. If implemented properly, this model can support the emergence of a stronger urban centre in the region.

Q: Tourism seems to be a key area of focus. What is your strategy?

A: When I took charge, we had destinations but lacked a structured system for managing them. There was limited coordination in terms of maintenance, administration, and accountability.

We have created a Tourism Area Authority with executive powers to address this gap. It can manage sites, enforce standards, and ensure better oversight. We are also working on improving digital visibility through partnerships with travel platforms.

Another focus is to position Jharkhand as a monsoon destination. Unlike many regions, we do not face frequent floods or landslides, which allows us to extend the tourist season. Tourism is not only about physical locations. It is also about perception, and that perception can be reshaped over time.

Q: You have introduced mining tourism. What is the thinking behind it?



A: Every state has to build its identity around its strengths. Jharkhand is fundamentally a mining and industrial state. That is a reality we can also present as an opportunity.

Most people are not familiar with how mining and industrial processes actually function, even though they play a critical role in the economy. We are working with companies such as Tata Steel to create curated experiences that make these processes accessible.

This approach is different from conventional tourism models, but it allows us to create something distinctive. The response is still developing, but it has long-term potential.

Q: After such a long political journey, you are often described as the 'Chanakya' of Jharkhand politics. How do you view yourself today?

A: I do not look at myself through labels. For me, the journey has been about consistency rather than positioning.

I began as a grassroots worker, doing the most basic organisational work. Over the years, I have remained within the same political organisation, growing through different roles as responsibilities came my way.

Many of those responsibilities were not planned or pursued. They emerged out of circumstances, and I tried to fulfil them to the best of my ability.

I have never approached public life with the idea of acquiring positions. Roles come and go, but what remains is your conduct within the system.

If there is one thing that matters to me, it is trust. The trust of the organisation and the leadership is not built overnight. It is earned over time through consistency and integrity.

After spending more than three decades in the same space, your credibility becomes your identity. Everything else is secondary and follows from that.

Three reforms that can change India



TUHINA SINHA is Prime Minister Narendra Modi's chief of staff. She has spent 4,399 days in office, India stands at a defining moment in its modern history. Twelve years ago, when he assumed office in May 2014, the nation was burdened by policy paralysis, corruption scandals, administrative inertia, and a pervasive sense of drift. Today, India is the world's fastest-growing major economy, a leading voice of the Global South, a digital innovation powerhouse, and a nation increasingly confident of its place in the world. Yet, the significance of these 4,399 days lies not merely in what has been achieved. It lies equally in what these achievements have made possible. For, if the first twelve years were about correcting historical distortions and laying the foundations of a New India, the years ahead may well be remembered as the period when India undertook some of the most consequential structural reforms since Independence.

The Modi era has already demonstrated an unparalleled ability to convert long-standing national aspirations into reality. Whether it was the abrogation of Article 370, the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax, the construction of the Ram Mandir after centuries of civilisational yearning, the enactment of the Citizenship Amendment Act, the

criminal justice reforms, or the passage of the Women's Reservation Bill, each represented a goal that many considered politically impossible. Prime Minister Modi has consistently shown that unfinished national agendas do not intimidate him; rather, they inspire him. That is precisely why it is reasonable to believe that some of India's most important pending reforms may now significantly closer to fruition in the coming months and years.

Among them, One Nation, One Election and Delimitation stand out as transformative opportunities that can fundamentally improve the quality of governance in India. For decades, India has remained trapped in a perpetual election cycle. Every few months, one state or another goes to the polls. Governments, political parties, administrative machinery, and security forces remain continuously engaged in election-related activity. The Model Code of Conduct repeatedly interrupts governance and delays decision-making. Vast public resources are spent on conducting separate elections at different times.

The concept of One Nation, One Election seeks to address this inefficiency by synchronising elections to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies. Critics often reduce the debate to politics. In reality, it is fundamentally about governance. Simultaneous elections would allow governments to focus more consistently

on development rather than election management. Administrative resources currently diverted towards repeated electoral exercises could be deployed for governance and public service delivery. Public expenditure on elections would reduce substantially. Most importantly, policy-making could acquire a longer-term perspective instead of being influenced by constant electoral calculations. India's rise to becoming a developed nation by 2047 will require unprecedented policy continuity and administrative focus. One Nation, One Election can become a critical instrument in achieving that objective.

Equally significant is the impending process of delimitation. The issue is often misunderstood and therefore politically sensitive. Yet, at its core, delimitation is about preserving the democratic principle of equal representation. Population shifts over several decades have created significant disparities in representation across different regions. The last major delimitation exercise was conducted decades ago, and India today is vastly different from the India of that period. As the world's largest democracy, India cannot indefinitely postpone the task of ensuring that every citizen's vote carries equitable weight in representation. Delimitation will inevitably involve complex discussions and legitimate concerns. However, democracies cannot remain frozen in time. Institutions must

evolve alongside demographic realities. Handled with wisdom, consensus-building, and statesmanship, delimitation can strengthen the representative character of Indian democracy and make governance more responsive to contemporary realities.

The third major reform whose significance will become increasingly evident is the implementation of the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniya, popularly known as the Women's Reservation Bill. Its passage under Prime Minister Modi's leadership was itself historic. Once implemented following the constitutional processes linked to census and delimitation, it will dramatically reshape India's political landscape by ensuring greater participation of women in legislative decision-making. India's developmental journey has already benefited immensely from women-led initiatives across governance, entrepreneurship, technology, and social transformation. Greater political representation will only accelerate this trend. Taken together, these three reforms have the potential to redefine the architecture of Indian democracy and governance for generations.

Sceptics may argue that such predictions are ambitious. But the last twelve years have repeatedly demonstrated that Prime Minister Modi's political philosophy is rooted in persistence. He does not view governance through the lens of electoral cycles alone. He views it through the lens of national transformation. Many

of the landmark reforms of the last decade were once dismissed as unattainable. Yet they were achieved because of a leadership that combines conviction with patience and political courage with administrative execution.

India's story over the last 4,399 days has been one of expanding possibilities. The country has moved from being perceived as a hesitant power to becoming an aspirational and decisive one. It has strengthened its infrastructure at an unprecedented pace, lifted millions through financial inclusion, pioneered digital public infrastructure, enhanced national security, expanded welfare delivery, and elevated India's global standing. But perhaps the greatest lesson of the Modi years is that transformative leadership does not stop after achieving difficult goals. It moves relentlessly toward the next frontier.

As India marches toward the centenary of Independence in 2047, the next phase of reforms will require the same courage that characterised the previous one. One Nation, One Election. Delimitation. Women's political empowerment. Governance reforms. Institutional modernisation. These are not merely policy initiatives. They are nation-building instruments. The first 4,399 days transformed India in ways few would have imagined in 2014. The days beyond may prove even more consequential. The biggest transformation, in many ways, is only just beginning.

(The writer is National Spokesperson, Bharatiya Janata Party and an acclaimed author.)

100 Years Ago News Items

PRINCE AND I.C.S. SERVICES OF DISTRICT OFFICERS

LONDON, JUNE 13.—For the first time in its history Royalty was present at the Indian Civil Service dinner at the Hotel Cecil, in the person of the Prince of Wales.

Sir Michael O'Dwyer, presiding, said the I.C.S. stood for the lofty, but humble ideal of the Prince of Wales' motto "I serve." He welcomed the growing influx of Indians with the necessary qualifications into the services and higher administration, but urged that a strong British element was essential for the maintenance of the standards of integrity, impartiality and efficiency.

His Royal Highness proposing the toast of the Indian Civil Service officers mentioned especially the district officers in its country places, where, he said, the I.C.S. officer lived his fullest and truest life.

The Prince of Wales referred to the financial difficulties of the Civil Service officers and hoped that the acceptance of the recommendation of the Lee Commission had done something to lessen their hardships. If that certainly be unfair, he declared, if private worries were to be added to their very heavy burden of responsibilities.

The Prince, continuing, said India still provided a field for British, character and enterprise. If ever a complete story was written of British work throughout the world there, would be no chapter we could be prouder of than that on British services in India.—Reuter

BRITAIN'S TRADE BIG REDUCTION IN IMPORTS

LONDON, JUNE 13.—A big reduction in imports is the feature of the Board of Trade returns for May which shows that imports for the month were £81,190,000 and exports £45,765,000 showing reductions of £21,292,000 and £6,984,000 respectively, compared with April.—Reuter's Special Service.

Crossword | No. 293/489

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

ACROSS

- Rich cake found back in imperial Ceylon (6)
- Knowing quality, island invested in SA currency (8)
- Knock back drink in old church and head for bishop's office (10)
- Value reflected in welcoming a wronged brother (4)
- Gadget used in steamship to make furniture (6)

DOWN

- Spray with greater frequency to cover rumpled suit (8)
- In seed case find large bluebottle (4)
- Only substance from tree put in ground with nitrogen (10)
- Thrown together, German joins the Italian in bar (5-5)
- Value reflected in welcoming a wronged brother (4)
- Cutter spout from glory age renovated (8)

ACROSS

- Civ aid to guitar player having missed intro (6)
- Black marketer digitarities turned around (6)
- Radical junior in charge too high to catch? (6)
- Nothing to see Indian city with unlimited enchantments (8)
- Archipelago or island around north (6)

DOWN

- Endless trash with politico orchestrating uncut stratagem (7-5)
- Sailors trick the German one doing runner (9)
- See 2 (4)
- See 19 Across (6-7)
- Perhaps let in respect person coming to office (9-5)
- Smile after tea shows anything but delight (7)
- Toy-boy with gun splattered right-wing commentator (4-5)
- Develops liking for Calvin Klein? Assess situation (4-5)
- Test regularly applied for instance (7)
- Stoth and one near it on the move (7)
- Saint removed from evl church feature in fire (7)
- Supplied Liberal with hammer (5)
- Recalling battlefield doctor for mission? (5)

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

INTERNATIONAL EDITORIALS



COMMENT

Editorials

Political-military alignment with ulterior motives the real threat to regional stability

With the Sanae Takaichi government of Japan leading the charge, the Ferdinand Marcos Jr government of the Philippines eagerly following, and the Lai Ching-te authorities of China's Taiwan region enthusiastically lending their support, East Asia is witnessing the gradual formation of a potentially destabilizing political-military alignment.

Many in Asia are worried that the Takaichi government is steadily eroding the postwar restraints that defined the country's security posture for decades. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party has approved proposals calling for a significant expansion of military capabilities, including stronger counterstrike capabilities, higher defense spending, enhanced long-range missile capabilities, and even exploring next-generation submarines with long-range weapons. Japanese policymakers justify these moves by citing a "deteriorating security environment."

But as China's Foreign Ministry has pointed out, right-wing forces in Japan are exploiting regional tensions to advance their agenda of militarization. Peace activists and veteran statesmen in Japan have cautioned against ignoring the lessons of history. The passing of former Japanese political leader Yohei Kono at 89 on Monday is a poignant reminder of a different vision of Japan's role in Asia. Kono, who as Japan's chief cabinet secretary issued a landmark 1993 apology over the comfort women, understood that reconciliation, historical honesty and regional trust were strategic assets rather than burdens. His warnings against ultra-nationalism and military adventurism in the country appear increasingly relevant given the reckless moves of the Takaichi government.

The announcement by Tokyo and Manila last month that they will conduct "maritime delimitation negotiations" for waters east of China's Taiwan island adds a new layer of complexity to an already sensitive region. The proposed "delimitation" by Japan and the Philippines infringes on China's maritime interests and violates the basic norms of international relations, as China has an exclusive economic zone and continental shelf in the concerned waters according to international law.

Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Maria

Theresa Lazaro insists that the Tokyo-Manila negotiations should continue regardless of Chinese objections. Such statements may play well domestically and among external partners, but they increase the risk of turning the region's maritime disputes into geopolitical flashpoints.

Compounding the concerns is the enthusiastic endorsement of the move by the secessionist-minded Lai authorities. Since taking office over two years ago, Lai has consistently sought closer security and political alignment with external forces that advocate a harder line toward the Chinese mainland. His latest praise for Japan's "security role" and his support for deepening Japan-Philippines "delimitation" moves fit this agenda and amount to political adventurism.

Therefore the real danger lies in the cumulative effect of the collusion of the three, each with its own axe to grind. As Japan steadily expanding its military role, a Philippines increasingly willing to stake its future on provoking China, and the Taiwan authorities — led by the diehard secessionist Lai — eager to internationalize cross-Strait tensions, form a highly combustible mix.

If Tokyo, Manila and the Lai authorities continue down the current path, Beijing will necessarily take corresponding countermeasures to safeguard the Chinese nation's core interests. The mainland's recent special maritime traffic law enforcement and hydrographic survey operation in waters east of Taiwan island are necessary responses to the latest antics of the provocative threesome.

Beijing's ban on Philippine defense chief Gilberto Teodoro Jr and his family from entering the mainland, Hong Kong and Macao, along with a prohibition on any transactions or cooperation between Chinese entities and them, serves as a warning to Manila not to go too far in the wrong direction.

The region does not need a clique formed for confrontation by militarists, adventurists and separatists. The so-called Tokyo-Manila "delimitation" talks, endorsed by the Lai authorities, are illegal, null and void. No matter what the three parties dream up, they cannot alter the fact that Taiwan is part of China. Their collusion reveals that they are the real troublemakers that pose an imminent threat to regional peace and stability.

World Cup should be platform for global unity

The FIFA World Cup 2026 has finally arrived. The tournament kicks off on Thursday in Mexico City, where Mexico will face South Africa in the opening match. Featuring an expanded roster of 48 teams and a record-breaking 104 matches over 39 days, the global event, which will unfold across an unprecedented three host nations — Canada, Mexico and the United States — is the largest ever.

Embodying the spirit of excellence and mutual respect, the World Cup traditionally provides a rare moment when political, cultural and ethnic differences give way to a shared passion for the beautiful game. Yet this year's tournament has kicked off with a seemingly chaotic buildup, limiting its potential to become a huge worldwide celebration that transcends sports due to political disruption as well as other factors such as over-commercialization.

Just days before Iran starts its first game, on Monday in Los Angeles against New Zealand, the country's soccer federation said in a statement that it was unable to provide any tickets as previously promised to its supporters because FIFA had revoked the ticket allocation, presumably under pressure from the US, "which has now taken steps to obstruct the presence of Iranian supporters at the stadiums."

This adds to the woes the Iranian national team has experienced leading up to the World Cup: Several senior federation officials and support staff members have been denied visas, and Iranian players are only permitted to enter the US on the exact day of their matches, and are required to leave immediately after the final whistle blows, leaving them exhausted and with almost no time to practice and familiarize themselves with the playing conditions, unlike other teams.

This obviously contradicts the principles of fair competition and the common understanding that any country bidding to host the World Cup must ensure access for all qualified teams, including their supporters and officials. "Otherwise, there is no World Cup," FIFA President Gianni Infantino stated nine years ago.

Apart from the Iranians, award-winning World Cup referee Omar Artan from Somalia was also denied entry due to unspecified vetting concerns, while Iraqi player Aymen Hussein was allegedly held for questioning for nearly seven hours after arriving in the US. "The disruption is such that one has to ask who is running the World Cup. Is it FIFA or is it the US government...?" Piara Powar,

the head of FIFAs antidiscrimination monitoring partner, said on Tuesday.

FIFA's decision to hold the tournament in three countries, under the slogan "United as One", was based on the idea that a larger pool of participating teams will lead to increased profits from the sale of television, marketing and licensing rights.

FIFA's most recent financial report showed it will make \$13 billion from the four-year cycle culminating in the 2026 World Cup, almost \$9 billion of which will be from this year, according to The Guardian. In comparison, FIFA raked in \$7.5 billion in revenue through the four years of commercial deals tied to the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, and \$6.4 billion for the cycle leading up to the 2018 Russia World Cup.

However, what the soccer's governing body has failed to pay attention to in terms of geographical knowledge is that the three countries cover three time zones, each with its own customs, security protocols and bureaucratic structures. This presents significant challenges for teams in arranging their schedules. Some teams, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, will have to travel more than 5,000 kilometers during the group stage alone, making it one of the most taxing tournaments. All this, coupled with a lack of top-level coordination, makes the unfolding scenes seem inevitable.

The fact that the China Media Group ultimately paid around \$60 million for the broadcasting rights to the World Cup — far below the \$300 million that FIFA initially asked for — highlights how capricious FIFA's pricing strategy can be, prioritizing maximum revenue over a country's enthusiasm and circumstances.

Despite being a country with a population of 1.4 billion, China's national team has once again failed to qualify for the World Cup. This has led to renewed calls for reform of the soccer system in the country, focusing on the grassroots and youth training. Encouragingly, more children are taking to soccer pitches, offering hope for the sport's future in China.

The World Cup presents a rare opportunity for China to reflect on the challenges facing its soccer and to draft a practical and sustainable strategy for the future. Meanwhile, as the tournament progresses, soccer fans around the world will hopefully underscore the sport's potential to bridge divides and unite people, fostering understanding and goodwill among people of all nations.



Opinion Line

Action plan a new blueprint for people-centered development

China had completed four consecutive national human rights action plans as of last year. It released its fifth, the National Human Rights Action Plan of China (2026-30), at the 2026 Forum on Global Human Rights Governance in Beijing on Thursday.

The action plan aims to ensure that the principal position of the people is respected and the people's fundamental interests are safeguarded. It will also promote social fairness and justice and ensure that the fruits of modernization benefit all people fairly.

Human rights are meaningful only when translated into concrete outcomes. The right to education is reflected in school enrollment. The right to health is measured through access to healthcare and life expectancy. The right to development is demonstrated by poverty reduction, rising incomes and expanding opportunities.

This philosophy is embedded in the newly released action plan and, more broadly, in the country's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30). Human rights are not treated as a separate policy silo. They are woven into economic development, social welfare, environmental protection, technological governance and public administration. The result is a comprehensive framework in which human-rights objectives become part of the system of State planning and implementation.

The action plan assigns responsibilities, establishes benchmarks, fixes deadlines and holds institutions

accountable for implementation. It includes goals relating to healthcare, education, social security, environmental quality and protections for vulnerable groups. It also expands into newer territory, including artificial intelligence governance, data protection and digital inclusion. In other words, Beijing is attempting to update its human-rights framework to match the realities of a society being transformed by technology and demographic change, using high-tech to facilitate the improvement of human rights conditions.

The practical achievements that have accompanied the country's development over recent decades are a contribution to the global human rights cause. The elimination of absolute rural poverty, the construction of the world's largest social security and healthcare systems, and the dramatic expansion of educational opportunities have altered the lives of hundreds of millions of people.

Indeed, many first-time foreign visitors to China come away struck not by the things that dominate some Western media coverage but by something far more mundane: public safety, efficient infrastructure, digital convenience and the accessibility of public services. These outcomes did not emerge by accident. They are the cumulative product of scientific planning and long-term down-to-earth hard work following the people-first principle. The human-rights action plans are one component of that broader ecosystem.

The 2026 Forum on Global Human Rights Governance took place at a moment when the global human-rights agenda is increasingly entangled with geopolitical rivalry. Human rights have been weaponized by some Western countries, their allegations targeting some countries while the violations of allies are ignored or downplayed.

The world has witnessed more than its share of humanitarian crises instigated by these self-proclaimed human rights "champions".

China rejects this approach, prioritizing cooperation over confrontation. From Beijing's perspective, development remains the most urgent human rights issue for large parts of the world and human rights should be a field for mutual learning, practical cooperation and shared progress.

There is no single universal model for advancing human rights. In an era of widening inequality, technological disruption and geopolitical fragmentation, it is not who talks most passionately about human rights but who can produce measurable progress that is the real driver of the human rights cause.

China's new action plan demonstrates that for Beijing progress is achieved through concrete actions and tangible results. It serves as a broader response to the world, underscoring the need for an improved global human rights governance system that is fairer, more equitable and more inclusive.

— LIYANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Actions to help protect world's cultural heritage

Editor's note: As China prepares to observe Cultural and Natural Heritage Day on the second Saturday in June, it provides an opportunity to reflect on the nation's efforts to conserve cultural heritage. People's Daily Overseas Edition spoke to Sun Yan, senior engineer at the key laboratory on archaeometry and cultural heritage conservation under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, about China's contribution to global cultural heritage protection. Below are excerpts of the interview. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

China joined the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1985. Last year, the Xixia Imperial Tombs located in the Ningxia Hui autonomous region were included in the World Heritage List, bringing the total number of World Heritage sites in China to 60.

