



Building consensus

The 18th BRICS Summit pushed for changes in traditional power equations

Reaffirming the importance of reformed multilateralism in a world riven with unilateral actions by superpowers emerged as a binding theme of the 18th BRICS Summit and the New Delhi Declaration. The Summit's success could be measured by three main parameters – the participation of members at the highest levels, the importance given to intra-BRICS trade cooperation mechanisms and the consensus achieved by Indian negotiators in forging a joint statement in a time of war. The government should be commended for ensuring that Iran and the UAE, two rivals in the West Asian conflict, used the occasion for their highest-level bilateral meeting since the war began. The New Delhi Declaration, which was issued despite scepticism about all the differences within the grouping, presented the BRICS as a formidable front in its 20th year. Among the BRICS members, the position of Saudi Arabia, which has yet to formally join the group, remains ambiguous, as Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud arrived after the main session where the joint statement was adopted on Saturday. For the other members, however, the consensus was clear on issues of global importance. The declaration made a call for the reform of the Security Council and support for a greater role for Brazil and India while recommending new initiatives for global governance. It condemned western sanctions and tariffs and resolved to improve intra-BRICS trade and transact more in local currencies. It also condemned unilateral wars, without criticising any member. While the statement omitted references to the U.S.-Israel attacks on Iran, the assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, and of Iran's retaliatory attacks on its neighbours, especially the UAE, it is understood that this was due to a last-minute compromise effected between the two countries so as to forge the agreed text. It also took an exceptionally strong position on Israel's actions in Palestine and Lebanon.

India's fourth BRICS chairmanship has given bal-
lance to its reputation as a Global South balancer
with easy access to both sides of a divided world,
while delivering bilateral benefits. Prime Minister
Narendra Modi's close attention to Iran's Presi-
dent Masoud Peshkian would have gone some way
in assuaging hurt feelings, when New Delhi
appeared to be tilting towards the U.S. and Israel
in the war. Mr. Modi's meeting with Chinese Presi-
dent Xi Jinping also afforded the two countries a
chance to reaffirm their political will to normal-
ise ties. And his meeting with important leaders
from the ASEAN grouping and African nations
paid much-needed attention to India's ties with
them. This BRICS Summit will be remembered
for a moment of solidarity among countries that
have many differences but are together in desir-
ing a shift in traditional power equations to one
more driven by their emerging economies.

A rising graph

Doping is now a deep-rooted culture in Indian sports

At least 13 doping positives in the run-up to the recent Commonwealth Games and the upcoming Asian Games have again put India in an embarrassing spotlight. For a country that has been notoriously leading the global doping charts for three consecutive years, the spate of positive results across disciplines including athletics, weightlifting, wrestling, wushu and judo, has not only brought shame but has also robbed India of some berths in these prestigious events. The dope-tainted names have forced authorities to pull them out of the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games squad. More such names are expected to trickle out in the coming weeks. Lucrative cash incentives for Asian Games medalists are a major factor driving athletes and coaches to take shortcuts, risking their health and reputation, as well as the country's pride. While the spike in dope-positive results ahead of major multi-sport events is not new, the jump this time is a cause for concern. The matter getting raised during the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) workshops in Delhi, the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) downgrading India due to an extremely high risk of doping, and an international agency recently conducting surprise tests in Bhubaneswar and Bengaluru indicate the seriousness of the issue.

Even though National Sports Federations have been expressing concern, it cannot be said that they are strict to the core to curb the menace. Despite being seriously understaffed, the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA), which shoulders the primary anti-doping responsibility in India, has significantly increased the number of tests and raids based on intelligence gathering. But it needs to do more in a vast and populous country to discourage doping. Besides, NADA needs to get out of the government's control to function truly independently in order to enhance its effectiveness. Proper implementation of the National Anti-Doping (Amendment) Act, 2025, to give more powers to NADA and its allied bodies, is another requirement. With dope testing becoming costlier and NADA needing more staff, the government can bolster the fight against doping by increasing the overall budget allocation, which was reduced in the current budget. The other challenge is to cut the supply line, as India has become a hub for the trade in banned substances sourced from different countries. An Indian serving a jail term in Kenya for illegally importing performance-enhancing drugs stands as proof of this. As India prepares for the 2030 Commonwealth Games and hopes to host the Olympics in the future, it needs to act resolutely to weed out a deep-rooted doping culture in Indian sports.