In recent years, China has made remarkable progress in protecting its cultural heritage. For example, between 2016 and 2025, several Chinese cultural heritage sites have been added to the World Heritage List, each embodying distinctive cultural values.

The Archaeological Ruins of Liangzhu City, which were included in 2019, bear witness to China's 5,000-year-old civilization. A large urban settlement dating back to the late Neolithic Age, Liangzhu boasts a massive ancient city and a sophisticated water conservation system, offering a unique glimpse into the origins of Chinese civilization.

The Beijing Central Axis, which was added to the list in 2024, stretch-

es 7.8 kilometers and embodies the ideals of ancient Beijing, the capital of the Yuan (1271-1368), Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. The design of the axis features "balance" and "harmony," which reflect the importance of order inherent in traditional Chinese culture.

The Xixia Imperial Tombs, the mausoleums of the Xixia Dynasty (1038-1227), showcase distinctive cemetery architecture and exquisite stone carvings, providing fresh evidence of cultural exchanges along the Silk Road.

Over the past decade, China's approach to world cultural heritage protection has shifted from emergency rescue to systematic conservation. Remarkable strides have also been made in the legal and institutional frameworks supporting cultural heritage protection. The amended Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics, which came into force on March 1, 2025, provides a solid foundation for safeguarding cultural relics.

Digital technologies are now being widely used to enhance the management of heritage sites.

By studying and interpreting the values of China's cultural heritage, people gain a correct, multi-dimensional and comprehensive image of the country.

For example, following the inclusion of the Archaeological Ruins of Liangzhu City in the World Heritage List, the international archaeological community has spoken highly of the development level of the city, as reflected by its water conservation system, social stratification and belief system.

Meanwhile, Chinese institutions have collaborated on archaeological research and conservation projects at World Heritage sites in Egypt, Honduras, Cambodia and other countries, sharing China's philosophies and technologies in archaeology and cultural heritage protection.

In 2023, China spearheaded the establishment of the Alliance for Cultural Heritage in Asia and the launch of the Asian Fund for Cultural Heritage Conservation. China remains committed to leveraging its expertise to contribute to global cultural heritage conservation efforts.

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VIEWS

Johan Rockström

Eco-civilization meets planetary boundaries

Over a decade after the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals — to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all by 2030 — we are in a precarious situation.

As we approach the 2030 deadline for the SDG framework that has defined not only the last decade of global development, but also work on climate, water, health and beyond, the question naturally arises: What next?

At a time of growing geopolitical fragmentation, it is increasingly difficult to imagine the UN forging the same broad consensus around a new global development framework that it did with the SDGs.

In this context, China's vision of an ecological civilization is a political and developmental framework that seeks to reconcile economic growth, social stability and environmental protection.

It is based on evidence that the old industrial production methods have run up unsustainable ecological costs, and concludes that environmental considerations must be integrated into planning, governance and economic activity.

This vision has seen a strong role for the state in its energy transition, such as large-scale investments in renewable technologies, ecological restoration programs, pollution control, and the use of environmental targets in government performance assessments.

Environmental protection is not above economic growth; rather, growth is compatible with ecological limits and national development goals.

Building an ecological civilization is fundamentally about succeeding in attaining aspirational social goals for human welfare and economic development, within scientifically defined boundaries: economic growth within the safe operating space of a stable, healthy and resilient planet. But a precondition to building an ecological civilization is to define and quantify the ecological limits or boundaries. The planetary boundaries framework



If we fail to keep the Earth's tipping point systems intact, ecological invoices will be sent, and they will hit indiscriminately across the world.

does just that. On the basis of the latest Earth system science, it starts by identifying the environmental processes that regulate the stability and resilience of the planet. These are the planetary boundaries.

It is not only about carbon and climate change, but also the ecological boundaries of biodiversity, land use, freshwater use, overloading of nitrogen, ocean stability, air pollution, depletion of the ozone layer and finally, novel enti-

ties, such as the overloading of persistent chemical compounds into the Earth system.

For all of these nine planetary boundaries, we have identified control variables, which — backed by big data, long time series and advanced analytics — enable us to quantify a safe boundary level that defines the transition from safety (when staying within the boundary level) to danger (when breaching the boundary).

Our scientific assessment from 2025 concludes that seven of the nine planetary boundaries have been breached. This means there is strong scientific support that we, as humanity, are in danger of destabilizing the Earth system and undermining human welfare across the world.

In the last decade, global warming has accelerated; the intensity of extreme events such as droughts, floods, wildfires and human-reinforced storms is increasing; and we are increasingly close to crossing tipping points, which would cause the permanent collapse of systems that provide planetary stability and life support for millions of people.

A new development paradigm will be needed to grapple with these challenges,

and it will require policies, economic incentives, regulations and profound equity dimensions (such as how to share, in a fair way, the ecological space on Earth among countries). If translated into ecological civilization targets, it can also drive innovation and efficiency and contribute to the next phase in humanity's journey toward shared prosperity.

At the same time, the international agenda will have implications for a large economy such as China. Our old and still dominant economic paradigm, which assumes that the planet has infinite capacity to buffer our unsustainable Anthropocene pressures, has long been proven wrong. The Earth is regulated by dampening (stress-reducing and cooling) feedback and interactions that regulate the large tipping point systems.

Scientifically, we have recently suggested that all tipping point systems (such as the large ice sheets, the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation, the Amazon rainforest) need to be legally defined as global commons.

Why? Because, to ensure strong socio-economic development, not only must the ecological civilization targets of all countries be met within their national borders, but also all tipping point systems on Earth must stay within safe planetary boundaries.

This also suggests a need to further align the Belt and Road Initiative with China's ecological civilization principles and scientifically defined planetary boundaries.

If we fail to keep the Earth's tipping point systems intact, ecological invoices will be sent, and they will hit indiscriminately across the world.

Ecological civilization in China thus not only implies clean, healthy environments for economic development within the country, but also becoming Planetary Stewards to keep the Earth, as a whole, within safe planetary boundaries.

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The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



MAX XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

Douglas de Castro

China and Brazil's blueprint for a shared future

Brazil was the top destination for Chinese capital in 2025, attracting \$6.1 billion in 52 Chinese investments. This was 45 percent more than the previous year, as highlighted in a report published by the Brazil-China Business Council recently.

To see these figures simply as traditional foreign direct investment is to miss a deeper structural alignment between China and Brazil.

This is not a cyclical movement of capital or a transactional pivot, but a civilizational convergence unfolding at a time when the liberal world order and international institutions are fracturing.

The China-Brazil partnership is quietly drawing a blueprint for a multipolar and ecologically rooted development model that reflects the vision of a shared future for humanity.

For decades, South-South economic engagement was often viewed through a narrow framework of resource extraction, debt diplomacy or geopolitical maneuvering.

This is the narrative that the 2025 report dispels: investing in Brazil's power grid, mining key minerals, electric-vehicle production, digital logistics, and high-tech manufacturing aligns with Brazil's priorities in energy transition and sustainable development, while also providing new opportunities for Chinese companies.

What distinguishes this wave of investments is its developmental philosophy. China and Brazil share many characteristics: large and diverse populations, imperialistic disruptions throughout history, state-led modernization and a preference for long-term sovereignty over short-term financialization.

Their growing partnership is anchored in strategic coordination, with infrastructure as the driver of industrialization and resilience as the measure of success.

This is very different from the Washington Consensus model of austerity, privatization and market fundamentalism that weakened many countries in the Global South and increased inequalities. Notably, many were greenfield pro-



In the broader context, cooperation between China and Brazil is accelerating because of the structural crisis of the liberal world order.

jects, focusing on capacity building, technology transfer, and sustainable operations. The investments touched a record 20 Brazilian states, with the North and Northeast gaining unprecedented momentum alongside traditional leaders such as Sao Paulo and Minas Gerais.

Investments in mining tripled to \$1.76 billion, focusing on critical minerals, copper, nickel, graphite and rare earths that are directly tied to the global energy transition.

Brazil has 26.5 percent of the world's graphite reserves and is second in rare earths, but China dominates their processing and manufacturing. Their collaboration is not exploitative but rather a vertically integrated supply chain that supports decarbonization.

The partnership's ecological dimension is evident at a deeper level. China's concept of ecological civilization places environmental sustainability at the center of modernization, embedding carbon neutrality, circular economy principles and green industrial policy into state planning.

Brazil adheres to the rights of nature framework, which recognizes ecosystems not only as economic resources but as subjects with their own intrinsic value.

Investment data from 2025 show how this philosophical convergence is turning into real infrastructure for the benefit of both nature and people. For the

fifth consecutive year, investment in sustainability and clean energy projects expanded in 2025, with a record 31 projects launched in hydropower, solar, wind and e-mobility.

These are not isolated initiatives, but part of an integrated low-carbon industrial ecosystem.

For instance, BYD and GWM did not simply replicate the Western assembly models in Bahia and Sao Paulo but localized entire value chains. Within months of starting operations, BYD produced nearly 20,000 electrified vehicles and established local supply networks.

Rumo and COFCO's rail logistics investment promises to cut carbon dioxide emissions from grain and sugar transportation by 80 percent compared to Brazil's heavily diesel-dependent road system.

Even the mining boom is linked to global decarbonization goals. EVs use six times more critical minerals than conventional combustion engine vehicles.

Here, China's model of ecological civilization intersects with Brazil's ethical emphasis on the rights of nature.

Together, they offer a pragmatic model of energy transition that respects both planetary boundaries and developmental sovereignty. In this sense, green industrial policy becomes a vehicle of South-South cooperation rather than a tool of Northern conditionality.

But this alignment requires careful navigation. Chinese companies must move beyond technical compliance and develop genuine socio-ecological integration by aligning with Brazil's complex environmental licensing rules, indigenous land protections, and decentralized regulatory environment.

In the broader context, cooperation between China and Brazil is accelerating because of the structural crisis of the liberal world order. Growing protectionism, technology decoupling, fragmented climate finance, and the weaponization of global supply chains have eroded trust in West-led multilateralism and Bretton Woods institutions.

Brazil is a natural anchor for China's

decarbonization and reindustrialization agenda given its clean energy mix, abundance of critical minerals, continental market size, and commitment to strategic autonomy.

From 2007 to 2025, Chinese investment in Brazil totaled \$85.5 billion in 355 projects, with manufacturing alone accounting for \$2.66 billion between 2023 and 2025, surpassing oil and mining in recent years. This signals a structural move away from dependence on raw materials to industrial integration with added value.

Brazil in turn gains access to capital, technology and industrial partnerships without the political conditionalities that have historically limited its policy space.

Projects such as the Geely-Renault joint venture in Parana, the expansion of Chinese digital platforms such as Keeta and 99Food, and the geographical dispersion in 20 states point to a decentralized and resilient network of cooperation. The community with a shared future for humanity is not a slogan but a functional architecture for multipolar development.

But this vision calls for long-term strategic alignment, transparent regulatory frameworks, robust local partnerships, and deliberate technological absorption.

Brazilian institutions should simplify licensing procedures while enforcing environmental and social standards. Chinese companies should deepen localization, prioritize workforce training and adapt to Brazil's institutional pluralism.

The crisis of the liberal order should not lead to fragmentation. Instead, it should be a catalyst for new forms of cooperation.

If Brazil and China continue to align their developmental trajectories with ecological imperatives, build regulatory transparency and develop technological capacity, they can shape a post-hegemonic, planet-centered future.

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European Union should get over its protectionist impulse

The upcoming European Council summit in Brussels from June 18 to 19 is a pivotal opportunity for the European Union to review its trade and investment policy toward China.

The EU needs to decide whether it wants to be more protectionist and confrontational or foster a more cooperative relationship with the world's second-largest economy.

The EU has been crafting multiple trade and investment measures against China, including the proposed Industrial Accelerator Act. The legislation would exclude China from participating in public procurement bids in certain sectors and from accessing subsidies in supply chains.

Since March 2019, when the EU redefined China from a comprehensive strategic partner to a "cooperative partner, economic competitor and systemic rival," the bloc has adopted a less cooperative policy. Many of the EU's investment screening and trade measures in the past years have deliberately targeted China even if they did not explicitly mention it by name.

The EU has also kowtowed to coercion by the United States to ban Huawei 5G and is now planning more measures against the Chinese company.

Within the 27-member EU, countries are divided on their approach to China. France, Spain, the Netherlands, Italy and Lithuania have advocated a tougher China policy while Germany and some Scandinavian countries believe stronger ties with China serve their best interests.

A tit-for-tat trade war between China and the EU will be a lose-lose game for both and the fragile global economy.

The EU has leveled various accusations against China, including running a trade surplus with the bloc, State subsidies, overcapacity and unfair trade practices. Yet, it's worth noting that the EU as a whole runs trade surpluses with most countries, including the US.

When Washington imposed punitive tariffs on the EU, the bloc tried hard to convince US President Donald Trump that trade deficits are not problematic. Yet somehow China's trade surplus has become a concern.

Many Europeans find it difficult to accept the fact that the country that once exported only labor intensive goods, such as garments, footwear and toys, is now globally competitive in electric vehicles, batteries, solar panels, wind turbines, AI and several high-tech sectors.

Most Europeans are not aware of China's phenomenal transformation.

I am writing this column in Chongqing, which has changed dramatically in the past two decades from a Third World city into a modern urban center comparable to major European cities.

At the same time, the EU's competitiveness has declined, especially against the US and China. According to a September 2024 report by former European Central Bank president Mario Draghi, the numerous challenges the EU faces are mostly internal.

China's GDP in nominal terms was smaller than that of Italy in 2000. But it surpassed Germany's GDP in 2007, and by 2025, was almost the same as that of the entire EU.

Blaming China for its own problems is a misguided approach. Instead, the EU should focus on addressing its internal problems and policy failures. During my time in Brussels, the EU prided itself on being a regulatory giant even though it had no tech giants of its own.

The Draghi report highlights that overregulation by the bloc has become a major problem that discourages innovation.

The EU's Cold War mentality, as exemplified by the demonization of Huawei and Chinese EVs as national security threats, is another problem.

In contrast, China welcomes EU investment, with millions of German, French and Italian cars running on Chinese streets.

Many EU companies have been involved in China's critical infrastructure construction. China has never branded Airbus as a national security threat despite the fact that it has a dominant 55 percent share in the commercial aviation market in the Chinese mainland.

The Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, which took many years to negotiate and remains frozen by the European Parliament, is a huge wasted opportunity for European companies in the Chinese market.

As two major trade partners, China and the EU have frictions on many issues. However, the right way to address them is through consultation rather than unilateral protectionist measures.

A tit-for-tat trade war between China and the EU will be a lose-lose game for both and the fragile global economy.

When EU leaders meet next week, they should aim to preserve the mutually beneficial trade and investment relationship, not derail it with tariffs, sanctions and discriminatory tools.

The FT View



FINANCIAL TIMES

"Without fear and without favour"

The Iran war tests the limits of India's economic resilience

Modi must combine crisis measures with reforms to help the country rebound

India's economy has displayed impressive resilience in the face of recent shocks, from the Covid-19 pandemic to punitive tariffs imposed by US President Donald Trump last year. The Iran war could, however, prove to be a test too far.

The fast-growing economy has been particularly exposed to the conflict. It imports 90 per cent of its oil, 60 per cent of its liquefied petroleum gas and about 85 per cent of the natural gas used to make fertiliser – and a significant portion of these commodities would usually pass through the Strait of Hormuz. But the longer shipping through the sea passage remains disrupted, the deeper the economic scars will be for the world's most populous country.

Since the US and Israel launched

attacks on Iran over 100 days ago, the commodity supply shock in India has threatened to metastasise into a financial malaise as well. Inflation has edged higher while public finances have been strained by higher subsidy costs for fuel and fertiliser. As the country's import bill has climbed, its currency has come under sustained pressure. The rupee fell to a record low against the dollar last month. Capital has also taken flight. As of early June, foreign ownership of Indian shares tumbled to a 10-year low. In recent weeks, India's stock market capitalisation has been surpassed by Taiwan and South Korea, though valuations have been volatile.

New Delhi has tried to limit the fallout with emergency measures. It has sensibly planned to ease back on some subsidies, even though this risks putting greater strain on households. In May, it more than doubled tariffs on imports of gold and silver to shore up the rupee. Last week it scrapped a capital gains tax on foreign investments in government

securities and launched a new blend of fuel that is 85 per cent ethanol, to help reduce the country's dependence on imported oil.

For now, the country remains at the whim of events in the Middle East – which is costing Indian lives too. Further economic sticking plasters may be necessary, from even tighter energy rationing efforts to interventions by the Reserve Bank of India, to stem capital outflows. But even if the current priority is crisis management, the government should note that turmoil from the war is also rooted in structural economic vulnerabilities, which ought to demand closer attention once the immediate pressures begin to ease.

First, India will need to move faster to diversify its supplies of key commodities and double down on renewable investments. Next, a stronger business environment would help India attract stickier foreign direct investment and reduce its exposure to flighty portfolio investors. Right now, firms still com-

Turmoil from the conflict is also rooted in structural vulnerabilities, which ought to demand closer attention once the immediate pressures begin to ease

plain about over-reach by tax and law enforcement authorities, and even "tax terrorism". Planning reform and further liberalisation of its large internal market would also help enterprises to scale and reap the benefits of AI. Finally, deeper trade deals will strengthen India's supply chain and expose firms to competitive pressures.

Recent economic shocks have pressured Prime Minister Narendra Modi into important reforms. In the past year, the government has implemented new labour codes, overhauled taxes, removed limits on FDI in insurance and accelerated new trade deals. The latest crisis will ultimately demand a similar response.

Emergency measures may soften the blow, but they will not insulate the economy from future shocks. If New Delhi wants to preserve its growth momentum and reclaim lost ground against its Asian competitors, it will need to emerge from this crisis not merely stabilised but also more resilient.

ft.com/opinion

Opinion Geopolitics

Why Europe should not choose to go it alone

Ann Kavanagh



Nadia Schadlow

When historians look back on the "great unravelling" whether of the post-second world war order or the transatlantic alliance – they will probably identify a series of policy choices made by President Donald Trump. But in reality, the fraying of the alliance may turn out to be more about decisions taken in Europe.

European choices matter and the key is how the bloc uses its agency. There are four major tests ahead. First, Europe must be realistic about the threat it faces. The war in Ukraine has shown growing co-operation between Russia, China, Iran and North Korea. The emergence of a network of revisionist powers whose activities span regions means that Europe must accept the imperative of aligning with the US. Washington may

The transatlantic partnership has survived repeated disagreements. It can do so again

be a frustrating partner at times, and debates over burden-sharing and troop levels are real. But "strategic autonomy" is not an option.

Second, Europe needs to reset its approach to China. Recent European Commission talks concluded the EU's relationship with Beijing was "not sustainable". The shift is welcome, but the postures adopted by member states remain uneven. France often favours a tougher approach; Germany often seeks to protect its commercial ties; and Hungary continues to welcome Chinese investment.

Third, like the US, Europe needs to get on a war footing in terms of defence, not to satisfy the Americans but to secure itself.

If Europe rebuilds defence capabilities outside Nato structures, it will deepen the fractures in the transatlantic alliance. Interoperability – the ability to fight as a single force – is one of Nato's greatest advantages. It took decades to build, and still remains incomplete, which is a testament to its difficulty. The key for Europe is to build on the capabilities and operational experience it has already developed through the alliance, not duplicate them outside of it.

Fourth, Europe can choose a growth agenda based on transatlantic connections. The economic strength

of the west depends on both the US and Europe. The US accounts for roughly a quarter of global GDP, while the EU remains one of the world's largest economic blocs. But Europe's share of global output has been declining. Reversing relative economic decline and generating stronger growth, investment and industrial capacity will require smart choices in three areas largely within Europe's control: regulation, energy and innovation.

As the Draghi report argued, Europe's regulatory environment has contributed to weak productivity growth, lagging innovation and lower investment. Meanwhile, high energy costs continue to undermine European industrial competitiveness. Europe can take steps to stabilise energy prices and secure supplies. Part of that effort could be greater access to long-term liquefied natural gas contracts linked to US Henry Hub prices. The price stability provided by long-term contracts could significantly reduce energy costs.

The ability to develop and scale AI will be equally important. Europe can continue to prioritise regulations, or it can accept greater risk. The question is whether it is prepared to make the trade-offs necessary to compete.

Large amounts of affordable and reliable energy are necessary to rebuild industrial capacity and grow AI. Europe's choice is between dependencies, like that on Russian gas, that create strategic vulnerability and relationships that rein force resilience. Long-term energy co-operation with the US falls into the latter category.

The gaps between the US and Europe did not start with Trump. They have been widening for years. If left unaddressed, these imbalances will steadily weaken the alliance. Europe can address them with its choices: on whether to build defence capabilities through Nato or parallel European structures; how to approach technological regulation; how to pursue growth; and how to address shared security threats. These choices will shape not only Europe's future but the future of the transatlantic alliance.

Pursuing forms of strategic autonomy that create greater distance between Europe and the US may offer the appearance of independence, but it risks weakening the bonds that have underpinned transatlantic security and prosperity for decades.

The transatlantic partnership has survived repeated political disagreements, policy disputes and changes in leadership. It can do so again. But that happy outcome is not inevitable. It will depend on decisions made not just in Washington but in European capitals too.

The writer was deputy national security adviser for strategy in the first Trump administration

Letters

UK pensioners are already paying a price for the SpaceX IPO

Toby Nangle asks how much it will cost investors not to have an opinion on SpaceX (AlphaVillage, FT.com, June 10). For the 11m people enrolled in UK defined contribution default funds, the question is sharper still: they do not have the option of an opinion, the index has one for them.

Nangle's diagnosis is exact. Nasdaq's fast-entry rule pulls SpaceX into the Nasdaq-100 index after 15 trading days rather than 63. FTSE Russell has gone further. S&P Dow Jones, to its credit, has held the line.

The mechanical consequence, on our modelling, is that roughly \$17.7bn of

passive demand will be conscripted into SpaceX on day 15 – of which about \$3.9bn comes from MSCI World-tracking vehicles, the benchmark to which the great majority of UK DC default funds are anchored.

This is not a debate about indexing in the abstract. It is a transfer of price-setting authority from investors to issuers and exchanges, paid for in the retirement incomes of people who have never heard of the Nasdaq listing rules.

A UK DC saver mechanically tracking MSCI World now has less exposure to the entire UK market (3.7 per cent) than to Nvidia alone

(5.6 per cent). Under plausible scenarios to 2036, the UK weight falls below 3 per cent and an "AI bloc" – SpaceX, OpenAI, Anthropic and the existing Magnificent Seven – exceeds 40 per cent of the global benchmark. The historical analogue for that degree of single-bloc dominance is Japan in 1989. UK pensioners were not asked then either.

And this is before one mentions the deleterious effect on the UK economy itself, of mechanically exporting British pension capital to the balance sheets of the UK's competitors – at a moment when domestic productive investment

has never been more needed.

Nangle is right that not having an opinion is going to cost something. The uncomfortable truth is that, for the British DC pensioner the cost is being collected automatically through a default fund whose architecture was never designed for an index whose rules are now being rewritten around a single generation of megastar listings.

Index inclusion methodology has become, in effect, UK retirement policy. It should be debated as such. Professor Iain Chicher, Ashok Gupta and Dan Hedley
New Capital Consensus, London SW1, UK

Trade rules force states to think beyond their borders

In Soumaya Keynes' op-ed "Why Europe must embrace tariffs" (May 29) it is clear, from the outset, that in her view the multilateral trading system is gone – blown up by the Trump administration.

But here is where she – and anyone who promotes the EU's turn to protectionism – may mistake the function of rules.

The World Trade Organization is not about rules of war. There are no rules of force. WTO rules are not scripture; they do not try to hold a government to moral accountability. Governance entails process and reasoning. The outcome rests with the WTO members.

The law cannot save the EU. Nor do the rules say the EU cannot adopt tariffs.

And here is where people misunderstand the design of the multilateral trading system.

Rules governing international trade, whether we are talking about free trade agreements, customs unions, or the WTO, offer a space for governments to come together and demonstrate a willingness to co-operate and co-ordinate. The WTO is a place to agree and to disagree.

All WTO members can raise tariffs in line with their domestic interests. There is a rule that binds members to the tariff rates they set, holding them accountable to other partners.

If and when needed, all members, including the EU, can renegotiate their tariff bindings. While mutually agreed settlement is the goal, renegotiation does not require an agreement. Without agreement, impacted partners can withdraw equivalent concessions to reset commitments.

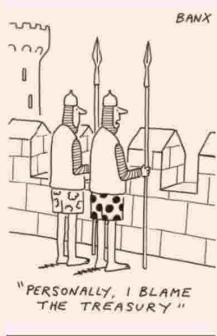
So, in a nutshell, the EU can do what it wants, but it has to respect its partners enough to consult and accept the consequences of its trade barriers. Because that is what the rules are for – they force the EU and other governments to think beyond their borders. A world where it cannot just be about Europe First.

Embarking on a plan that thumbs its nose at rules is not about the power to impose tariffs. The EU already has that power. Raising tariffs unilaterally, in defiance of the process for tariff negotiation, sends a powerful signal to all trade partners that the EU is in it for itself.

All the hard work to foster collective action through FTAs and WTO diplomacy would shrivel up. All for a tariff strategy that, to date, has not worked that well for the US.

That's the thing – tariffs are not credible commitments, but rules are.

Mona Paulsen
Assistant Professor of International Economic Law at LSE Law School, London WC2, UK



Defining corruption in Trump's America

Your editorial "The ethical dilemmas of artificial intelligence" (June 6) misses the prime priority of these business people most invested in AI. A relatively small number of these tycoons sat in the front row in January 2025 at Donald Trump's inauguration, about to claim their rewards.

They contributed hundreds of millions of dollars to Republican campaigns in the 2024 election, more cash for the inauguration, and more cash for Trump's ballroom and other causes, plus heavy lobbying in the halls of Congress. The quid pro quo for their largesse was a commitment by President Trump to absolutely minimal government regulation of AI.

Is this corruption? Not according to the decisions taken years ago by the US Supreme Court. Nevertheless, it is outrageous influence peddling.

The recent executive order signed by Trump is no more than throwing a tiny bone to those who want effective regulation to support national security. After all, corporations without restraints on their AI technologies could create weapons of mass destruction – and control them as well.

The enormous investments involved now in AI will strengthen the already formidable forces in support of maximum profits and minimum safeguards. While many governments, including the one in Argentina that you highlight, may or may not strive to regulate AI, the only authority that matters is the one that could directly control the AI giants. But the powers that be in Washington DC have been bought by the powers in Silicon Valley and Wall Street. Greed wins. Let us call it legal corruption where ethics has no place.

Frank Vogl
Co-founder Transparency International
Adjunct Professor Georgetown University, Washington DC, US

Burnham's fiscal folly made for depressing reading

For those of us who, many years ago as colleagues, admired the highly capable economist Jim O'Neill, the piece by George Parker, Sam Fleming and Jennifer Williams – "Burnham eyes spending rise within fiscal rules" (Report, 5 June) – made for depressing reading.

Lord O'Neill is supporting the dangerous prospect of even more government spending by backing projects with "high positive economic multipliers", using the somewhat shop-soiled Gordon Brown argument of "borrowing to invest".

When Brown was chancellor under Tony Blair and then when he was prime minister, funds "borrowed to invest" were too often spent on NHS running costs, public sector pay and general departmental budgets.

This Labour government promoted growth but has pursued tax and spend policies that are bound to have precisely the opposite effect. That is what Lord O'Neill should be impressing on Andy Burnham, not disguising further fiscal folly as a source of growth.

Governments are bad at investing money, which should be a private-sector function. It is faint praise indeed for the Institute for Fiscal Studies to say it was reasonable to argue that investment with "well-evidenced returns" would be more welcome than unfunded current spending.

Obviously, but so what? Even more government spending is just the wrong way to go. For growth, what is needed is tax cuts enabled through sharply reduced welfare benefits.

Gregory Shekman
London SW7, UK

Law firms are struggling to convert AI use into profits

John Burn-Murdoch's Data Points feature ("How much value is AI really creating?", Opinion, FT Weekend, June 6) refers to new research on AI use for legal work.

But the productivity gains that are realised by law firms using AI agents to produce legal work cannot necessarily be converted to higher profit or increased revenue if the charging model being used by those law firms is still based on cost reimbursable billing.

This form of billing incentivises tasks that are of a longer duration and which are undertaken by several types of lawyer, in different departments. Other forms of "fixed fee" charging connected to activity and/or to value-based billing are not proven.

This paradox is currently stymying some law firms.

Mark Bull
Managing Legal Consultant,
Winchester, Hampshire, UK

An outdated Atlanticism and a wartime guilt

In Constance Stelzenmüller's column on what she calls "Germany's (entirely predictable) UN Security Council defeat" (Opinion, June 10) she is right to say that Chancellor Friedrich Merz tends to speak before he thinks. That said, the explanations she gives for Germany's failure at the UN are incomplete.

Very surprisingly, she omits to mention that the UN General Assembly was presided over by the former German foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock! It is therefore hard to imagine that she did not have the stakes of the 2026 vote in mind, or that the German government who pushed her candidacy did not have the Security Council election in view. This makes the failure all the more bitter.

Beyond this affair, German politics suffers from an acute sense of guilt. It is, for instance, this sense of guilt that explains why German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, justified the signing of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline with Russia as a form of moral reparations for German aggression against the Soviet Union in the second world war. Guilt is also what drove Baerbock, in the midst of the war in Gaza, to speak of unconditional support for the state of Israel, as if it were realistic to support the policy of any state, whatever it may be, unconditionally. What will Germany do, if tomorrow, Itamar Ben-Gvir, the far-right national security minister, were to take the helm of the Israeli government?

Germany is principled, but not terribly creative. It remains trapped in an outdated Atlanticism and in a sense of guilt, which is understandable but not always well placed.

Zaki Laidi
Professor at Sciencespo, Paris, France

Another fine photograph

Another fine photograph on the front page (May 26). Not from the Strait of Hormuz this time but one of a woman strolling on the seafloor at Bournemouth, coast-jour, like a painting from the Newlyn School. Please do print the photographers' names bigger. I can read without glasses but have to reach for the magnifying glass to see who took the photos.

The pictures are what started me getting the FT. In particular, a picture of people queuing along a rainy, grey Thames to see the late Queen lying in state that reminded me of the painting I had just done remembering Churchill's funeral when the quayside cranes saluted his river cortege.

Jane Swan
Delabole, Cornwall, UK

Opinion

Building resilience in a turbulent world

Sanae
Takaichi

Pressing challenges face the international community right now. Key among them is the situation in the Strait of Hormuz. As well as being a strategic chokepoint for global logistics, the strait is also an international public good. The free and safe navigation of vessels through it has underpinned the prosperity and growth of numerous countries including Japan and the UK.

But recent developments in the strait are straining the free and open international order based on the rule of law, which Japan has consistently supported. To ensure the resilience of supply chains for vital goods, including energy, it is essential to safeguard this route in accordance with international law. This view is shared by many, and Japan will continue to make consistent diplomatic efforts in close co-operation with others

as I attend the G7 summit next week. The international community is also faced with the task of determining how we should envision our future, drawing lessons from the turbulence of the present moment. The circumstances brought about by the strait's de facto closure have reminded us of the importance of each nation playing its part in the global order by enhancing its own agency and resilience.

In particular, the Indo-Pacific region, which accounts for approximately 50 per cent of global GDP, holds the key to the world's future peace and stability. The UK and Europe demonstrated their commitment to this region at an early stage while the US places priority on its national security strategy. Japan also strongly reiterates its belief that we must actively contribute to the stability of the Indo-Pacific and fulfil our own responsibilities there.

With this in mind, I announced the updated Free and Open Indo-Pacific framework (FOIP) in May. This upholds core principles such as the rule of law, economic prosperity and the realisation of peace and stability. But, in light of

today's challenging international circumstances, it also strengthens initiatives to help each country in the region acquire the agency necessary to determine its own destiny and ensure the entire Indo-Pacific will be "more resilient and prosperous together".

In addition to bolstering co-operation on economic security, we will collaborate with our partners on advanced

To tackle the new challenges of today, it is essential to acquire new capabilities

technology and innovation, promote rules-based free trade and investment, and counter economic coercion.

Recently, with a view to stabilising energy supplies, we launched the POWER Asia initiative. This aims to work with Asian countries to strengthen the resilience of supply chains for energy and critical materials. We are also promoting the "FOIP Digital

Corridor Concept", which focuses on developing the infrastructure essential for the AI and data era, including undersea cables, open RAN, satellite communications and all-optical networks.

It is in geopolitical circumstances like the present moment that such initiatives, which seek to foster strategic co-operation with other nations, become all the more crucial. We recognise the need to work together to strengthen the resilience of nations not only within the Indo-Pacific but across the world.

That is precisely why Japan is looking to the international community as a whole. In the field of security, our accelerating co-operation with the UK and Italy on the Global Combat Air Programme is a case in point. Following the review of Japan's policy guidelines on the transfer of defence equipment and technology earlier this year, it is expected that co-operation aimed at further enhancing interoperability between Japan, the UK and Europe will ensue. Japan is also providing approximately £14.5bn in support to Ukraine. We pay tribute to the UK

and Europe's leadership in this regard and will continue to work closely with our partners to deliver our support.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer and I will co-operate to take Japan and the UK's relationship as "enhanced global strategic partners" to new heights. Specifically, we will collaborate on economic security including energy issues, advanced technology, such as research on "Beyond 5G/6G", and security policy.

To tackle the new challenges of today, it is essential to acquire new capabilities. This also necessitates embracing change. Although it may face political pushback, as Japan's "Iron Lady" I am strongly determined to bring about the necessary transformation. Throughout this tour of Europe, I intend to engage in concrete, frank discussions with my counterparts, jointly reaffirming the importance of making a step change in line with the times. Japan will continue to devote all its efforts to maintaining and strengthening a free and open international order.

The writer is prime minister of Japan

Pro-worker conservatives are changing the US

AMERICA

Oren
Cass

For the past five decades, as private-sector union membership in the US collapsed, the National Labor Relations Act went unchanged. Labour leaders funded the Democratic Party and made maximalist demands often unpopular with workers themselves. The Republican Party, largely beholden to business interests, was content to oppose any reform and let worker power wither.

Now, however, a small but growing cadre of pro-worker conservatives is scrambling that playing field, most recently with the passage on Tuesday of the landmark *Faster Labor Contracts Act (FLCA)* in the House of Representatives. Seventeen of them co-sponsored the bill and seven joined with Democrats to force a vote over the opposition of their leader, Speaker Mike Johnson. In the final tally, 20 Republicans voted to strengthen substantially the position of workers seeking a union contract.

People often assume that the vote on whether to form a union is the make-or-buy moment in securing the right to bargain collectively. In fact, a successful union election merely marks the start of negotiations that might go nowhere. Most workers, a year after forming their union, still don't have an agreement. Employers use stalling tactics to sap momentum and undermine workers' enthusiasm for the process.

The act seeks to change that by establishing a tight timeline for bargaining a first contract: ten days to begin negotia-

Corporate lobbyists accustomed to obstruction may need a fresh game plan

tions and another 90 to reach an agreement. If no deal is reached, the parties move to 30 days of mediation and, then, if necessary, an arbitration panel steps in to settle a final contract that binds both sides for two years.

In Washington, the provisions had lived within the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, a union wish list that Democrats failed to advance through a partisan push. In the past, that would have been the end of it. But as polling from American Compass demonstrated last year, not all of the labour demands were unpopular. And with conservatives more frequently making the case for worker power, and working-class voters shifting to the right, Republicans, led by senators Josh Hawley, Bernie Moreno and Roger Marshall, sensed an opportunity.

Worried corporate groups have tried to cast themselves as the true union enthusiasts. "Congress shouldn't take away the voices of workers through forced arbitration," says Americans for Tax Reform. The US Chamber of Commerce warns that, "without ever having a vote from union members, the government could decide workplace rules, pay, and benefits".

The problem with these arguments is that, absent a union, workers are already subject to terms and conditions of employment set by some combination of government regulation and employer fiat. If working under conditions you did not vote for is some grave injustice that employers wish to remedy, they should all recognise unions voluntarily and perhaps even support industry-wide sectoral bargaining.

Workers voting for a union after passage of the FLCA would know that one possible outcome is an arbitrator-imposed contract. One assumes few of them want a union that can be stalled endlessly by management rather than one that has a backstop of mediation and arbitration.

Only a few years ago, the prospect of Republican legislators helping to strengthen labour law would have seemed outlandish. Now it is happening and seems likely to become more common. In a world where both parties can find common ground on pro-worker reforms, the corporate lobby action must be straightforward obstruction may need a new game plan. More importantly, they may need to get serious about bargaining in good faith and treating workers well.

The writer is an FT contributing editor and chief economist at American Compass

The business model of white victimhood

BRITAIN

Robert
Shrimsley

There is the reality and then there is the grift. So let's start with the reality. There are problems with some of the people the British asylum system allows in; there are issues with the police. Some well-meaning efforts to crack down on discrimination have had unwanted effects.

There have been shocking failures to protect public safety, and cope with serious mental illness. From the triple murderers, Axel Rudakubana, the Southport killer, and Valdo Calocane, to the Pakistani-dominated rape gangs, warnings went unheeded through incompetence or a fear of appearing racist.

Nor can we ignore the brutality. The sight this week of a Sudanese migrant sitting astride his victim, slashing at his throat on a Belfast street brought back memories of the murder of the soldier, Lee Rigby, 35 years earlier. The killing of Rhiannon Whyte was a murder of astonishing savagery. These incidents may be small in number but they alarm. And since all these men were asylum seekers, migrants or the children of immigrants, many jump to conclusions.

It would be absurd not to be outraged by such crimes, or heartbroken by

the last moments of Henry Nowak, who died in handcuffs because police, who had been called out by his Sikh killer to what he said was a racist assault, did not initially believe he had been stabbed.

It would also be right to be outraged at the case of Chas Corrigan, a British construction worker who murdered a Saudi student in Cambridge, stabbing him in the neck. But you probably haven't heard about it since it doesn't fit the zeitgeist. You may also have missed Alina Burns, a neo-Nazi teenager who set on a Kurdish barber with an axe.

I do not mention these last cases to indulge in reflex whataboutery. They do not invalidate the desire to avoid importing more killers. But we hear little of these other incidents because their white perpetrators do not fit the narrative – or the political business model – of the populist right. No Reform UK figure tweeted: "some cultures are better than others" when John Ashby was jailed for beating and raping a Sikh woman in her home in Walsall.

In the pendulum of political fashion Britain is now being offered its "white lives matter" moment, complete with the hyper-radicalised selective vision of the Black analogue. Diversity policies are lambasted as an anti-white plot. White victimhood is the template for the populist right across the west from Elon Musk to the far-right extremists he promotes on JD.

We saw it in *IX* Vance's assertion that the Nowak case was proof of "the politics of self-hatred and the mass invasion of migrants, many of whom despise the

west", a preposterous claim to anyone who knows Britain's Sikh community. But Vance is not only speaking to the UK. Britain and Europe are the cautionary liberal tale he is selling Americans.

Then we have the media and bloggers seizing on incidents that fit the white victimhood agenda, ignoring those that do not. This is a smart career move. Each crime is a chance to attract subscribers, get on TV, reach a US audience and promote books with titles like *Suicide of a Nation*. "Is Britain racist against white men?" asks the Telegraph.

The same is true for politicians on the right. Outrage is their currency. Hence the ratchet of rhetoric from UK populist leaders, Nigel Farage, Rupert Lowe and Tommy Robinson, and their disingenuous warnings of civil unrest. Robinson's

If the opportunists are to be defeated, leaders have to grasp the kernel of reality in their arguments

response to the Belfast attack was to call for rallies (promoted of course on X), knowing some were likely to end in violence. The sight of people being burnt out of their homes is then used by the grifters to warn of spreading unrest.

Some argue that in his call for "pure color" over the Nowak case, Farage made a mistake. Perhaps, but it was not an accident. This was a political calculation. His audience is those who feel ignored by politicians in London. (Note the number of asylum hotels in poorer areas). Nowak can be fitted into his story of liberal elites imposing two-tier law on the white population. Rage is the model, one rewarded by social media.

It may also be that Reform has noticed the sharp fall in net migration and even, for now, small boat crossings. The immigration agenda is now mainstream so the party needs a larger dragon to slay. And there is a fear of being outbid by a more hardline party. The impact goes in only one direction: an ever more hostile environment for non-whites.

Politicians have always seized on crimes. In the 1990s Tony Blair made his

reputation with his response to the Jamie Bulger murder (he later lamented his "good politics but bad policy"). But it is the job of political leaders to cool tempers and find ways to take the grievances away from the grifters.