Terror's changing face, India's counter-terror strategy

The terror attack carried out by al-Qaeda on the Twin Towers in New York on September 11, 2001 was neither the first major terrorist attack in the world nor the first against the United States. But it fundamentally changed how terrorism would be fought in the decades that followed.

Over the past 25 years, the global security landscape, including that of India, has changed irreversibly. The forms of terrorism have evolved, the instruments used to perpetrate terror have changed, and so too have the strategies adopted by countries around the world to counter terrorism.

We no longer hear of large terror groups operating under ruthless terrorist leaders such as al-Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden or Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who led the Islamic State and called for the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate. Instead, terror groups have morphed into smaller, more autonomous entities. Lone-wolf attacks are becoming the norm, while technologies such as drones, cyber capabilities, and even artificial intelligence are being used not only by terror groups but also by nations combating terrorism.

From an Indian standpoint, 9/11 certainly helped bring greater attention to India's concerns over cross-border terrorism, particularly in Kashmir. However, it was not until the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks (November 2008) that the world truly stood in solidarity with India and acknowledged its fight against cross-border terrorism. Over the years, India's strategy towards terrorism has evolved – from a passive strategy of merely warning Pakistan but not punishing it, to a bold and active strategy that classifies any act of terrorism backed by support from across the border as an 'act of war'.

The starting years saw a passive response

Although cross-border terror commenced in Kashmir in early 1990s, the first major terror attack did not come from the Kashmir Valley. The assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam terror group of Sri Lanka on May 21, 1991 in Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu shook the nation. With no clearly defined counter-terror strategy and a rapidly expanding terror network in Kashmir, India found itself stretched. The March 1993 Mumbai serial blasts, which killed over 250 people in 13 coordinated blasts across the city, and the synchronised blasts across Coimbatore city (Tamil Nadu) in February 1998 exposed the inadequacies of India's internal security mechanisms to detect and fight terror inside the country.

However, the direct role of Pakistan was first exposed with the hijack of Indian Airlines flight IC-814, on December 24, 1999. Under tremendous public pressure and with very few options, India agreed to release dreaded Pakistan-based terrorists such as Ahmed Omar Sheikh and



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Masood Azhar in exchange for more than 160 civilian hostages. The attack on India's Parliament in New Delhi by the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) terrorist group on December 13, 2001 outraged India and led to a large-scale military mobilisation under 'Operation Parakram'. With India and Pakistan having acquired nuclear weapons, the threat of escalation grew, prompting the international community to rush in to cool tensions. After almost two years of a tense standoff, the military disengagement took place without any direct punishment on Pakistan. The 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks – widely considered India's 9/11 moment – also did not lead to any military action against Pakistan.

There were other terror attacks too, such as the 2002 Akshardham Temple attack, the 2006 Varanasi serial bomb blasts, and the 2010 German Bakery blast in Pune. Delhi, too, was not left untouched by terror. Even before the Parliament attack, an Army garrison within the Red Fort was targeted on December 22, 2000 by Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terrorists, resulting in the deaths of three soldiers. In October 2005, over 60 people were killed in serial blasts that rocked popular Delhi markets, including Sarojini Nagar and Paharganj. Again, in September 2008, months before the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, multiple blasts rocked commercial areas of Delhi, including Connaught Place, Greater Kailash, and Karol Bagh. On September 7, 2011, a briefcase bomb exploded outside the Delhi High Court, killing 15 people. The attack was claimed by Harkat-ul-Jihad Islami (HUJI), a terror group affiliated with al-Qaeda and largely based in Pakistan. In all these cases, and many others, India chose not to respond directly and decisively, even after conclusive proof of Pakistan's direct support for these attacks. How and when, then, did India change its strategy?

Taking the fight across the border

It was after a change of government at the Centre in May 2014, and its resolve not to let terror go unpunished, that India changed its strategy towards cross-border terrorism. The terror attack on September 18, 2016 by Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) terrorists on an Army camp in Uri, Kashmir, led to the first cross-border surgical strikes (September 28-29). The strikes not only sent a strong message but also served as a clear statement of intent. Soon thereafter, following the terror attack on a Central Reserve Police Force convoy in Pulwama, Kashmir, on February 14, 2019, the Indian Air Force (IAF) launched strikes on a JeM terror camp in Balakot. This marked the first time that the IAF had crossed into Pakistani airspace to carry out a strike against a terror target.