If the opportunists are to be defeated, mainstream leaders have to grasp the kernel of reality in their arguments. They must take public safety seriously, tackle the failings in policing and mental health services and weed out the dangerous from the asylum system. They may also, as the Tory leader Kemi Badenoch argues, address any proven (as opposed to merely asserted) perverse impacts of anti-discrimination policies.

The grifters offer two threats. The first, obviously, is voters falling for their dishonest narrative. The second is voters' fears being disregarded out of contempt for those who raise the issues, an approach that will not address those concerns. Not that the grifters model in mind. The core of their business model is the grievance, not the solution.

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An unlikely alliance is pushing an AI sovereign wealth fund

TECHNOLOGY

John
Thornhill

Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump have little in common. But on one narrow subject, at least, they seem to agree: the government should take direct equity stakes in the big American AI research labs currently rushing towards giant public market flotations. The radical senator from Vermont is championing the idea of the federal government becoming a core shareholder in leading AI companies, such as OpenAI and Anthropic, a plan the US president appears to endorse. But this unlikely political convergence disguises some wildly divergent motives, interests and approaches.

Sanders is drawing up a bill to nationalise the big AI labs by charging them a one-off 50 per cent tax to be paid

in stock. The senator's logic is simple: given that AI is "built on the collective knowledge of humanity, the wealth it generates must benefit humanity". His proposed legislation would give the government voting rights on each company's board to shape decisions in the public interest. It would also ensure that the vast wealth potentially generated by AI would benefit all Americans, not just a handful of "Big Tech oligarchs".

Surprisingly, the main thrust of this semi-Leninist attempt to co-own the means of AI generation has been backed by the spasmodically libertarian Trump. Last Friday, he told reporters he was discussing a deal with the major AI labs to take stakes in their companies. "There's something very interesting about it, where it almost becomes a partnership with the American public," the president said.

Trump relishes the role of big-time "stockbroker", no matter how much this ruins his free-market supporters. Since returning to office, the federal government has spent more than \$10bn taking direct stakes in several semiconductor and minerals companies

deemed critical for national security, including Intel and MP Materials.

More structured sovereign wealth funds already operate successfully in several countries. Norway, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, for example, have all built enormous public investment funds based on their oil revenues. At the state level, the idea has proved popular in the US, too. For 50 years, the Alaska Permanent

Sanders is drawing up a bill to part-nationalise the big labs by charging them a one-off 50 per cent tax

Fund has doled out oil revenue-derived dividends to the state's residents in a form of universal basic income. If, as the (imperfect) cliché goes, data is the new oil then why not create a data-resourced public investment fund?

Even some of the AI labs seem to agree. In discussion papers, both OpenAI and Anthropic have floated the

idea of creating a public investment fund. Sam Altman, OpenAI's chief executive, even met Sanders last week to discuss the plan. These companies may be hoping to forestall a growing public backlash against AI that they themselves have helped trigger. Their loose talk of AI causing mass joblessness, cyber attacks and existential risk has alarmed the public. "I could almost support the Sanders proposal as a stupidity tax," the former AI presidential adviser David Sacks acidly posted on X.

Like other libertarians, though, Sacks opposes the principle of the state taking stakes in private companies, fearing it would distort competition and risk regulatory capture. For them, such civil-technological fusion in the US appears dangerously similar to civil-military fusion in communist China. Any prospect of state intervention will also cause many sleepless nights for the bankers currently drafting the prospectuses for the forthcoming public offerings of OpenAI and Anthropic.

As Sanders himself admits, the details of any such sovereign wealth fund are critical and his own bill seems highly

unlikely to fly. Myriad questions need to be answered first. Which companies would be included in any such scheme? Should it also embrace giant AI frontier companies, including SpaceX, Alphabet and Meta, which may be the biggest beneficiaries of the technology? Besides, if, as Sanders argues, AI truly is the distillation of all human knowledge then why should only American citizens benefit? It seems odd for a self-declared democratic socialist to be supporting a form of data colonialism.

In trying simultaneously to address three differing agendas of economic justice, regulatory oversight and national security, it could be that the idea satisfies none of the above. By instinct, Trump would appear more inclined to reach a quick, headline-grabbing deal than support more considered legislation. But it is encouraging that this debate is happening at all. If, as the AI companies promise, they stand to make billions from this disruptive technology, then one way or another they will have to pay for a social licence to do so.

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Opinion

The New York Times

It's Not the 1994 World Cup, but It's Something

Joshua Jelly-Schapiro

A geographer and writer who edited a series of essays about the 2018 World Cup for The New York Review of Books.

IT'S not easy to explain, to kids growing up today surrounded by screens and viral videos, the epiphanic force with which the men's World Cup landed on American TV in 1994. It certainly did on the old Magnavox TV in my parents' house in northern New England's woods. Like many American kids in the waning years of the Cold War, I spent my Saturday mornings kicking a ball around American fields. I had joined a travel team whose sponsor's logo ("CABOT: Cheese from Vermont") vied for space with Adidas on our chests. But I'd never seen the game played at the highest level — until 1994.

To live in range of ABC's coverage of the games that summer was to glimpse the world's finest players and best-loved teams. It was also to be treated to vivid and at times incongruous tableaux of ethnic fervor and comity, involving not merely those teams but their impassioned fans, too. They filled America's biggest arenas — green-clad Nigerians and sombrero-wearing Mexicans, Swedes in Viking hats and Argentines singing songs about Diego Maradona. Feelings of national rivalry and pride occasioned not war but play.

To take in those games, as ABC's commentators informed us, was to watch telecasts also being absorbed by billions of other humans — and to participate in the world.

In 2026, the world doesn't look like we hoped it might from the sunny vantage of the early 1990s, when history still felt like it was moving in a positive direction. The



HARRIET LENNEMAN

United States, which seemed destined to be increasingly open-minded, is more closed off. But the return of the World Cup, a competition founded in the same era as the League of Nations and involving a sport that Americans have now learned to love, will still channel conflicts between countries into "peaceful contests in the stadium," as Jules Rimet, the man who masterminded the competition, once put it. As important, it will offer us all a chance to experience, even if just for a moment, a mighty form of communion.

In 1994, the Cold War was over and America — notwithstanding Washington's frequently awful proxy wars in developing

This year's soccer tournament offers a chance at a mighty form of communion.

countries — was admired as the global paragon of democracy and the rule of law. But the sporting culture in the United States was insular and jingoistic. It was defined by sports that Americans evolved from the games of our colonial masters: Gridiron football was a more dynamic and violent form of English rugby; baseball was an American riff on cricket. Americans took pride in the fact that few others in the world cared about or played our "national pastime."

Association Football — a game with ancient global roots but whose modern form was, like rugby and cricket, codified in England — became the globe's game thanks to factors both of history and of form. The British Empire brought British sailors, engineers and miners to the world's ports. The game they played by wharves from Buenos Aires to Accra to Hong Kong was embraced by people who founded clubs in those cities and a thousand more. Soccer became the 20th century's pre-eminent way for people around the world to hail, as the soccer historian David Goldblatt put it, "the miracle of our own solidarities."

Except in the United States — until 1994, anyway. That summer's World Cup was the best-attended and most-watched tournament that soccer's worldwide governing body, FIFA, had ever staged. This was the goal. FIFA and its partners, among them some of the world's biggest companies and media conglomerates, aimed to make the globe's best-loved sport a big business in the world's richest market.

In the 32 years since the 1994 World Cup, the dreams of FIFA and its corporate cronies have in large part come to pass. We follow the world's top leagues on TV, and our women's team are worldbeaters. Soccer, according to one recent poll, has surpassed

baseball as Americans' third-favorite sport. Among teens, it comes close to rivaling the N.B.A. for hearts and eyeballs.

Now the World Cup is back. Since 1994, the reputations of both the United States and FIFA have taken some profound dings. FIFA's corruption was never exactly a secret, but has now been exposed to the world. President Trump's contempt for the rule of law and international norms has done vast damage to America's global standing and American society alike.

The reason FIFA's flagship event has returned to the world's richest country, this time sharing hosting duties with our North American neighbors and cosignatories to NAFTA, the former treaty that Mr. Trump loved to hate, is the same reason that Gianni Infantino, FIFA's unctuous current head, expanded this World Cup from 32 nations to 48: cash.

This is the world as it is. But we'll be watching regardless. In 1994, we thrilled to Romario's balletic goals for Brazil; in 2026, we'll wonder if Kylian Mbappé's mercurial French team can pull together and if the great Lionel Messi of Argentina has one more "mundial" in him. We'll cheer along for smaller nations, from Haiti to Jordan to Cape Verde, hoping they can notch even a single, glorious win.

This year's final will be staged on July 19 in New Jersey's MetLife Stadium, whose turf played host in 1994 to a memorable match between Italy and Ireland. It was filled to bursting with immigrants' kids below their love for the old countries in the new one where they'd made good.

We tuned in then, and we will tune in now — to hundreds of matches across the continent. And we'll know that what happens on their fields will model, as only a World Cup can, the world as we want it.

The Bipartisan Hatred of All Things Feminine

Jessica Grose

An Opinion writer covering family, religion, education, culture and the way we live now.

PRESIDENT TRUMP'S cabinet has been breathtakingly incompetent and horribly destructive, but the members who are suffering the biggest consequences seem to be women.

Kristi Noem, the secretary of homeland security; Pam Bondi, the attorney general; and Lori Chavez-DeRemer, the labor secretary, either were fired or stepped down under pressure this year; Mr. Trump picked men to fill their spots. Beyond cabinet positions in the second Trump administration, only 12 percent of Senate-confirmed appointees are women.

Mr. Trump's second term in office has been less volatile than his first, and some high-profile men have been canned. Nonetheless, some of the women hired to run large parts of the federal government have already flamed out.

I don't mourn the loss of their service, but the anti-woman bias of many in our current leadership is overt and constant, and it will have lasting effects on female political achievement — not just for Republicans.

Pete Hegseth, the secretary of defense, has gone out of his way to demean women in the military and block their promotions, and the founder of his religious denomination thinks women with husbands shouldn't be allowed to vote. Mr. Trump attacks the female reporters who ask him tough questions, commenting on or criticizing their looks — just recently he stomped out of an interview with NBC's Kristen Welker, telling her, "You're either crooked or you're stupid."

But Mr. Trump and his cronies aren't content just to put down actual women. Anyone whose behavior is deemed insufficiently manly is trashed. James Talarico, the mid-mannered seminarian Democrat who is running for a Senate seat in Texas, has been called "James Talafreako" by his opponent, the corrupt Republican Ken Paxton, in part because Mr. Talarico has embraced meat alternatives. The Trump henchman Stephen Miller has gone further, repeatedly claiming that Mr. Talarico is "transitioning" to female on both Fox News and his X account.

If that weren't awful enough, some leftists and liberals seem to be aping Republican-style insults, implying that anything outside an old-fashioned vision of masculine behavior is weak and womanly and should be avoided. In response to new revelations about the Maine Senate hopeful Graham Platner's past relationships, a prominent progressive, Matt Stoller, defended him, posting on X that "Graham Platner represents a rejection of Dem HR lady politics." Which is to say, any objection to Mr. Platner's history is somehow coded as female.

This defense tactic from Mr. Platner's staunchest supporters is not new. Moira Donegan, writing in The Guardian in October, noted that many liberal men loudly defended Mr. Platner then, in spite of his Nazi tattoos and his Reddit comments about women and minorities, on the ground that the party had become too feminized. "The idea is that in catering too much to women, and in being insufficiently deferential to domineering, gruff, physically imposing and implicitly white, rural men, the party has come to seem hectoring, inauthentic and whiny, and lost the voters they need to most recruit."

If I lived in Maine, I would certainly vote for Mr. Platner over Susan Collins in a general election, so that Democrats can have a

Some liberals are aping the Republican-style aversion to anything womanly.



ELEANOR DAVIS

chance to take back the Senate and oppose Mr. Trump. I also understand why people are excited about Mr. Platner's progressive stances and his ability to connect in person, and I get the calculus around choosing him as the nominee among the other options.

But it isn't even true that it's "Dem HR lady politics" to look askance at his behavior — according to Gallup polling from 2025, 89 percent of Americans think adultery in a marriage is morally wrong, and Republicans and independents are more likely to think it's morally wrong than Democrats. Adultery is not just a subject of interest to women.

While I know that Mr. Trump has broken our sense of ethics when it comes to political behavior, it's actually pretty normal and not especially feminine to worry that Mr. Platner's sexting as many as a dozen other women while married could be a liability for him in a general election, and to wonder if there are going to be other shoes dropping for him in the next few months.

I also find it impossible to believe that a female, gay or nonwhite politician with Mr. Platner's background would be given the amount of grace that he is receiving.

Gretchen Whitmer, the governor of Michigan, got dragged across the internet last year for simply holding a folder in front of her face in the Oval Office, with one headline asking, "How Politically Devastating Is the Blue Folder Picture?" and some speculating that her future in politics was basically over.

It is profoundly depressing to see people on both sides imply that only "masculine" behavior, defined in the narrowest, most chest-thumping way, is worthy of power and respect, and the only way to win elections. It makes the expectations for female candidates even more onerous and complicated. I don't think it's a coincidence that in the past year, the few female Democrats — Governor Abigail Spanberger of Virginia and the New Jersey congressional hopeful Rebecca Bennett — who have been able to break through tend to have traditionally masculine career backgrounds in the military or the C.I.A.

I called Amanda Litman, the president of Run for Something, an organization that recruits young progressive candidates like Mr. Talarico to run for office, to ask her if she was seeing some of the same barriers for female candidates that I have noticed. "I think

one of the broader challenges is that we do not have a definition of authentic or compelling that includes women," she said. And the second female Democrat does eke out a place for herself, Ms. Litman added, the right-wing media ecosystem makes her into a monster, the way it has with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Kamala Harris and Nancy Pelosi.

I am generally optimistic about the state of gender relations in this country. But I am not feeling bullish on female politicians gaining real power on the national level in the near future.

We're still more than two years out from the next presidential election, but none of The Washington Post's "standout" candidates on either the left or the right are women. On "Pod Save America," a podcast hosted by former Obama administration staffers, the co-host Dan Pfeiffer recently came to a similar conclusion, saying, "You could end up with an all-male field, which would be kind of gross in 2028."

It may be gross, but it's also a logical conclusion, if you're paying attention. If we've defined authentic power as male, then there's no way for a woman to claim it.

My Life Lessons From M.M.A. Fighting

Matthew Denton-Edmundson

A professor of creative writing and the author of the forthcoming novel "Reclamation."

ON PRESIDENT TRUMP'S 80th birthday this Sunday, professional fighters are scheduled to attempt to beat each other up on the South Lawn of the White House in a newly erected arena called the Claw. There's even been talk that the fighters might emerge from the Oval Office, then do battle in an event featuring a shower of patriotic fireworks.

I teach at a state university in Boise, Idaho, a town that's a blue dot in a red state, and most of my friends and colleagues, as well as most people on my social media feeds, are already horrified by the prospect of this coming spectacle. I get it. But what many of my friends don't know is that, for several years now, on Saturday mornings, I say goodbye to my wife and kid, head to Straight Blast Gym, lace up 16-ounce gloves and trade uppercuts and body kicks with a group of highly accomplished fighters. I'm training in muay Thai, one of several fighting styles commonly used in mixed martial arts.

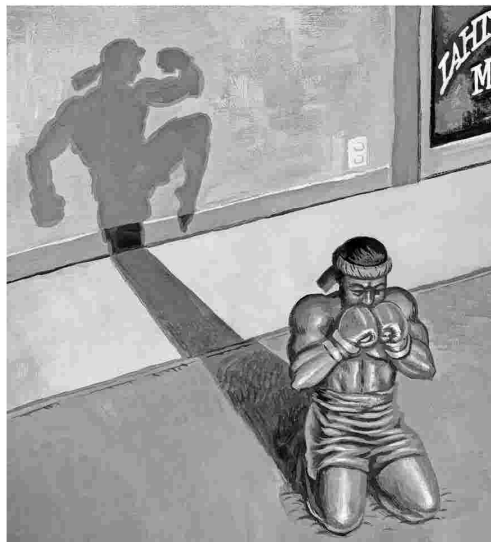
In my social circles, muay Thai and M.M.A. are often imagined as the sole territory of disgruntled and possibly deranged males in their early 20s and divorced dads who mainline Joe Rogan. Picturing my gym, my friends most likely imagine a basement with bare lightbulbs and Tyler Durden intoning, "The first rule of Fight Club is..."

They're not totally wrong to have that impression. There is an overtly macho element to combat sports: the trash talk and posturing, the slugfests and blood-on-the-mat fights. In my experience, lots of young men are interested in learning how to fight. Maybe these men don't want to feel vulnerable or weak in a world that feels full of threats. A few of them — though none I've ever met — might even aspire to fashion themselves into hyper-alpha males modeled on the likes of Andrew Tate, the former kickboxer, self-sworn misogynist and manosphere influencer who's been accused of human trafficking.

I do think it's true that many young men crave a sense of confidence but struggle to find ways of cultivating it. And they may become attracted to messages that explain away their feelings of inadequacy: It's feminism, it's liberals, it's my teachers, it's my boss. They may even come to idolize the kind of aggression and macho bravado that ultimate fighting offers, and that our president deploys in business, politics, international relations and, yes, the promotion of over-the-top M.M.A. events.

When I first walked into a fight gym, I'd recently moved across the country to a new city, for my wife's job, and I was feeling a bit unmoored. I confess that I fantasized a little bit about a reborn version of myself — lean and dangerous, somebody not to be messed with. But that's not quite what I've found while training, and it's not why I've stuck with muay Thai. Instead, the sport has helped me in ways I never expected. I've learned that legitimate fight gyms offer an alternative vision for what men ought to be. Like other difficult sports, muay Thai teaches you that purpose and pride can be earned through hard work — and that you are responsible for building your own confidence by pushing your physical and mental limits. Muay Thai training has also given me a sense of peace and tempered confidence I don't think I could have found anywhere else.

Not long ago, my wife and I had our first child, and in the months after his birth, the stress and sleeplessness started to get to me. There were moments when I felt anger



BENJAMIN MARRA

and frustration rising — most often at myself, at how much work having an infant turned out to be, and how unprepared I felt. Each time this happened, I recalled an exercise we do at the gym called a finch drill: A partner rains down punches on you while you do your utmost to remain calm and watchful behind your guard, parrying and blocking whenever possible. Because of that drill, I'd learned to use breath work and mindfulness to alleviate my stress response. In the most difficult moments of early parenthood, that's exactly what I did.

People might imagine combat sports as all about anger, brutality and aggression. But being calm under fire — calm always — is one of the first attributes taught in muay

Muay Thai taught me to handle the hardest moments of parenthood.

Thai. Composure is valued above all else, and respect for one's rival is close behind. For this reason, accomplished fighters are well prepared to keep their cool.

I don't tend to bring up fighting at the playground or around the college, partly because I'm wary of being seen in a negative light — as a bit of a brute, even — and partly also because I know such judgment isn't wholly unjustified. It's true that certain men let their abilities in the ring go to their head. I admit that on occasion I've found myself fantasizing about testing my martial skills (such as they are) outside the gym — teaching a lesson to some guy who dares to say the wrong thing to me or my wife. And there are invariably one or two guys at every gym who are out for blood every time they spar, no matter the skill level of their partner. Muay Thai trainers sometimes refer to this behavior disapprovingly as "ego sparring."

But fight gyms also have a way of cutting egos down to size. Just when you start think-

ing a bit too much of yourself, you end up toe-to-toe with a skinny teenager who can easily put you on the ground. There's always someone around who can outmatch brawn with calm and technical prowess.

There's a tradition I've encountered in my muay Thai training that's notably different from the bravado that surrounds the Ultimate Fighting Championship and the kind of pomp that will most certainly be in full force at Mr. Trump's White House fights. Before serious and professional matches, muay Thai fighters do a formal dance around the ring called a wai khru, which involves a meditative swaying and movements meant to evoke and honor tigers and other animals.

The purpose of performing the wai khru, beyond its aesthetic appeal, is to pay respect to teachers and parents, and to remind the fighters and audience that the contest is a form of ritualized violence, a way of expelling aggressive impulses while building, rather than undermining, community feeling. While I'll occasionally watch an M.M.A. fight, I've become a devoted follower of the professional muay Thai circuit, based out of Rajadamnern Stadium in Thailand, and I always enjoy watching the dances that precede the bouts.

The dance is not necessarily what anyone in the Western world, or the so-called manosphere, would call macho. I doubt the White House M.M.A. fights will involve any such ritual or reverence, or any appeal to the notion of a calm and centered self. So if you're put off by the prospect of cage fights on the White House lawn, fair enough.

But don't dismiss the skill and dedication of the fighters themselves. The growing popularity of combat sport gyms is, to my mind, a great sign of a structural advantage every time I show up to Saturday morning practice and find a room full of young men and women who are serious about making something better out of themselves. If there really is a crisis of masculinity, as the headlines would have us believe, muay Thai is part of the solution, not the problem.

LETTERS

Should the Public Get a Piece of A.I. Wealth?

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "A.I. Belongs to the People, Not to Billionaires," by Bernie Sanders (Opinion guest essay, June 3).

Senator Sanders argues that "the people" should be compensated for their contributions in training artificial intelligence and have "a direct role in determining the future of this technology." But a federal sovereign wealth fund, which he proposes, is a disguise for more government control and can be supported only by those who think the government knows best.

He points to sovereign wealth funds built on oil revenues as a model. But oil and A.I. are fundamentally different. While oil is a finite natural resource, A.I. is an evolving technology whose value depends on continued innovation and investment. You cannot regulate a breakthrough the way you regulate a barrel of crude.

Mr. Sanders says his proposal would give Americans a stake in the future of A.I. In practice, it would give that stake to the government. Ownership and decision-making rights would revert to public officials. The answer for a prosperous future is not concentrated government power.

MARIO OTTERO, WASHINGTON

The writer is the emergent technology policy analyst at *Americans for Prosperity*.

TO THE EDITOR:

Senator Bernie Sanders's proposal to give the public an ownership stake in America's top A.I. companies is quite alarming. He is not simply advocating a sovereign wealth fund that would help the public capture the benefits of A.I.-generated growth. Those funds

normally take small stakes in many companies; Mr. Sanders wants the government to take a major stake in industry leaders, giving it both a share of profits and the power to dictate the company's behavior.

Unlike the normal left-of-center policies Republicans misconstrue as socialism, government ownership of private enterprise is the textbook definition of it. And how do we know it will stop with A.I.? Mr. Sanders's claim that the government deserves a stake in companies "built on the collective knowledge" could apply to any business that iterates on government-funded research or uses public infrastructure — which is ultimately almost all of them.

The timing of the proposal is particularly perplexing. Donald Trump has already taken direct stakes in some 20 companies, including U.S. Steel and Intel, in return for favorable policy decisions. Do American leftists really want to suggest officially giving his proto-authoritarian regime control of our most influential businesses? It's a dangerous, half-baked proposal that no liberal should support.

BEN RITZ, ARLINGTON, VA.

The writer is the vice president for policy development at the *Progressive Policy Institute*.

TO THE EDITOR:

Senator Bernie Sanders argues for the creation of a sovereign wealth fund. This misstates the purpose of these funds and the reasons that countries such as Norway, which Mr. Sanders mentioned, created their funds. Norway's fund was created to avoid what economists call "the Dutch disease," which occurs when a surge in natural resource exports causes a nation's currency to appreciate so much that traditional exports become uncompetitive. The fund absorbs the purchases and currency flows and redeposits the capital in a measured and gradual way so that the inflows do not dislocate the economy.

It is easy to look at the trillion-dollar funds of Saudi Arabia or Singapore with envy, but their funds act as a cushion for countries with more wealth than their economies can absorb. The United States, by contrast, is a large country with the deepest capital markets in the world to help fund major expenditures.

Mr. Sanders is right to be concerned about economic losses accruing to ordinary Americans because of A.I., but wrong in his solution.

JULIAN GRAHAM, WASHINGTON

The Times welcomes letters from readers. Letters must include the writer's name, address and telephone number. Those selected may be edited, and shortened to fit allotted space. Email: letters@nytimes.com

Trump's Enablers

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "Trump Nominates His Former Personal Lawyer to Be Attorney General" (news article, June 9) and "How Lindsey Graham Has Tried to Outrun His Past Criticism of Trump" (*nytimes.com*, June 8):

Your reports about Todd Blanche and Lindsey Graham are a reminder that one of the underpinnings of the current Trump administration has been the willingness of various officials to abandon any principles they may have once had in their pursuit of proximity to power.

Many of the deprecations that President Trump has committed during his second term would not have been possible without the support of these shameless enablers.

History will not treat these officials kindly.

MICHAEL SILK
LAGUNA WOODS, CALIF.

The Global Bull Market Defies the Myth of American Exceptionalism

Liaquat Ahamed

The author of "Lords of Finance" and "1873: The Rothschilds, the First Great Depression, and the Making of the Modern World."

IN THE coverage of the genuinely broad-based global equity boom, an important detail is often overlooked: In the past 18 months, as that boom has reached what appears to be its peak, international markets have hugely outperformed the United States.

Since the beginning of 2025, equity markets have generated returns of 68 percent in emerging economies, 45 percent in Europe and 44 percent in Japan, while the U.S. equity market has been the laggard, generating returns of "only" 26 percent. If history is anything to go by, the massive I.P.O.s planned by Anthropic, SpaceX and OpenAI will probably continue to weigh upon the relative performance of the U.S. market.

Because the United States leads the global A.I. industry, the dominant narrative in financial markets is still about American exceptionalism. Many investors remain convinced that the United States is the singular engine of global capitalism and that its technological lead cannot be challenged. Why does this idea persist?

Some of it is historical. Foreign markets have lagged behind the United States for so long that we have learned to ignore them. While the U.S. market has been making new highs for years, European equities have only just reached the high that they set almost 20 years ago, in 2007, just before the global financial crisis. And the Nikkei in Japan finally eclipsed its 1989 bubble peak only in 2024 — a 35-year journey. Even the broad emerging market indexes, after two decades of trading water, have finally broken into new territory.

It was perhaps inevitable that at some point global markets would catch up. But the move in foreign markets has not simply been a matter of playing catch-up. Corpo-

rate profits and earnings were unusually strong across every major geographic region in 2025. This has a lot to do with the knock-on effects of the A.I. infrastructure construction boom that is occurring around the world. To understand why requires tracing where the money being spent on A.I. goes once it leaves the balance sheets of the U.S. technology companies driving the boom.

Many people treat A.I. as a purely American technology story. But the physical construction of artificial intelligence depends on a supply chain of extraordinary global complexity. At its core sits an unusual tripartite: Nvidia's chip designs from California, ASML's precision lithography equipment from the Netherlands, and TSMC's manufacturing facilities in Taiwan, Japan, China and America — three companies that together control an overwhelming majority of advanced A.I. chip production.

Then there is memory. Every A.I. chip requires vast quantities of high-bandwidth memory made largely in South Korea, where SK Hynix alone commands a 57 percent share of the global market.

Powering the data centers themselves requires hardware that is, to a striking degree, European. France's Schneider Electric, Switzerland's ABB and their continental peers dominate the global market for the transformers, switching gear and energy management systems without which no data center operates. These are not peripheral vendors. They are the picks-and-shovels companies of the A.I. era — and they are headquartered near Paris and in Zurich, not Palo Alto.

The international earnings boom reaches beyond A.I. Take Japan. After decades of pressure from domestic reformers and foreign activist investors, Japan has experienced a structural transformation in its corporate culture. A new generation of Japanese executives has been willing to do what their predecessors refused: return capital to

shareholders and dissolve the cross-shareholding arrangements that had entombed corporate balance sheets for generations.

Return on equity is now pursued as a genuine strategic goal rather than an afterthought. In Europe, Russia's invasion of Ukraine triggered a defense-spending renaissance across NATO that has proved a sustained earnings tailwind for aerospace and defense companies, and Germany's dramatic abandonment of its long-held fiscal austerity has begun injecting fresh stimulus across the continent.

Part of the reason the global nature of the bull market has been obscured is structural. The United States now represents roughly 65 percent of global equity market capitalization. When something is that large, it is easy to mistake the part for the whole. American financial media is, unsurprisingly, American. The indexes that pension funds and retail investors track — the S&P 500, the Nasdaq — are American. When those indexes move, it is news. When the Nikkei breaks a 35-year record, it barely earns a paragraph.

The U.S. economy retains enormous advantages compared with those of Europe and Japan. For example, because of its self-sufficiency in energy, it has a resilience that other regions of the world do not. That resilience has been most apparent in the three months since the start of the Iran war, allowing the U.S. market to do modestly better (5 percentage points) than Europe's and Japan's, which are more exposed to the vagaries of Middle East oil supply.

It remains true that the combination of deep capital markets, entrepreneurial dynamism and flexible labor markets gives American equities a structural advantage over other markets. That thesis has been repeatedly vindicated over the past 20 years. Investors who have bet against it have, more often than not, lost.

But after the past 18 months, it is important that we not go back to an overemphas-

Bringing A.I. to fruition required more than just U.S. tech prowess.



MAX SLOMOVICH FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

on the U.S. stock market to the exclusion of the rest of the world. For that would be a form of financial jingoism that leaves investors blind to the true scope of what is happening.

No one doubts that American technology companies, with their unrivaled ability to marshal capital and talent, have turbocharged the A.I. revolution. But bringing A.I. to fruition has required more than just American technological prowess. It has required the semiconductors of TSMC and Samsung, the lithography machines of ASML, the power infrastructure of European engineering firms, the copper and rare earths extracted from emerging markets.

The bull market so many think they understand is smaller than the bull market that actually exists. The rest of the world has been writing one of the more remarkable chapters in modern financial history — and we have largely been too busy watching our own screens to notice.

OPINION

Big Brother Is Watching the Sky



POTOMAC WATCH
By Kimberley A. Strassel

At least when Britain's Parliament imposed a tea tax that snuck in a regulation, it did so forthrightly—and with the knowledge it was playing with fire. Compare that with the sneaky and entitled tax assault on private aircraft that is now the subject of a partisan battle in Congress. This is a fight worth watching, a warning about how a big government armed with tracking tools can dramatically expand punitive taxation.

At issue is a technology little known outside pilot world: The Federal Aviation Administration in 2010 warned private aircraft owners it would begin mandating the use of a satellite-based system called Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast, ADS-B. Out continually broadcasts an aircraft's location, altitude, speed, and identification number, giving air-traffic control better situational awareness. No one disputes its benefit as a safety tool.

Which is how it was sold to the private-pilot world, which winced at the mandate. Flying is a passion for hundreds of thousands of Americans. There are some 220,000 general aviation aircraft in the U.S. flown by small businesses and hobbyists. It's an expensive hobby, yet with a fleet with an average age of more than 50

years, one that has remained in reach for average earners. Retrofitting with new ADS-B gear initially cost upward of \$5,000, a big hit for many enthusiasts. But they did it because they love flying and appreciate the tech's benefits—and because they were assured that ADS-B wouldn't be used as a government tracking tool.

That promise proved as trustworthy as any issued from government. Aircraft are a favorite target for revenue-greedy locales. They pay sales taxes, use taxes, fuel taxes, registration fees, takeoff fees, landing fees, ramp fees. Some jurisdictions also levy eye-watering personal property taxes. Before 2020, local tax collectors had to sit at airports to spy on tail numbers. ADS-B gave them an instant high-tech snoop tool, including the ability to claim owners are registering planes in one place but parking them elsewhere. Jeff Prang, the assessor for Los Angeles County, recently bragged to Politico that the county is using ADS-B to take the tax hammer to owners of 1,000 planes it claims have been "avoiding" "\$35 million in local property taxes." Never mind that the system is far from reliable when it comes to aircraft ID, and erroneous bills are a growing problem. ADS-B is such a money gusher that private companies now collect and sell data to tax authorities.

"Pilots went along with equipping their aircraft based on assurances that the tech-

nology would only be used for aviation safety," says Jim Coon, senior vice president of government affairs and advocacy at the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association. "It was never intended to be used by airports and tax collectors to invade the privacy of law abiding pilots purely for economic gain."

Congress has a chance to stop tax collectors from exploiting a safety technology.

Enter Congress's latest effort to update aviation safety in the wake of the 2025 mid-air collision over Washington's Reagan National Airport. Both the Senate and House bills contain a new requirement that private aircraft further upgrade to obtain ADS-B II—allowing pilots to see aircraft around them. House Republicans, to their credit, used the revival of the issue to remedy the original tax sin, forbidding any government agency from using ADS-B "for the purpose of obtaining revenue."

They are backed by federal safety officials, who are alarmed that the tax hijack of the tech is reducing safety. National Transportation Safety Board Director Jennifer Homendy railed in a February Senate Commerce Committee hearing against tax collectors' using ADS-B: "It should be used for safety, and not as a revenue gener-

ator," she said, pointing out that the tax threat is causing pilots to "turn them off, or not install it at all, or use it." North Carolina Sen. Ted Budd, who is fighting for the change, says Congress's job should be to create "every incentive for pilots to equip and enable ADS-B capabilities in flight to prevent tragic accidents in the sky."

Advocates of the fix also note that no one is stopping collectors from levying taxes. They just won't be allowed to do it at the cost of safety, or with a tech tool that takes privacy invasion to new levels. But safety means little to the tax officials wailing that they will lose this new "efficient" way to tax—as if Americans are obligated to fund their jobs easy. It also means little to Democrats, who see a new front in the class war, and who are claiming—falsely—that this is all about private Learjet owners evading tax bills. Both groups are fighting to strip the House provision from any final compromise.

But there's a bigger issue at stake in this tax bait-and-switch: precedent. In a recent hearing, Montana Sen. Tim Sheehy invited Americans to consider government deploying this idea in a broader scenario: Imagine a "sensor in your seat-belt buckle" that tracked and charged you for every mile. Who would wear it? Think that a wild idea? Freedom-loving pilots were told ADS-B would never be used that way. Look where they are now.

Write to kim@wsj.com.

BOOKSHELF | By John Paul Newport

A Rough Assignment

A Course Called Home

By Tom Coyne
Avid Reader, 304 pages, \$30

In March 2023, Tom Coyne, a golf writer exploring a possible magazine feature, visited a 98-year-old, nine-hole course in New York's Catskill Mountains. Sullivan County Golf & Country Club was almost poetic in its decrepitude. The clubhouse had a paint-chipped exterior and was even worse inside, where unsexed kitchen appliances dripped ooze. Half the golf carts in the barn didn't run. The two-man greenkeeping crew spent as much time fixing the tractors and mowers as using them.

The course's owners could have easily sold the land for development, but they hated to turn their backs on the community, especially as the course neared its 100th anniversary. So, as a kind of last resort, they made Mr. Coyne an unusual offer: to run the course for a year, at his own expense, with an option to buy it afterward at a prenegotiated price. As Mr. Coyne relates in "A Course Called Home," he accepted himself by surprise.

Mr. Coyne is no stranger to challenges. In his 2006 book, "Paper Tiger," he recounted his attempt to transform himself into a PGA Tour-worthy competitor. (He fell short but did lose a lot of weight.) For "A Course Called Ireland" (2009), he hiked around the Irish coast to play every links course he could find and throw back a few beers in every clubhouse bar. He adopted a similar mission in "A Course Called Scotland" (2018), albeit this time with the help of motorized vehicles and after getting sober. In 2021's "A Course Called America," he documented the diversity of American golf by playing 295 courses across all 50 states.

Mr. Coyne had never paid much attention to the nitty-gritty of golf-course operations. Now he had to learn fast. The priority was to increase revenue to pay for needed improvements. He started by raising the fee locals paid for unlimited golf to \$550 from \$450—that's for a full year, not monthly. The price hike didn't help much, since fewer than 100 signed up, so he appealed to his followers on social media. To the initial dismay of locals, he created a \$400 annual-membership category for out-of-towners and promoted it as a noble way of supporting mom-and-pop golf. Some \$50,000 in fees flew in from all over, mostly from sympathetic people with no intention of ever coming to play.

Similarly framed pitches went out to golf companies, resulting in free pallets of turf nutrients and, on loan from Toro for a year, "beautiful red riding machines." The longtime head greenkeeper was ecstatic as the new equipment was unloaded. "The cavalry has arrived," he announced.

Even so, it would be a year of endless "Hey, Tom, there's a problem." May and June were exceedingly dry, the main water pump conked out regularly, the roof of the ladies' room caved in and the pro shop needed more scorecards, which are surprisingly expensive. As the summer wore on, however, the oddball staff Mr. Coyne had assembled, including a former itinerant musician and a transplant from Brooklyn, N.Y., who was distancing himself from his mob-connected family, began bonding as a team.

Mr. Coyne, accustomed to more solitary work as a writer, reveled in the camaraderie and the sense of common purpose. He also came to treasure his time mowing the fairways each morning before the golfers arrived, the dew glistening on the grass while the nibbling, untroubled deer looked on from the rough. "There's a feeling," he writes, "that the place belongs to you."

Tom Coyne was no stranger to golf-related challenges. Fixing up a decrepit course in the Catskills was a test unlike any he'd faced.

Mr. Coyne excels at chronicling the many different ways golf enchants its aficionados. The Monday-night regulars at Sullivan County come mostly for "the hang." Mr. Coyne writes, in contrast to the friendly but eccentric old gentleman who comes by himself most evenings to putt on distant greens. Occasionally, men from nearby ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities show an interest in the game. One hot day two vanloads of men, having shucked their black overcoats, ask at the pro shop if they can rent carts to drive around the course. They are told that the carts are for golfers only, but they do accept an offer for some basic golf instruction on the practice range, and happily spend the next several hours fooling around with clubs, balls and those strange little sticks that golfers call tees.

At the end of the season, confident that he'd learned enough about how things work, Mr. Coyne decided to move ahead with the purchase. He and his wife had some money to invest, but the decisive moment came when his friend Bill Murray—yes, that Bill Murray—agreed to split the cost. (Mr. Murray has made previous appearances in Mr. Coyne's writing.) With additional funds promised from others, Mr. Coyne oversaw plans for the following year: a partial revamping of the course, several new fairways and a top-to-bottom clubhouse makeover.

Very little came off exactly as planned, given the still-tight budget, but by the time Sullivan County celebrated its centennial in 2025, its future seemed auspicious if not guaranteed. Mr. Coyne's vision was never for the course to be anything other than "bottom-dollar golf." Pristine courses are all the same, he argues, but a course like his gives golfers a chance "to experience something unique, to forget golf's trappings and recall that our game, at its core, is about traversing a field with a flag at its end." Nine flags in the case of Sullivan County, all with a new logo.

Mr. Newport was the Journal's golf columnist from 2006 to 2015.

Coming in BOOKS this weekend

The British patron of the American Revolution • A global history of the Black Death • The travels and discoveries of George Forster • Brian Epstein: the man who gave the world the Beatles • Duchamp in New York • & much more

Welfare Grants in the Collection Box

HOUSES OF WORSHIP
By Stephen Ford

spring—and it wasn't rhetorical. In mid-April, the White House cut \$11 million in federal funding for Catholic Charities to shelter migrant children, although the administration says the Catholic bishops were informed of the cut long before.

This row reminds us why Vice President JD Vance, a Catholic himself, last year criticized the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops for relying on federal funding. The Trump administration is highlighting a real problem: The Catholic Church has become a handmaid of the welfare state.

Since the 1960s, the church has increasingly turned to government for charitable financing, especially through its national umbrella group, Catholic Charities USA, which has 169 local agencies. By 1980, according to then-Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the national organization received 50% of its funding from the federal government. In 2022, Forbes estimated that Catholic Charities received \$1.4 billion in governmental support, compared with \$1 billion in private donations.

The church's turn to taxpayers was likely well-intentioned. Catholicism had long

done exceptional charitable work in the U.S., running hospitals, orphanages, shelters, soup kitchens and more. But it wasn't ready for the Great Society era of the 1960s, when America was overwhelmed with massive government programs based on the assumption that the state could achieve what private and religious charity had failed to do: eliminate poverty. That goal didn't pan out, but the programs multiplied in the ensuing decades. The church has increasingly positioned itself as a middleman, receiving federal money to run federally approved welfare programs.

It's hard not to see a corruption of the church's social teaching in this metamorphosis. Catholicism prizes solidarity (a duty to defend the common good) and subsidiarity (solving problems as close to their source as possible). In becoming an arm of the federal government, the church's charitable work has overlapped and supplanted what neglecting subsidiarity. Along the way, the church adds its own layer of bureaucratic bloat.

The most effective antipoverty work usually happens when people in local parishes tackle local problems. A good example is CarePortal, which connects Catholic parishes and other churches with families in crisis, saving children from foster care. My own parish in Virginia supports an after-school

program for the local Salvadoran community, among other projects. Yet the reliance on federal funding discourages regular Catholics from giving for bigger subsidies for ObamaCare. Yet stronger work requirements for able-bodied adults are a basic matter of human dignity and flourishing.