However, it was the terror attack in Pahalgam on April 22, 2025 that outraged the nation like never before. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was on a visit to Saudi Arabia, returned to India and soon after, the Indian armed forces

launched Operation Sindoor on May 6-7, hitting the heart of the Pakistan-based terror network. In a matter of 96 hours, the leaders and headquarters of the terror networks (LeT and JeM) were destroyed and Pakistani military assets were pulverised.

Where India stands on terror now

India has come a long way since the menace of cross-border terrorism took root in Kashmir in the early 1990s. From a passive and reactive policy, India has emerged as a leading voice in the global fight against terrorism. Soon after Operation Sindoor, India declared three clear intentions – first, that the era of restraint and patience is over, and Pakistan will have to pay a direct and heavy price for any terror attack in the future. Second, that any future act of cross-border terrorism emanating from Pakistan will be treated as an 'act of war'. Third, that Pakistani nuclear blackmail will no longer be a restraining factor.

India also unveiled 'PRAHAAR', its first comprehensive National Counter-Terrorism Policy and Strategy, on February 23, 2026. The policy provides a national counter-terrorism framework for preventing and responding to terrorist activities and radicalisation through coordinated 'whole-of-government' and 'whole-of-society' approaches.

Although the number of terror-related incidents in Kashmir has declined drastically, the possibility of a few terrorists infiltrating across the Line of Control (LoC) and evading intelligence and security agencies remains. The answer lies in a four-fold strategy. First, continue to hunt down and eliminate the remnants of the terror network in the country, particularly in Kashmir. Second, take pre-emptive military action against any potential terror threat building across the LoC, including at terrorist launch pads. With years of experience and a deeply embedded intelligence network, this is possible. Third, undertake an exhaustive de-radicalisation programme across the country that not only motivates young people to join the mainstream but also makes the prospect of joining or supporting a terror outfit unattractive and prohibitively costly. Fourth, take all necessary steps to cut off terror financing, in close coordination with friendly countries.

Twenty-five years after 9/11, the threat of terrorism across the globe has not been eliminated but has instead morphed into new forms. At the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Summit in Bishkek on September 1, Mr. Modi called out the double standards on terrorism and said, "We must send a strong message to countries that use terrorism as an instrument of policy and provide safe haven and support to terrorists that terrorism can never be a strategic asset for anyone." At the 18th BRICS Summit in New Delhi, an exclusive paragraph on the Pahalgam terror attack was included in the Delhi Declaration, clearly underscoring the growing global consensus on combating terrorism.

Pakistan's westward turn — strategic depth or overstretch

The defence cooperation agreement signed by Pakistan and Kuwait on August 27, 2026, is the latest manifestation of Pakistan's rapidly expanding strategic footprint in West Asia. The agreement assumes greater significance when viewed alongside Pakistan's membership of the Saudi Arabia-Türkiye-Pakistan defence arrangement and its recent role as an intermediary between Iran and the United States.

Enduring links

Pakistan's West Asian orientation has deep historical roots. From its inception, it attempted to combine its South Asian geopolitical identity with that of a major Muslim power. During the Cold War, Pakistan, Iran and Türkiye were linked through the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and subsequently through the Regional Cooperation for Development.

The decisive turn towards the Arab world came after Pakistan's defeat and dismemberment in 1971. It sought to compensate for its diminished position in South Asia by emphasising its Islamic identity, symbolised by the Islamic summit held in Lahore in 1974. Pakistan simultaneously developed extensive military relationships with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies.

What is new, therefore, is not Pakistan's involvement in West Asia but its increasing institutionalisation. The Makkah Agreement of August 7 stipulated that an armed attack against one member would be regarded as an attack against all. The three countries moved quickly to give the arrangement institutional substance. At the August 31 meeting in Istanbul, their Foreign and Defence Ministers and military chiefs decided to establish a permanent secretariat in Saudi Arabia, with a Pakistani serving as its first Secretary-General for three years. They also agreed to strengthen military interoperability and pursue defence-industrial cooperation, including



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joint technology development and production.

But the new arrangement is already confronting Pakistan with the contradictions inherent in its expanding West Asian role. Renewed Houthi missile and drone attacks against Saudi Arabia created the first serious test of the Makkah pact. The Houthis' recent capture of Mocha port and Perim island have further added to their capability to choke off Saudi shipping through the Bab al-Mandab. With the Strait of Hormuz effectively closed by Iran, a frustrated Saudi Arabia may re-launch a full-fledged war against the Houthis. This could create a major dilemma for Pakistan especially if Riyadh decides to invoke the collective defence provision of the Makkah agreement.