It's reasonable to ask if church employees are truly objective when more federal money is on the line. Catholics are as susceptible as anyone to the mistaken view that the most important measure is the amount of money spent. But what matters is whether a charitable endeavor actually helps people lead better lives, including by escaping poverty.

Taking federal money has made the Catholic Church a handmaid of the welfare state.

the mid-1960s. Federal programs such as food stamps and Medicaid often trap people in dependency. Christ says, "the poor you will always have with you." That doesn't mean Christians should be complicit in keeping people poor.

But that's exactly what the church has done for decades. Catholic Charities USA was among the most vocal opponents of the 1996 welfare reforms—reforms that empowered millions to rise out of poverty. The church also routinely lobbies for expansions of welfare programs such as the child tax credit, which would have worsened child

poverty by pushing parents out of work. Last year, bishops opposed President Trump's reforms to Medicaid and food stamps while calling for bigger subsidies for ObamaCare. Yet stronger work requirements for able-bodied adults are a basic matter of human dignity and flourishing.

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Catholic leaders should argue for smarter federal spending, not simply more spending, even as they continue to call for no federal spending on such evils as abortion. It would be nice to see them begin to extricate the church from the federal Leviathan. Oklahoma Catholics have shown that it's possible, with the Diocese of Tulsa relying almost entirely on private funding. The Catholic Church, the bride of Christ, shouldn't be the handmaid of the welfare state. Lifting up the poor demands recognizing the distinction.

Mr. Ford is the founder of West Exec Writing.

Time Runs Out for the Alarm Clock

By Brenda Cronin

A friend who recently joined the Medicare rolls encountered a new test at his last physical. To confirm he still has his marbles, he was asked to draw a clock face displaying the time 10 minutes after 11. He passed, but would a fourth-grader? Not necessarily, I suspect, due to the near-extinction of the alarm clock.

These humble devices, which surged into mass production in the first half of the 20th century, had two jobs: tell time and wake you up. They didn't analyze your sleep, chat with you or tally your steps. Smartphones and wearable devices have all but wiped them out. It's a sad but unsurprising fate, considering the most exciting upgrade—the snooze button—came in 1956. The technology has swept away ancillary cinematic relics like the hotel wake-up call.

As a natural lark, not an owl, I have seldom needed an

alarm clock. But who could resist these workhorses with models named the Rooster and Baby Ben?

My first alarm clock came from my extravagant godmother—childless and incapable of giving presents she wrote me a check. On my 9th birthday, she gave me a travel alarm clock, something

Who needs one when your smartphone can rouse you from sleep?

I didn't even know existed. Its chic leather case opened like a compact mirror, revealing a silver face with Roman numerals. Even the muted tick conveyed glamorous luxury. The hour and minute hands glowed in the dark, so the owner could make out the time when returning to her suite at the Paris Ritz after the ball. With its exquisite controls—a knob to wind the clock, a key to

wind the bell and a button to silence the alarm—it was a bewildering cross between jewelry and a grown-up appliance.

This improbable gift was succeeded by a clock-radio—a Sony Dream Machine with a blue digital display in a sleek white tube that prefigured Apple's austere aesthetic.

Standards dived in college, where my dorm-room alarm clock had all the charm of a prison. No corner was uncut in manufacturing this lump of plastic with an angry buzzing alarm. There was no luminous dial or companionable tick, just four numbers—12, 3, 6 and 9—with slashes for the other hours. The switches were so flimsy that setting the alarm at anything beyond the hour or half was a gamble.

A thrift-store find some years later righted things: an Art Deco wonder with a ceramic face housed in wood marquetry. Its tick was a low-key gurgle and the alarm a dignified two-bell chime. Alas, this clock—and its predecessors—

long gone. Now when I have an early-morning flight, I set an alarm on my phone.

But the wind-up alarm clock won't disappear entirely, says Bill Stoddard, who repairs and sets clocks at his shop in Florida, Ind. After all, he points out, the British people buy clocks." Mr. Stoddard began collecting Baby Bens when he was a teenager. He still uses an alarm clock—a Westclox Moonbeam made in about 2000. Westclox debuted the model, which flashes a light before sounding an alarm, in the mid-20th century.

Mr. Stoddard sells the occasional vintage alarm clock through his store and website. But young customers are rare—"1 out of 100," he says—and they are usually seeking less a timepiece than an old-timey tochtchke, "something that parents or grandparents had."

Ms. Cronin is an associate editorial features editor at the Journal.

OPINION

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Is That All From the GOP Congress?

The midterm elections are about 150 days away, and Republicans are already behaving like a governing coalition in twilight. The question is whether the GOP will exploit the coming weeks to pass accomplishments they can sell to voters—especially the President's request for U.S. military preparedness.

The House and Senate are celebrating passage this week of \$70 billion for immigration enforcement, after President Trump nearly derailed that train with his "anti-weaponization" fund. Congress tried and failed on Thursday to renew the crucial intelligence-gathering tool known as Section 702 (see nearby).

But is that it from the GOP? "I think it's safe to conclude there will not be another reconciliation bill," GOP Sen. Mitch McConnell said this week, and Maine Sen. Susan Collins agreed. As appropriators they have some sway, but why the premature surrender?

Republicans would be crazy to squander the powerful tool of budget reconciliation that lets a tax and spending bill pass with 51 votes in the Senate. The GOP is likely to lose the House in November, and the Senate may also be gone. Meanwhile, Democrats are blocking anything that isn't a progressive victory (see the pending housing bill).

Another reconciliation bill may be the last Republican opening to accomplish anything consequential for years. It's now or nothing—including for Mr. Trump.

The obvious anchor for a reconciliation bill is Mr. Trump's defense money, if the President will fight for it. He's proposed a \$1.5 trillion Pentagon budget that is appropriate for the world's cascading threats, but some \$350 billion isn't in the regular appropriation and assumes reconciliation.

Approve of the President's strategy in Iran or not, huge numbers of Tomahawk missiles and air-defense interceptors were spent protecting the lives of American troops in combat. The stocks need refilling. Some 727 of the U.S. Navy's 785 requested Tomahawks are penciled into a reconciliation bill. Ditto for a much-needed "drone dominance" initiative to confront changes in modern warfare.

"We need the whole bill," acting Navy Secretary Hung Cao says of the \$1.5 trillion proposal. "We need unmanned systems, we need submarines, we need ships, we need auxiliary ships.

We also need quality of life for our sailors and Marines."

Ideally Congress would fund the U.S. military through regular appropriations that give the services and weapons makers predictable and stable funding. But Democrats would extract an enormous price for 60 votes, and they may not even allow that to deny Republicans another achievement before the election.

There are other good ideas for a reconciliation bill. Voters are suddenly awake to the fraud throughout the U.S. welfare system and student loans. That field is rich for saving money. Why not end "broad-based categorical eligibility" that lets people cross-qualify for programs without enough scrutiny? Or as Advancing American Freedom suggests, why not trim Medicaid money to states that don't police high error rates? Both would build on the GOP work requirements in welfare now taking effect.

Republicans could also do more than replay the first Trump tax cuts. One worthy idea is expanding access and contribution limits for health-savings accounts. They could also index the capital-gains tax for inflation—a matter of fairness after the Biden inflation.

If that's too ambitious, they could at least raise or eliminate the cap on the capital-gains exemption on the sale of a primary residence, plus indexing it for inflation. The \$500,000 exemption limit for joint filers is far too small given the inflated appreciation of recent years. The cap reduces the supply of housing on the market as people decide they'd rather stay put than sell and pay a giant tax.

Republicans in close races will balk at another tough vote, and there's the risk the project collapses amid narrow majorities. But Members in marginal districts are in trouble no matter what they do between now and Election Day. They need more accomplishments to talk about, and pounding the table about the Save America Act on voting rules that can't pass doesn't count.

The glue that can hold together reconciliation 3.0 is the U.S. military money. The President will try to shrug off any GOP loss in November as someone else's fault. But on the line is his legacy and whether he left the U.S. better off to deter China and Russia, or merely talked about it.

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The Revolt of Britain's Defenders

It's no secret that Europe's welfare states jeopardize the continent's ability to defend itself. The bracing news Thursday was the revolt of British defense officials who told the truth about the Labour government's insufficient military funding.

The U.K. pledged last year to meet NATO's new standard and spend 5% of GDP on national security by 2035, including 3.5% on the military. At the time Prime Minister Keir Starmer held forth on the need to act with "agility" and "speed."

Yet on Monday he presented Defense Minister John Healey with a defense plan in which spending would rise to only 2.68% of GDP by 2030, up from 2.6% next year, the defense minister said in a letter of resignation to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Starmer has been "unable, and the Treasury has been unwilling, to commit the resources that the nation needs to defend the country at this time of rising threats," Mr. Healey wrote. He said the plan "falls well short of what is required" and jeopardizes the safety of the country and the readiness of British armed

forces. He chose honorable resignation rather than defend this plan to voters.

Alistair Carns, minister for Armed Forces, also resigned Thursday, saying "we owe those who serve the UK the kit to do the job and loyalty to stand by them when it's done. We are failing on both."

Labour won't fund defense because it puts a higher priority on welfare spending, which it refuses to reform. About one in 10 working-age people in the U.K. now claim a sickness or disability benefit, and nearly a million Brits under 25 aren't employed, in school or in training.

The resignations are a jolting repudiation of the government by officials who best understand the threats Britain is facing. Germany's army chief warned Thursday in an interview with Politico that "all 32 NATO partners agree that Russia might have the capability to invade a NATO partner country in 2029."

Let's hope the resignations awaken our friends in London about the peril they face, lest they have to write another chapter in "while England slept."

FISA 702 Goes Dark

Congress failed another test of its democratic duty on Thursday when the House defeated a proposal to extend a crucial intelligence-gathering authority. Democrats blame President Trump, but they did it to spite him and the real loser is American security.

Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act expires on Friday, and the House left town on its June recess after defeating a bill for an extension through July 2. The measure went to the House floor under rules that required a two-thirds vote, but it couldn't even muster a majority. It failed 218-198 with only seven Democrats in support.

Nineteen Republicans also opposed the measure over dubious civil liberties concerns and myopic revenge against Donald Trump's nomination of housing regulator Bill Pulte as Acting Director of National Intelligence (DNI). A longer-term renewal failed in the Senate for the same reason.

Mr. Pulte was a bone-head choice, but that's no reason to put the American public at risk. On Thursday Mr. Trump announced his intention to name Manhattan U.S. Attorney and former Securities and Exchange Commission Chairman Jay Clayton as the next permanent DNI. This is a solid choice.

Mr. Clayton has experience with intelligence as U.S. Attorney, including the complaint against Iraqi national Mohammad Al-Saadi for plotting terrorist attacks. More important, he's a patriot who will understand that his job is defending

the country, not pursuing political vendettas. The frustrating mystery is why Mr. Trump didn't announce his decision to nominate Mr. Clayton before the FISA vote when it might have helped.

The Senate should confirm him with dispatch. Meantime, Section 702, which was first authorized in 2008, will expire. The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court signs off on FISA's operations each year, and some have suggested the surveillance could keep operating temporarily under that approval, or with an executive order.

But communications firms that provide data under Section 702 might not continue cooperating when the law lapses owing to liability risk. When 702 faced a similar deadline in April 2024, two major communications providers said they would cease turning over the data if it lapsed.

When the data flow is turned off, real-time information is permanently lost, and with it clues about potential threats. In October 2023 702 information warned of a terrorist threat against U.S. military installations. In 2024 it helped thwart a terrorist attack on a Taylor Swift concert in Vienna.

Congress may work out an extension when it returns to Washington later this month. But House Speaker Mike Johnson rightly warned that this is an especially risky time to go dark on terrorism with the World Cup and America 250 celebrations on tap. Americans will know who to blame if there's an attack.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Free-Market Forces Behind Fishtown's Revival

Noah Gould's excellent account of Fishtown's revival rightly emphasizes neighborhood renewal's human side: "New Fish" arriving, "Old Fish" staying, and a once-struggling working-class neighborhood finding new life ("New Fish" and "Old Fish" Revive an Iconic Section of Philly," Cross Country, June 6). But the larger lesson lies in how Fishtown made a comeback: not through a master plan or top-down government program, but by making private investment feasible.

In the 1990s, Fishtown and Philadelphia saw little housing investment as demand flowed to the suburbs. The root cause was economics: Construction costs exceeded achievable sale prices, creating an appraisal gap that kept builders on the sidelines. The city's 10-year residential property-tax abatement, expanded in 2000 to cover new construction city-wide, supplied the "extra bump" that made deals work. By exempting improvements while continuing to tax land—and by making the abatement broad, automatic and predictable—the city let markets decide where demand justified new housing.

Development first took hold closer to Center City, where demand was

strongest, then moved outward in the 2010s into adjacent rowhouse neighborhoods, including Fishtown, as property values rose and more infill projects became financially viable.

Across the city, builders added more than 60,000 housing units after 2000, including tens of thousands of townhomes built by small builders. This market-driven renewal filled vacant lots and derelict sites, reduced blight, converted nonperforming parcels into taxpaying assets and created billions of dollars in new wealth for existing homeowners, with little evidence of widespread displacement.

That bottom-up model beat Philadelphia's centralized efforts. The \$300 million Neighborhood Transformation Initiative created blight but failed to spur broad reinvestment in targeted areas. The abatement made the city competitive again for housing investment, but the revival was built from the ground up. The lesson is clear: Government works best when it makes private investment feasible and lets the market build.

TOBIAS PETER
American Enterprise Institute
Washington

Read the Fine Print on Your Insurance Policy

Regarding "Growing Home-Insurance Risk: Claims That Don't Get a Payout" (Page One, June 1): Studies have shown that many insured people feel the homeowner's policy is like a warranty policy; it isn't. Many also think that the policy will cover flood damage; it doesn't.

We are now in hurricane season and are getting messages to prepare. The best preparation isn't buying three days of food and water or other supplies. The best preparation is to read your policy. It is a tool you have purchased to protect the most valuable asset you own. Learn what the policy does and doesn't cover; read about the sublimits like a 1% match limit or a \$10,000 limit for fungi. Call your agent to explain your coverage gaps. Look into buying down your hurricane deductible or purchasing a parametric policy to fill the gap. Research flood insurance, even if you aren't in a flood zone. A large majority of U.S. counties and parishes have had a flood event in the past 10 years.

GREGG GOLSON
Jacksonville, Fla.

Insurers are committed to helping

We Train Boys for Entertainment, Not Work

Reading Jason L. Riley's column "American Idle: The Work Ethic Goes Out of Style" (Upward Mobility, June 3), I was at first shocked to learn that 1 in 3 men in the U.S. is neither working nor looking for work.

The more I thought about it, however, the less I was surprised. It is the probable outcome for a generation of men raised to be addicted to video games and screens in general. We have trained them for entertainment. We know from books like Leonard Sax's "Boys Adrift" (2007) that boys' brains have been rewired to be addicted to pleasure, and the motivation centers in the brain have been affected. We pacify toddlers with screens in grocery store carts, hand kids tablets instead of requiring effort and attention in schools and allow boys especially to anesthetize themselves with video games instead of pushing them to play outside or

take out the trash. We have trained sloth and docility and are reaping what we have sown.

Those of us who are parents need to be brave enough to say no to video games and recognize the harm that they cause. We might as well hand our boys cocaine and expect them to have a good life. We need to pull the plug on screens, inspire our young men with stories of fortitude and require them to work at home and do hard things in school. They can handle it. Summer is the perfect time to start.

TARSA NEALE
Siloam Springs, Ark.

The Verdict on Law Reviews: Incomprehensible Gibberish

Kudos to Kevin McCaffree and Colin Wright for debunking the drive that passes for scholarly writing in today's publish-or-perish colleges and universities ("A Way to Challenge the Groupthink of Scholarly Journals," op-ed, May 28).

There are many law review journals in the U.S., some of which publish three or more times annually. The overabundance of virtually incomprehensible gibberish in most law reviews seems to serve no purpose except to perpetuate more of the same.

Those of us who languish in the academic wasteland are too tardy to lament, so little has changed.

EM. PROF. KENNETH LASSON
University of Baltimore School of Law

God of Instant Gratification

Regarding Jason Blazakis's "Chatbots May Need a Cult Deprogrammer" (Houses of Worship, June 5): The appeal of AI as a religion surely lies in its immediacy. Prayer requires patience and faith that God is listening. AI offers instant answers. Perhaps another appeal lies in its vanity. Christians believe God created man. AI worshippers believe man can create a god.

SAMUEL MCCLUNG
Bethlehem, Pa.

Free Expression

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Pepper ... And Salt

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



"Money is life's Swiss army knife."

OPINION

Pensions, Fiduciaries and DEI

By Jay Rogers

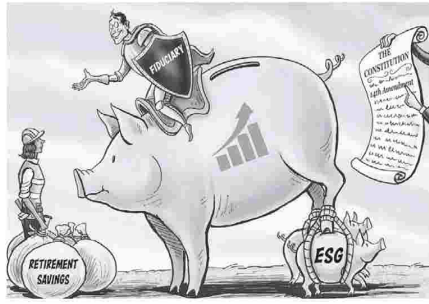
Fiduciary duty is the highest obligation the law imposes on asset managers. It requires a trustee, investment adviser or pension manager to subordinate his interests to the interests of the beneficiary. Not mostly. Not when convenient. Entirely. A fiduciary who invests a beneficiary's assets to advance his own political preferences has breached that duty. The standard is clear and the legal principle settled.

Practitioners have been slow to acknowledge that a fiduciary duty may extend to the Constitution. They should heed the Supreme Court's decision in *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* (2023), in which the court found that race-conscious admissions at Harvard and other universities violated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment. The same legal reasoning implies that trustees who manage public pension funds, state university endowments and other government-adjacent investment pools are subjecting beneficiaries to additional risk if they pursue "diversity, equity and inclusion" by engaging in favoritism on the basis of race or sex.

Investment managers who push or even countenance race preferences could be courting legal jeopardy.

The Equal Protection Clause provides that no state shall deny to any person the equal protection of the laws. The Supreme Court has interpreted this to mean that government actors can't make decisions that discriminate on the basis of race without meeting demanding constitutional standards known as strict scrutiny. *Fair Admissions* made clear that racial preferences at universities accepting federal funds can't survive strict scrutiny.

The investment parallel is direct. A public pension fund is a state actor. Its investment committee exercises fiduciary authority delegated



by the legislature. When that committee builds a portfolio by directing capital toward companies on the basis of the racial composition or sex ratio of their boards, managements or employees rather than financial merit, it has made a race- or sex-conscious allocation decision with the assets of beneficiaries who didn't consent to their retirement funds being used for social engineering.

The Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 governs private-sector pension funds and requires fiduciaries to act solely in the interest of plan participants. The U.S. Labor Department has issued guidance, revised repeatedly across administrations, on whether "environmental, social and governance" factors, which often include the pursuit of DEI, constitute permissible considerations.

The statutory argument against ESG as the primary driver of investment decisions is strong and central to active litigation, such as *Spence v. American Airlines* (2024), in which a federal district court found a plausible fiduciary breach claim arising from an ESG-focused 401(k) investment menu. Public pension funds fall outside *Erisa* and are governed by state law, but they face something *Erisa*-covered plans don't: equal-protection obligations under the Constitution.

A state pension fund that screens investment managers by race or sex has imposed a legally suspect classification

on a government contracting decision. Diversity-focused manager-selection policies haven't been tested with anything like the rigor the *Fair Admissions* case applied to university admissions. They should be, and the legal challenge is closer than most trustees recognize.

Work I've done as an expert witness has put me in front of investment committees defending decisions made under ESG frameworks. They typically offer one of three arguments: that ESG factors are financially material and consistent with fiduciary duty, that diversifying the manager pool produces better financial outcomes, and that trustees have independent political obligations that warrant consideration alongside financial returns. The first argument tries to sidestep actual risk factors and is empirically contested. The second is theoretically coherent but collapses in practice. Objective performance and demonstrated track record are the only criteria that hold up under scrutiny. The third concedes that trustees aren't acting solely in the beneficiary's financial interest and thereby concedes a fiduciary breach.

That third admission adds a constitutional layer. A trustee who acknowledges he weighed political obligations in instituting or maintaining a DEI program has allowed that he made decisions partially on the basis of race or sex—reasons unrelated to investment

performance. A private trustee breaching fiduciary duty for such political reasons faces statutory liability under *Erisa*. The remedy under Section 409 involves restoration of losses to the plan, plus removal of the fiduciary. A public trustee doing the same thing with government assets may face statutory liability and a constitutional equal-protection claim from beneficiaries whose money was managed with an eye to race or sex goals. For public-plan violations, courts are more likely to award injunctive relief than monetary damages—but beneficiaries can seek prospective relief requiring the fund return to merit-based investment standards.

Fair Admissions concerned only university admissions. But the core principle—that race-conscious classification by a state actor requires compelling justification and narrow tailoring—applies with equal logic whenever a state actor makes consequential decisions using racial criteria. In *Ultima Services Corp. v. USDA* (2023), a federal court enjoined a Small Business Administration program that used race-based presumptions in awarding contracts, finding it couldn't survive strict scrutiny after *Fair Admissions*. Investment management is the next frontier.

Public-pension beneficiaries are a defined class: public employees and retirees who contributed to a system in exchange for a defined benefit. They're owed the full return those contributions can generate under prudent management. When their trustees intentionally divert some of that return to political or social objectives, the beneficiaries have suffered a harm that isn't merely financial. Their retirement security has been made a tool for someone else's agenda. That's a fiduciary problem. For public funds operating under state authority, it may also be a constitutional one.

A trustee who has read *Fair Admissions* carefully should be asking whether his ESG and DEI investment policies would survive the scrutiny applied to analogous race-conscious programs in education. Many of them won't.

Mr. Rogers is president of Alpha Strategies Investment Consulting.

Vindication For Young Elon Musk

By Jimmy Soni

In 2004, a Senate subcommittee gathered on Capitol Hill to ask a question that now sounds quaint: Could America still reach space without the space shuttle?

The shuttle was grounded, 14 astronauts had died in two disasters, and the hearing room was thick with the anxiety of a nation that feared it had lost a step. Sen. Bill Nelson (D, Fla.), who had flown on the shuttle, warned that without it the country might spend years relying on Russian rockets. Nobody disagreed.

The witnesses came in two panels. First, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration defended the program through William Readdy, its associate administrator for spaceflight, accompanied by a retired admiral. After NASA spoke, industry did: a vice president from ATK Thiokol, another from Lockheed Martin, a director from the Aerospace Corp. At the end of the second panel was a 32-year-old man who had founded a rocket company two years earlier and had yet to launch anything.

In 2004, he told the Senate that open competition would transform the industry.

He had a more immediate complaint: NASA had just awarded a rival a roughly quarter-billion-dollar contract without open competition, and his company had protested. The senators thought the matter off-limits—it was under government review—and steered the witness back to the day's subject: heavy lift, the blunt problem of getting big things off the planet.

"Certainly," he said. "Although, it's worth correcting—I think Mr. Readdy misspoke when he said it was competitive. It was, in fact, not competitive." The chairman tried again: "Let's just stay to heavy-lift capacity issues—"

"Absolutely," the witness agreed. Then, his correction safely on the record, he said something the panel wasn't ready to hear. The past few decades, Elon Musk told them, had been "a dark age" for human space flight—one costly government program after another that failed to reach the pad. The public's drift from space, he argued, wasn't the apathy of a tired people but the disappointment of a hopeful one.

It sounded, in 2004, like a man with a grievance and a half-built rocket. He had made the same case the summer before, in one of his first Capitol Hill appearances, at a 2003 hearing on commercial space flight. There he borrowed a concept from the economist Joseph Schumpeter: creative destruction. The industry had lost it—not one successful new entrant in four decades.

Space, Mr. Musk pointed out, had barely improved since Apollo, which opened the door to space exploration and the internet to intercontinental flight—had been transformed by newcomers and open competition. Restore that forcing function, he said, and space would change no less dramatically. The government need only be "a customer, not a competitor."

He could be glib. Every launch from Vandenberg Air Force Base, he said, was required by law to be studied for its effect on the local seals—at \$10,000 a flight—even as that population climbed by nearly 13% in a single year. "With that population growth rate," Mr. Musk observed, "it seems clear that if anything the Vandenberg launch activity serves as an aphrodisiac."

People laughed. It was the laughter you give a clever outsider. But we can grade that clever outsider's argument now, because more than 20 years have passed and the record is in. The fear that haunted that 2004 hearing—dependence on Moscow—was ended not by the booster but by Mr. Musk's company. In 2020 a SpaceX capsule carried two NASA astronauts to the space station from American soil, closing a nine-year gap in which the U.S. paid Russia as much as \$90 million a seat to hitch a ride. The "semireusable" rocket Mr. Musk described to skeptical senators became a fleet of boosters that land themselves and fly again.

Today SpaceX launches more than half the world's payloads. On Friday it goes public in what is expected to be the largest IPO in history, at a valuation near \$175 trillion. The witness at the end of the second panel turned out to be the one worth listening to.

Mr. Soni is author of "The Founders: The Story of PayPal and the Entrepreneurs Who Shaped Silicon Valley."

The Social Security Trust Fund Deception



POLITICAL ECONOMICS
By Joseph C. Sternberg

Few deceptions in American politics are quite so pernicious as the notion that the Social Security trust fund exists. Again this week we've received another warning that trust funds that are essentially nonexistent are on the verge of running out of money they already don't have.

Technically, there is a line item in the ledger of the Social Security Administration marked "trust fund." Two, actually—one for the old-age retirement benefit and one for the working-age disability program. Superficially, reports of the trust funds' declining fortunes are alarming. The old-age fund will have run dry by late 2032, several months sooner than previously estimated, the Social Security Trustees warned in an annual report this week. Combined, the two trust funds will be empty by 2034.

But this is all fictional, or notional if you want to be polite. The programs for several decades received more income via payroll-tax revenue than they paid out in benefits. Congress directed the surplus into the trust funds, on the theory that the pot of money would be available later if tax revenues fell below benefit payouts. But rather than invest those surpluses into the private sector as a large deferred-benefit pension manager would, Congress directed that Social Security "invest" only in special-issue U.S. Treasury bonds.

The trust funds therefore represent borrowing by one hand of government from another. This transferred the cash to Congress to spend in the flush years, while putting the Treasury on the hook to redeem the bonds out of general revenue or borrowing once Social Security payouts

began to exceed payroll-tax revenue. The Treasury already has been funding a portion of Social Security benefits since 2010, the year in which benefit payouts exceeded payroll-tax collections for the first time. The cost in 2025 was \$160 billion and will hit \$300 billion a year by 2030.

So when you get word that the trust funds will "run out of money" soon, that's a political rather than a fiscal warning. The previous political-economic equilibrium regarding Social Security is expiring, and a new one will have to be found.

We're warned of a 'crisis' when the money runs out in a few years. But the reserve is only a fiction.

Prior generations made a political judgment that voters would expect to extract from the programs some approximation of the taxes they'd paid in, and that it would be best to habituate voters early to a stable level of payroll taxation that for decades was higher than required to fund each year's payouts. The trust funds were a way of cumulating workers' aggregate tax payments to ensure an equal sum would be paid out again, in aggregate, at some point.

It was a weird bargain. The gimmick works only in aggregate. At the individual level, you may extract much more or much less than you paid in, depending on accidents such as your life span. Baby boomers exacerbated the problem by granting themselves sufficiently generous benefits that the cumulated tax payments of the surplus years will run out before the boomers do.

The exhaustion of the trust funds in 2032 and 2034 won't change any-

thing about that underlying dollar-in, dollar-out political-economy bargain. The programs will revert to paying only an aggregate level of benefits each year that can be financed from that year's payroll-tax revenue—which in the old-age program works out to roughly 78% of the current benefit level and falling.

The question is whether that deal is politically sustainable if it requires reducing dollars out as dollars in decline. This, in its entirety, is the looming Social Security "crisis."

The trade-offs will be subject to bloody political brawls because each possible resolution is so painful to someone: lower benefits to confine the programs' costs within the limits of the current payroll tax, a higher payroll tax with negative consequences for the labor market, or the codification of a permanent subsidy from general revenue into the programs at the expense of priorities such as defense.

But is that really a crisis? One of the sillier themes to emerge this week is the notion that candidates for office in the next few election cy-

cles must present a plan for Social Security since the trust funds will run out on their watch. Of course no one who aspires to get elected will be so foolish.

The working out of a resolution will instead be as chaotic and contingent as most other decisions Congress makes. The crisis talk seems designed to frighten lawmakers into acceding to the left's preferred higher-tax, higher-benefit solution before anyone has a chance to think about it—and to prevent the younger voters who will bear the brunt of the taxes from noticing what's going on. Conspicuously, however, the political system has in recent years been highly resistant to levying higher taxes to fund Social Security.

Meanwhile, it is waiting such a bad idea. Any workable political settlement for Social Security will require as its inputs a relatively stable immigration policy and perhaps several years of information on how artificial intelligence will transform the economy's productivity. Don't allow a phony crisis to pre-empt a real solution in the end.

It's Time for School Choice

By Tommy Schultz

School choice is coming to every state thanks to the Education Freedom Tax Credit, established in last year's tax law. Thus far, nearly all Democratic governors hesitant to opt in have said they will make a decision once they have clarity on rules. Now they do. They can opt their state in with the certainty that a student in any setting—public, private, even home schools in many states—can be eligible to receive scholarship funding. There will be clear rules to prevent misspending. Joining should be a no-brainer.

The EFTC turbocharges innovation and opportunity in American K-12 education. By creating a dollar-for-dollar federal tax credit up to \$1,700 for taxpayers who contribute to support K-12 scholarship programs, the law can unlock massive new school-choice funding nationwide.

Setting the rules is critical for federal legislation, with many things on the table, from the technicalities of how scholarship organizations operate to whether states can impose regulations more restrictive than the federal law. Education reformers were rightly on alert to see if states could pile on regulations to make the tax credit unworkable.

The Treasury answered that question with a decisive no—states

can't kill this tax credit with a thousand regulatory cuts. States that opt in won't be allowed to impose additional regulations or pick and choose which organizations are added to the list if they meet the law's requirements. That's a significant win for advocates who have pushed to keep the law true to its original intent.

The proposed rules should be available no later than the end of September—and they will carry legal force, offering crucial clarity for operators and legislators eager to begin serving students.

Treasury also answered the important question of whether home schoolers can participate—they can in the estimated 22 states that treat a home school as a private school. The rules will soon establish a strong, streamlined process to limit misspending, which required financial and programmatic audits and streamlined alternatives for smaller scholarship organizations.

Governors who have been waiting for information now have it. Thirty-one states have already opted in or said they will, including Democratic Govs. Jared Polis of Colorado and Kathy Hochul of New York. For governors who have said they will do so once rules are clear, it's time to act.

Mr. Schultz is CEO of the American Federation for Children.

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EDITORIALS

Data centers are a lightning rod.
Some state regulation is reasonable

The Lake County Board on Tuesday moved to impose a temporary moratorium on new data centers in unincorporated parts of the county.

In that same county, the Grayslake Village Board recently approved a massive data-center complex, igniting a firestorm within the normally quiet suburb. Opponents are preparing a lawsuit to reverse Grayslake's approval.

About 200 miles south, in staunchly Republican Logan County, just north of Springfield, the county board last month approved a 12-month moratorium on new data centers, halting for now a proposal by Miami-based Hut 8 Corp. to construct a 50-acre, \$5 billion data center. The company says it's determining whether to continue to seek approval in light of the setback.

These are just a few of the data-center debates raging throughout Illinois. Local officials are finding that many of their constituents are deeply suspicious of these projects, even though they promise to generate potentially transformative property-tax revenues.

The opposition is bipartisan. Red and blue counties alike that are entertaining these proposals are encountering the same buzz saw.

Data centers are necessary infrastructure in a digital age, but the status quo isn't working. For it's not only the counties and municipalities that data center developers are targeting that are affected. Data centers consume outside amounts of electricity, and growth expectations for the sector alone already have driven up the cost of power. Commonwealth Edison customers, as well as consumers all over the country, are seeing the effects in their higher electric bills.

We met recently with ComEd CEO Gil Quinones, and he told us the utility has received about 100 data center applications. If all were built, they alone would consume considerably more power than ComEd's peak record



Demonstrators gather for a rally about proposed legislation to regulate construction of data centers during the spring legislative session outside the State Capitol on May 30 in Springfield. JOHN J. KIM/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Data centers are necessary infrastructure in a digital age, but the status quo isn't working. For it's not only the counties and municipalities that data center developers are targeting that are affected. Data centers consume outside amounts of electricity, and growth expectations for the sector alone already have driven up the cost of power.

delivery of 24,000 megawatts throughout its service area on a sweltering summer's day.

Get your head around that. Of course, they won't all be realized, but the magnitude of the problem is clear. Northern Illinois long has been blessed with more power generated within its borders than it needs. That appears poised to change dramatically.

Given substantial increases in demand, fueled in large part by data centers, as well as the closure of existing fossil fuel-fired power

plants, the region will become a net importer of electricity as soon as 2030, according to state projections.

So what exactly are data centers? They are essentially sprawling storage structures, housing servers and other similar equipment powering the digital needs of the modern economy as well as — controversially — the fast-growing demands of artificial intelligence. They're not all the same.

As Quinones explained to us, there are essentially three

types. One group is made up of enterprise/cloud facilities that back the needs of a single digital company. Another is comprised of multi-tenant centers that provide the same service for more than one outfit. And then there are so-called hyperscale facilities critical to development of AI products and services. That last group is far and away the most energy-intensive.

Atlanta-based T5 Data Centers' approved Grayslake facility, for example, is a hyperscaler, designed (once fully built out) to house 18 buildings and consume up to 1,600 megawatts of electricity. To put that in perspective, that's nearly 70% of the output of the Byron nuclear power station some 75 miles to the west, which generates up to 2,347 megawatts, enough to serve more than 1.7 million homes.

Right now, Illinois is the Wild West when it comes to accommodating the data-center indus-

try. Municipalities and counties have widely varying approaches and are in far different negotiating positions. Many are in such fiscal distress that they may well be tempted to host data centers for the potential property-tax bonanza that could bail them out in one fell swoop.

That's no way to regulate an industry that by its very nature imposes heavily on the region even if it can be a game-changing boon to individual localities.

Bills were introduced in Springfield over the spring to impose ground rules on data center development. None went anywhere, as legislative leaders deemed them not ready for prime time.

But there are expectations that state lawmakers will act on the issue during the fall veto session. In the meantime, Gov. JB Pritzker has announced that the state's tax incentives for data centers, created back when the industry's public standing was far more positive, will be put on hold for two years.

Trade unions in a position to benefit from data center construction jobs blocked Pritzker's request that lawmakers suspend the tax credits and are crying foul now that he's doing so unilaterally.

At the end of the day, though, the tax credit is a sideshow. We need statewide rules governing data center construction that ensures the industry won't soak up power supplies keeping the lights on in the state. That means the industry will need to take more responsibility for building or financing new power generation in Illinois to serve its needs. Too many developers right now are taking the position that their primary obligation is to pay for connecting their projects to the existing grid and then availing themselves of existing power supplies.

Pritzker needs to take a hands-on approach, gathering all the stakeholders well in advance of the November veto session and hammering out a workable regimen, to ensure lawmakers have something on which to vote.

So is Illinois' social media tax going to take on Tinder? Nextdoor? Yelp? Yahoo?

Illinois' new budget includes a new tax — shocking, we know. This time, the target is social media companies.

The plan is to create a graduated tax of sorts on the powerful businesses, based on the number of users they have in Illinois.

The architects behind this grand idea say that it will generate about \$200 million per year.

It fits into the ground.

This statute reads more like a concept than a finished policy. Social media "fees" will be collected beginning Jan. 1, 2027, and seem destined for legal challenges long before then.

We never liked this idea in the first place. Now, a devastating analysis from The Tax Foundation details this ill-conceived and sloppy statute's fundamental

flaws. We'll walk you through the basic mechanics and the biggest problems.

The plan imposes escalating monthly fees on social media companies based on the number of Illinois users they have, topping out at \$165,000 per month plus 50 cents for every user above 1 million.

But what is a user? The authors never got around to identifying the very thing they want to tax.

Suppose one Illinoisan has two Facebook accounts and three Instagram profiles. Is that five users? One user? Two? What if some of those accounts aren't active?

The statute doesn't say. What about those lovebirds who share an account? Is that one user or two?

Another mystery. The problems go even deeper. Who, exactly, counts toward these totals? The phrasing "average number of monthly users of the platform located in the State of Illinois" leaves things very vague.

Does this mean Illinois residents? People physically in the state, whether they're visiting from out of state or not? Users whose IP addresses appear to be in Illinois but who may live elsewhere? Anyone whose profile lists Illinois as their home state?

You'd expect that a tax or fee that depends entirely on a count would also spell out the counting methodology in great detail.

But the legislation's problems with definitions keep going. Where's the line between "social media" and "something

else"? Legislative authors' definition — that the service must "primarily serve" as a medium for users to interact with content generated by other users — is sweeping. So the law also leaves room for debate about which online services — Yelp? Nextdoor? Substack? Snapchat? Tinder? Ring? Reddit? BeReal? — qualify as "social media" platforms, offering little guidance on how regulators should make these determinations.

We wish more legislators had raised red flags before this thing sailed through the General Assembly.

We do not disagree with the sentiment that social media poses major cultural and societal problems, especially for young people. We understand the instinct to

want to curb those ills.

Taxing social media, however, is difficult and complicated. While we'd prefer the state stop tacking on new taxes altogether, if you accept that this social media fee scheme is legitimate in theory, legislators at least need to clearly define exactly what they are taxing and how they intend to measure it. A tax that is claimed to generate \$200 million annually should come with clear definitions and clear rules.

Legislators need to realize that big tech is self-protective and eschews state boundaries in multifarious ways. Thus, it is very difficult for states to tax.

Throwing legislative tax spaghetti against the wall isn't going to stick.

ON THIS DAY 101 YEARS AGO POLITICAL BRICK

Arthur Evans, in his story of brick in Chicago, said that architects estimate that if builders could use tile instead of brick there would be a saving of \$500 in the average two-story house and from 5 to 7 per cent on a skyscraper. Tile cannot be used in construction walls in Chicago because the brickmakers have been politically good enough to keep it from being used. They have had a grip on city regulations for over twenty years.

In the suburbs and towns just outside Chicago tile is used, and the Chicago builder can see his neighbors getting the advantage of it, but he cannot build that way because the ordinances will not permit him.

It is not a fire precaution. Tile is just as non-conductive as brick. It is not for any reasons of safety in construction, either for the dwellers in the house or their neighbors. The answer to tile is

political brick. Hollow tile makes a cooler house in summer and a warmer house in winter.

In the winter that saves on the coal bill. It is estimated that it saves from two to three tons of coal in an eight-room house. Brick making is virtually a monopoly in Chicago, and with tile out brick is in good. Sometimes a builder gets a special permit for tile, but the ordinary builder is handed over to the brickmaker.

Occasionally the council looks into the matter. It is doing so now. Mayor Dever says he insists upon the removal of the restrictions against tile. William Schlake, the Supreme Brick, has been doing very well so far, but he may have to take off his coat and meet a little competition with another building material.

Tribune editorial board,
June 12, 1925



BILL BRAMHALL

OPINION

The lasting cultural changes since the 1966 Division Street Riots

By Michael Peregrine
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

Most Chicagoans know Division Street as one of the city's truly prominent arterial roadways. With its famous designation as "1200 North" in the municipal grid system, it runs from its eastern origin at Lake Shore Drive and the water's edge to a western terminus at Thatcher Woods in River Forest.

Fewer Chicagoans know it as the site of one of the most significant of the city's many violent 1960s social conflicts. Sixty years ago, from June 12 to June 14, 1966, the intersection of Division Street and Damen Avenue was the epicenter of the first recognized uprising of a Puerto Rican community in an American city. It led to a significant, if gradual, change in the social and political standing of Chicago's Puerto Rican community.

The first major migration of Puerto Ricans to Chicago began in the 1950s, with large numbers settling in Lincoln Park. Many found employment as low-paid laborers in service industries and factories. But the area's subsequent gentrification prompted the Puerto Rican community to move west to the more affordable neighborhoods of West Town, Wicker Park and Humboldt Park. It was within this forced relocation that the seeds of the 1966 conflict were likely sown.

Life in the Division Street corridor presented new hardships for the Puerto Rican community, including housing discrimination, poor neighborhood schools, restricted access to decent-paying jobs, limited interaction with city services and difficulty in finding church homes. From this grew a sense of isolation that would later manifest itself in a deeply problematic relationship with the Chicago Police Department and its controversial efforts to reduce area crime. Many of the same hardships simultaneously confronted the city's Black community.