Pakistan wants to be Saudi Arabia's security partner, Türkiye's strategic ally, Iran's friend and interlocutor, Washington's useful intermediary, and an increasingly important security provider to the Gulf monarchies. These roles are compatible when regional tensions are manageable. They become irreconcilable when they are not.

What it means for India

For India, Pakistan's westward turn presents both a challenge and a potential relief. A Pakistan embedded in a network of West Asian security relationships may acquire defence in depth. Saudi financial resources, Turkish defence technology and Pakistan's expanding relationships with Gulf militaries can theoretically increase Islamabad's resilience in a confrontation with India. Türkiye is already Pakistan's most vocal major supporter on Kashmir. Pakistan's nuclear status also enhances its strategic value to Arab states concerned about an increasingly unstable regional order because of nuclear-armed Israel's aggressive policies.

But strategic depth can easily become strategic overstretch. Pakistan's security establishment has

historically concentrated overwhelmingly on India. A Pakistan increasingly required to devote diplomatic, military and intelligence resources to Iran, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf, Yemen and the Red Sea may have fewer resources to concentrate on India.

The current Saudi-Houthi confrontation and the distinct possibility of it spawning a war clearly demonstrate the danger of Pakistan's strategic overstretch. The deeper Pakistan becomes embedded in West Asian security arrangements, the harder it will become to remain aloof from the region's conflicts. If the Houthi-Saudi confrontation escalates, Islamabad may eventually have to choose between honouring the credibility of its collective-defence commitments and maintaining its carefully cultivated relationship with Tehran, the Houthis' principal ally.

India should therefore resist interpreting Pakistan's growing West Asian role in purely negative terms. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and the other Gulf states have major economic and strategic relationships with India that they are unlikely to sacrifice for Pakistan. New Delhi should continue deepening these relationships as a counter to Pakistan's expanding footprint in West Asia.

The consolidation of Pakistan's West Asian relationships undoubtedly provides it with greater strategic depth vis-à-vis India. But those very relationships expose it to some of the world's most combustible rivalries. For India, therefore, Pakistan's westward turn contains a paradox. A Pakistan more deeply embedded in a West Asian security structure may in theory look strategically stronger. But a Pakistan entangled in mutually contradictory West Asian commitments will soon discover that it could be indefinitely stuck in a quagmire of its own choosing. It is far more difficult to get off the tiger than to get on it.

Pakistan's expanding West Asian role brings influence and opportunity, but also strategic risks

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

India's BRICS moment

The high-profile 18th BRICS Summit could not have come at a more opportune time, with the United States flexing its muscles, adopting a belligerent, obstinate and defiant stand across a raft of issues, and treating a galaxy of countries across the world with disdain and contempt (Front page,

September 13). The successful summit is, undeniably, a testament to India's steadfast commitment and desire to usher in an era of durable peace, stability and security in the world. One positive aspect was the interaction between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping, which,

it is hoped, will pave the way for a ratcheting up of relations between the two countries, which are currently far from cosy. Whether the outcome of the Summit will lead to an enhanced level of cooperation and coordination among the participating nations across a plethora of spheres, and

whether it will have an impact on Washington's style of functioning, only the days ahead will reveal.
V. Johan Dhanakumar,
Chennai

Statesmanship vs theatre

The dignified response by DMK president M.K. Stalin to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay's recent

visual gesture in the Assembly serves as a profound lesson in political maturity. Mr. Stalin's injury should not have been a punchline or a subject for mimicry; it was a physical scar from 1976. By choosing to offer statesmanship and constructive advice, Mr. Stalin held up a mirror to the current administration.

True leadership is earned through decades of public struggle and administrative execution, not through social media reels or theatrical swipes meant to mask governance deficits.
R. Sivakumar,
Chennai

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

Revisiting Kuwait's invasion amid war

As the world witnesses yet another war in West Asia, the passage of August revives the haunting memory of Iraqi troops invading Kuwait on August 2, 1990. As Kuwait remembers that sordid day, another story, which has largely been forgotten, also needs to be remembered – the story of the migrant workers. For them, the war was not an abstract international crisis; it meant unemployment and the loss of everything they had built abroad.