In 1966, Mayor Richard J. Daley pronounced the first week of June as "Puerto Rican Week," highlighted by neighborhood celebrations and a large State Street parade on June 11. But by



Smoke rises from a burning squad car as a crowd surrounds it during a disturbance on June 12, 1966, on the West Side. JAMES MAYO/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

the evening of June 12, the tone markedly changed, as police and celebrants clashed at Damen and Division. A young Puerto Rican, alleged to have been carrying a gun, was shot and wounded by police. A crowd of several thousand gathered; police dogs were called in, and the crowd responded with assaults on the police. The angry crowd grew at nightfall, instigated by word of mouth and local radio broadcasts.

The riot surged again on June 13, following a large, peaceful rally organized by area religious and community leaders. Rioters again attacked police with rocks, bottles and other objects, and looted and burned local buildings. On the evening of June 14, over 500 police officers surged into the Division and Damen area in an ultimately successful effort to stifle the rioting, but not before many injuries, arrests and widespread property

damage had occurred.

In the riot's aftermath came several positive developments. A 5-mile protest march from the Division Street neighborhood to City Hall took place, without violence. And the Chicago Commission on Human Relations held a series of hearings on the plight of the city's Latino residents, which included discussions of the grievances of the Puerto Rican community and the formulation of several policy recommendations. In addition, new Puerto Rican cultural and support organizations began to form, several of which continue to operate to this day. The Chicago Police Department began to hire more Puerto Rican officers. And the development of the Paseo Boricua district in Division, between California and Western, increased community pride.

But with the benefit of 60 years

of hindsight, it's fair to ask: Has lasting progress truly been made since those three hot summer nights in Humboldt Park?

Certainly some. Through the Latino Caucus in Chicago's City Council and leadership positions in government agencies and institutions, there are measurable indications of Puerto Rican political and commercial influence. But whether it is enough progress, considering that Latinos as a whole represent almost 30% of the city's population, is debatable. Furthermore, the famous diversity of the city's broad Latino coalition suggests that the fruits of such influence might not be shared evenly among its constituents.

And any lasting progress must also be measured against other disturbing events. Memories of Operation Midway Blitz remain raw. The plight of the "Broadview Six" should be shocking.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement continues to fund deportation operations and build mass detention facilities. So maybe not so much progress, after all.

The roughly 12 miles of Division Street, from the lakefront to the forest preserve, are lined with many great neighborhoods, each with its own unique stories to tell. Stories of vitality and decline; of abundance and deficit; of community and tension; of tolerance and intolerance. Stories that tell us much about our city, our neighbors and the challenges they continue to face. And as we drive down Division Street, we would do well to acknowledge those challenges and what must be done to redress them.

Michael Peregrine is a retired Chicago lawyer who grew up near Division Street's River Forest terminus.

My father, a WWII refugee, would no longer recognize our country

By Alex Poppe
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

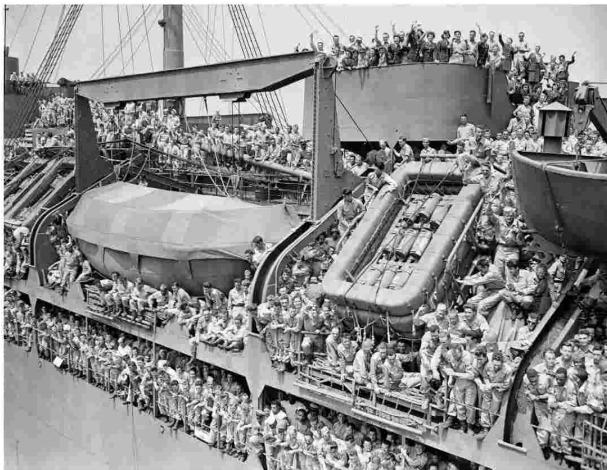
He was the killer of big blond spiders, the fixer of household things, an occasional Santa's helper. Among his many acts of service, my father volunteered with Chicago's Christmas Ship, bringing Christmas trees to disadvantaged families in the area.

My father was also a refugee. Dad was 6 years old when his homeland of Germany attacked Poland and started World War II. My grandmother boarded him on a farm outside Berlin to keep him safe. He remembered running through a field toward the farmhouse as Allied forces strafed it. I always wondered what it must have been like for him, being separated from his mother, who stayed in Berlin, and his father, who was conscripted, and living with strangers far from what was familiar. But he didn't often recount the past.

Although my father fiercely defended border control, he was outraged by President Donald Trump's family separation policies during his first term, which separated more than 5,000 children from their parents at the U.S.-Mexico border. Since Trump's return to office in 2025, more than 145,000 children have had a parent detained in deportation campaigns, according to a recent Brookings Institution report.

My father did not stay at the farm. When Allied bombing campaigns intensified, my grandmother worried that the railroad tracks would be obliterated, so she brought my father back to Berlin. In an apartment building there, my father and grandmother would listen for the telltale tap of the Gestapo's hobnail boots and scurry up stairs to the attic to cross over and come down into another section of the building, where my grandmother's Catholic friend lived, so they could hide.

That haunting piece of family history resurfaced for me when the "Broadview Six" and others protested outside a suburban immigration detention facility. Chicagoans blew whistles and filmed detentions while immi-



Docked at Pier 88 in Manhattan in New York City, soldiers aboard the USS General Harry Taylor celebrate their homecoming after World War II on Aug. 18, 1945. AP

gration agents patrolled neighborhoods with military-grade weapons as part of Operation Midway Blitz.

Once, toward the end of WWII, when my father and grandmother were in an air raid shelter, a few Russian soldiers came in, sat in the middle of the room and started cleaning their rifles. Dad told me: "They would aim the weapon at one of us, but not fire it. They seemed to have fun with it. I thought for sure I was going to die that day." He was only 12. I heard his words again when I read about federal immigration agents descending from a Black Hawk helicopter, breaking down doors, and zip-tying U.S. citizens and immigrants in Chicago's South Shore neighborhood last September.

With support from the organization that was the precursor to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, my father and

grandmother immigrated to the United States aboard the General Henry Taylor. The ship sailed past the Statue of Liberty into New York Harbor. I imagine my father's dread and excitement, his sense of loss and hope, as he took his first steps on U.S. soil at age 16.

My father and grandmother were met by an affiliate of the refugee group, who arranged a place for them to sleep and then brought them to Penn Station. They caught a train to Chicago, where my grandmother had some friends, and they were on their own.

If they were seeking safety in the U.S. today, they might need to fly to Mexico as Ukrainians did after Russia's 2022 invasion. Or they might have to travel on foot across multiple countries, taking only what they could carry; cross the Darién Gap, with its extortions, traffickers, sexual violators, thieves, flash floods and wild

animals; and travel north through Mexico atop a train, eating instant coffee so they wouldn't fall asleep and roll off. They would arrive at the U.S. border having not bathed in days.

Immigration officials would look at them but not see the people they had been or who they were going to become.

My father and grandmother first settled in Englewood. Dad went to night school to learn English and was attending Englewood High School when he got drafted into the Army. He passed the GED test while completing his military service, earned a bachelor's degree in business from Northwestern University and built a comfortable middle-class living for himself.

Despite Executive Order 13269, signed by Republican President George W. Bush, which grants expedited citizenship to noncitizens serving honorably in the

armed forces, approximately 94,000 noncitizen veterans were at risk of detention or deportation as of 2024. Over the past year, 248 relatives of former military members have been put into deportation proceedings, 125 former service members have been arrested for immigration violations and 34 former military members have been put into deportation proceedings.

Dad often credited the U.S. for saving his life. He was fiercely proud to be an American, but I am not sure he would recognize his beloved country today.

When the president lets immigration officers operate with expanded authority and limited accountability, threatens to send the military into U.S. cities, strips people of due process and tries to implement indefinite detention without bond hearings, the U.S. resembles the authoritarian country Dad and my grandmother fought so hard to escape.

The life my father built for himself in Chicago would have been impossible in postwar Berlin. In midlife, he taught himself how to sail and eventually served as the commodore of the Burnham Park Yacht Club. He once told me he couldn't believe someone like him was allowed to belong to a yacht club, let alone lead it.

Dad believed in the promise of the U.S. — that those seeking safety and opportunity would find them here — because he had lived it. That U.S. promise has enabled a pluralistic society that reflects the best of our country's values: hope and goodwill between peoples, care, concern and understanding. The ruptures in our nation, exemplified by family separation, indefinite detention, mass deportation and an absence of refugee resettlement for most everyone except white South Africans, will destroy the essence of the U.S.

Alex Poppe is an award-winning author of four books of literary fiction and the bestselling "Breakfast Wine," a memoir-in-essays about her wild ride through Iraq. She has worked in conflict zones such as Iraq, the West Bank and Ukraine.

OPINION

Ukraine's cheap drones and combat robots offer hope for the good guys



Elizabeth Shackelford

When Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Washington and Europe expected a quick Russian victory. Russia's population was more than three times that of Ukraine, its military four times larger and gross domestic product 10 times bigger. The power imbalance was just too great. That Russia was entirely in the wrong meant little. Any realist would tell you Ukraine would fall.

Then President Volodymyr Zelenskyy refused to flee, and Russia couldn't take Kyiv. Observers decided that Ukraine just might be able to stave off defeat, as long as generous U.S. military assistance kept coming. Ukraine faced steep losses but stayed in the fight.

Then Donald Trump returned to the U.S. presidency in January 2025. He had spent years blaming Ukraine for being invaded and covering for Vladimir Putin's war crimes, so it now seemed inevitable that U.S. support would end and Ukraine would lose. U.S. assistance nearly dried up, and Trump pressed Zelenskyy to accept Putin's terms. Observers in Washington and European capitals began to debate exactly how much territory Ukraine would have to surrender to sue for peace.

And yet, 18 months into Trump's second term and four years into Russia's full-scale war, Ukraine still hasn't fallen. In fact, it's beginning to gain the upper hand. April was the first month in nearly two years that Russia had a net loss in territory. In a year full of bad news stories, Ukraine is offering hope that the good guys just might win.

How has Ukraine defied expectations? To be sure, Europe stepped up its aid to help fill the gap caused by reduced U.S. assistance. But that aid had never been enough to bring Ukraine victory. It had merely helped keep Ukraine from losing outright.

Ukraine is turning the tide with Ukrainian resolve and innovation. Should it manage to end this war with its independence intact and its territory defensible, that won't



A Ukrainian serviceman of the 33rd Mechanized Brigade operates a land combat drone during a training at a polygon in Kharkiv region, Ukraine, on Wednesday. **ANDRII MARIENKO/AP**

only make for a sweeter victory, but the country that emerges will be stronger for it too.

Ukraine couldn't outdo Russia in force, so it had to in ingenuity and collective commitment. The Ukrainian public mobilized to resist. Some civilians joined volunteer battalions or were drafted to join the military, while others contributed in different ways, from intelligence gathering and crowd-sourcing funding to food and medical distribution networks and critical infrastructure repair.

The civilian contribution most consequential to the fight, however, has been the rapid advances in the home-grown defense industry. Ukrainian professionals who once worked in finance, information technology, construction, game design and architecture have turned their civilian capabilities to military means. The results have been staggering.

Ukraine is rapidly producing cheap drones that impede Russia's advances. It has short-range drones for the battlefield,

midrange drones that are disrupting Russia's logistics resupply and troop rotation and long-range drones that can strike targets deep within Russian territory, eroding Putin's sense of security back home. Its unmanned ground vehicles are conducting reconnaissance, evacuations and logistical missions. Combat robots are even recapturing territory without putting soldiers at risk. Ukraine faces a foe that also has access to cheap drones, so perhaps its most important development has been artificial intelligence-powered drone interceptors, which have impeded at low cost Russia's ability to inflict heavy losses.

Ukrainian technology is now in high demand from countries such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia that need similar defenses against inexpensive but deadly drones. After all, the drones Russia is using are Iranian-made Shaheds.

Ukraine's defense industry is now producing this technology at scale. As of early 2026, its companies were producing up to 1,000 interceptor drones a day. More

than 500 companies are now manufacturing drones inside the country, producing millions each year. Most of these companies didn't exist before 2022.

And the innovation keeps coming. Engineers are working directly with combat units to enable real-time feedback that drives constant improvements and adjustments as new technology is battlefield-tested. These are the kinds of heroic developments that only a crisis makes possible. Necessity is the mother of invention, after all.

Undoubtedly, Putin still has the capacity and will to inflict serious damage on Ukraine's people and infrastructure. It is unlikely this war will end absent some kind of diplomatic resolution. But Ukraine looks more and more likely to be entering the next round of negotiations with a strong upper hand.

The importance of this today goes far beyond Ukraine. The rules-based international order was established in the wake of World War II to deter wars of

aggression and provide an alternative to the long-standing global reality of might makes right. That order has been faltering, flouted repeatedly by the powerful who have faced no consequences for aggression, leaving the world over all more dangerous for everyone else.

But Ukraine is fighting back against that bleak reality. In a clear battle between right and wrong, the bully may lose. Ukraine may ultimately prevail through grit, determination and imagination.

War is unpredictable, and the tide may well change again. But, for now, it's good to see the good guys take the lead.

Elizabeth Shackelford is a senior advisor with the Institute for Global Affairs at Eurasia Group and a foreign affairs columnist for the Chicago Tribune. She is also a distinguished lecturer with the Dickey Center at Dartmouth College. She was previously a U.S. diplomat and is the author of "The Dissent Channel: American Diplomacy in a Dishonest Age."

Voice of the people

The plan to 'Redefine the Drive'

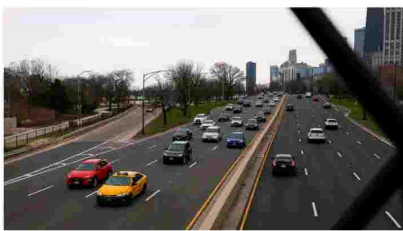
In late May, the Illinois Department of Transportation announced that it was revisiting its recommended proposal for rebuilding North DuSable Lake Shore Drive. Speaking as a Lakeview resident, a bike commuter and a cargo bike parent, I believe that restarting the process and potentially slowing down north-south travel on DuSable Lake Shore Drive is a mistake.

I don't drive often, but a DuSable Lake Shore Drive that is an efficient mover of traffic has been critical for my family. Between 2020 and 2023, I was blessed with two trips to Prentice Women's Hospital for the birth of my two children and had the misfortune of making several urgent trips to Lurie's Children's Hospital. It is hard to quantify how important it is to have the ability to move through the city quickly when you are rushing to the downtown hospital district or are driving home for a brief rest after watching over an infant who required hospitalization.

Zooming out, 150,000 vehicles use DuSable Lake Shore Drive daily to get to work, visit family or enjoy many of the entertainment activities Chicago has to offer. Making DuSable Lake Shore Drive less usable for cars will push more vehicle traffic to neighborhood streets and will increase travel times for Chicago-area commuters. Some people will counter that "it's only a few minutes" but these extra 10 or 15 minutes each way add up, robbing families of valuable together time.

We don't have to imagine what a future that restricts vehicle travel on Lake Shore Drive would look like. Consider the massive travel disruptions caused by the Ridge Avenue work last summer or the current gridlock related to bridge work at Cortland, Halsted and Lake Avenue bridges.

DuSable Lake Shore Drive was recently named as one of the most beautiful roads in the world. It needs an update. The option recommended by IDOT in 2024 improves on the current design by expanding public spaces, making the lakefront more accessible and the road safer. Let's stop stalling



Drivers travel on DuSable Lake Shore Drive on April 9, 2025.

EILEEN T. MESLAR/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

this project, proceed with IDOT's excellent recommendation and keep the city moving.

—Roman Shuster, Chicago

Barrier to jury participation

Growing up as the son of a single mother who needed every cent of her paycheck to keep a roof over our heads, I understand firsthand that civic duty cannot exist in a vacuum; it must reflect and support the real lives of those asked to fulfill it.

I also know what it feels like to be on the wrong end of an unjust outcome in our legal system. That experience taught me that who sits in the jury box matters enormously and that when financial hardship determines who can afford to serve, justice suffers.

That is why I urge Gov. JB Pritzker to sign HB4844.

This legislation would require employers to pay employees their regular wages during jury service, a long-overdue reform that addresses one of the most persistent barriers to equal participation in our justice system. To protect small businesses, the bill sensibly exempts employers with 25 or fewer employees.

Jury service is a cornerstone of justice, yet Illinois currently pays jurors as little as \$4 to \$10 per day in most counties. Cook County pays just \$35 per day. For working Illinoisans living paycheck to paycheck, those figures don't cover lost wages — they don't even come close. The predictable result is that hourly work-

ers and lower-income residents seek hardship exemptions, fail to appear or struggle to comply with summonses altogether, while jury pools increasingly skew toward retirees and salaried workers who can more easily absorb the cost.

This isn't just a fairness problem; it is a justice problem. When financial hardship determines who can afford to serve, juries stop reflecting the communities they are meant to represent. I have lived that reality on both sides.

EB4844 changes that. Pritzker should sign it.

—King Moosa, organizing manager, Citizen Action/Illinois, Chicago

Teaching kids how to swim

My organization and I appreciated the recent op-ed by Chuka Onuh and Dr. Amy Hanson highlighting the urgent need for drowning prevention and greater access to swim instruction for Chicago youths ("This summer, Chicago can help stop the tragedy of drownings," June 1). Their opinion piece sheds important light on a preventable tragedy that continues to impact families and communities, particularly when children lack opportunities to learn critical water safety skills.

At Boys & Girls Clubs of Chicago (BGCC), we see firsthand how access to swimming lessons can change lives. BGCC operates four indoor pools in East Garfield Park, Uptown, Little Village and Bridgeport, providing aquatics programming that is free to club members

year-round. Our pools allow young people to continuously develop and strengthen water safety skills in neighborhoods where access to swim instruction is often limited.

The need is significant. Learning to swim is a lifesaving skill, yet many children never receive formal instruction. In fact, nearly three-quarters of youths who participate in BGCC aquatics programs have never taken swimming lessons. Last year, we served more than 1,100 young people through aquatics programming.

BGCC also offers free learn-to-swim lessons, water safety education, recreational swimming opportunities and competitive swim teams.

Still, access remains a challenge. While BGCC operates four pools, five of our club locations do not have aquatics facilities. Transportation is often the greatest barrier preventing youths from participating in swim lessons. Last summer, when we provided transportation for young people from our club in Austin to the nearest pool we operate in East Garfield Park, 98% of participants were taking their first-ever swim lesson. We are planning the acquisition of our first passenger van — funded by a donor — to support transportation needs in Austin. Drowning prevention requires community-wide solutions. We are proud to be part of that effort through year-round aquatics programming and encourage continued support for transportation and access initiatives that help ensure every child, regardless of ZIP code, has the opportunity to learn to swim.

—Susanna Wickham, president and CEO, Boys & Girls Clubs of Chicago

Ensure kids can access care

Children with rheumatic conditions, such as juvenile arthritis and lupus, rely on highly specialized care from a pediatric rheumatologist to treat and manage their disease. Pediatric rheumatology became a medical specialty

50 years ago, but there are still only about 400 of us nationwide and more than 300,000 patients who rely on our care. And now, limited federal Graduate Medical Education (GME) funding, uneven Medicaid reimbursement and restrictive immigration policies all threaten to make that shortage worse.

Since Medicaid reimbursement lags behind Medicare rates, and a much higher proportion of children in the U.S. are covered by Medicaid (more than 30%) compared to adults, pediatric specialists often earn significantly less than their counterparts in adult practice. This creates financial disincentives for graduating medical students and residents to enter the pediatric subspecialty workforce. Meanwhile, international medical graduates — who make up nearly 25% of the U.S. physician workforce — face visa restrictions that limit their ability to practice, especially in already-underserved areas. Cumulatively, these factors threaten to further reduce the number of pediatric rheumatologists in the years ahead.

Without action, children with complex rheumatic conditions may face longer wait times, delayed diagnoses and reduced access to life-altering care. Congress and state policymakers can help by expanding GME funding for pediatric subspecialties, ensuring adequate Medicaid reimbursement for pediatric care, and maintaining pathways for international medical graduates to enter and remain in the U.S. healthcare workforce.

Childhood is short, and kids demand timely access to specialized care. Improving these policy levers is critical to securing a sustainable pediatric rheumatology workforce to improve outcomes for children across the country.

—Dr. Brian Nolan, pediatric rheumatologist, Chicago and New Lenox

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