The labourers and domestic workers were the most hit, being abandoned when employers fled. Many returned empty-handed, leaving behind wages, savings, and possessions. And while some chose to undertake the arduous return journey, others had no choice but to stay back.

There were also cases of employers utilising the war as a pretext to withhold dues. While a UN Compensation Commission was set up to retrieve wages, it was fruitless in compensating only white-collar workers and high-skilled blue-collar workers while labourers, domestic workers and other low-skilled workers lost all their hard-earned wages. This is the same story that unfolded decades later during the COVID-19 crisis which triggered the Justice for Wage Theft Campaign.

However, because of their dire circumstances, when the war ended, migrants went back to the same jobs and in many cases to the same employers, proving that the Gulf Dream was only a mirage for many.

After the invasion, some undertook extraordinary journeys to return home;



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Oommen

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some of them travelled via roads in cars, crossing many international borders over days, and were able to reach Kerala through informal networks of assistance. Many others were evacuated via civilian-led airlifts, made possible by the efforts of diaspora leaders.

However, some stayed back in the war rather than returning home to debt, and adapted in remarkable ways. One of our respondents who had then just opened an electrical shop, remained in Kuwait, taking on odd jobs; he sheltered quite a few fellow migrants and was briefly detained by Iraqi soldiers. When the war ended, he reopened his shop under skies darkened by burning oil wells, hoping for a brighter future. A tailor, who was stranded after his employer disappeared without paying his wages, survived through casual labour, and sheltered in basements during the war.

Community as resilience

The invasion also saw stories of resilience and courage. When Kuwait was occupied by Iraq, the Indian embassy could not continue its operations and was formally withdrawn and the staff relocated to Basra. One of the migrants recalls how a voluntary committee of Indian businessmen assumed critical roles, coordinating evacuations, liaising with officials in Basra, and arranging buses, ships, and flights to ensure that migrants were not left to fend for themselves. In an extraordinary move, they were entrusted to issue travel documents using official seals.

Despite logistical hurdles and long desert waits, these leaders were able to

evacuate 1,70,000 Indians – an exceptional instance of diaspora-led crisis management in the absence of state infrastructure and embassy guidance.

Another striking manifestation of the war was the contrasting response of migrants after returning to Kerala. In south Kerala, large public rallies expressed support for the Emir of Kuwait, while in north Kerala, especially Kozhikode, massive demonstrations backed the Iraqi leadership.

The legacy of the invasion extended well beyond 1991, with the war reshaping not only migration strategies but also the social geography of the Malayali diaspora in Kuwait. A lingering sense of insecurity took hold, with workers beginning to save more aggressively, transferring money home quickly, and investing in land and houses back home. The social geography of Kuwait also changed.

Migrants from Kerala who were never ghettoised, started clustering in neighbourhoods such as Abbasia – “mini-Kerala” – creating tightly knit communities, with community and religious organisations assuming more importance. This offered emotional support and a sense of stability to the migrants. Thus, the war not only reshaped individual lives but the collective outlook of migrant groups across the Gulf.

As war once again, unsettles West Asia, these memories acquire renewed relevance. Migrant workers continue to build the economies of the Gulf while remaining among those least protected when conflict erupts.

The evidence gap in dole politics

In May 1795, English magistrates met at the Pelican Inn in Speenhamland, Berkshire. With food prices rising and the French Revolution unsettling the English establishment, they decided to top up agricultural wages from parish funds, linking payouts to bread prices and family size. Hungarian economic historian Karl Polanyi later saw this as an early assertion of a human “right to live” against the harshness of the market.

Critics, however, held a different view. Once wage support, relief for the poor, and public finance were folded into one instrument, it became unclear what the system was protecting: poor families, the wage structure, employers, or social peace. By subsidising wages from public funds, the Speenhamland system blurred price signals and weakened incentives. While relief could be justified, the instrument still had to be judged by its effects. India's dole politics must now face the same test.

Cash support can indeed be essential in a poor, informal economy. The Economic Survey 2025-26 notes that transfers to women amount to 11-24% of the monthly income of women daily-wage workers, and 11-87% of self-employed women. But a transfer that begins as relief can also become a permanent fiscal commitment unless there is a clear account of who receives it, what it changes, and what it displaces. These concerns assume importance because dole politics is now a regular feature of Indian statecraft. It appears as free electricity, free bus travel, monthly cash transfers, subsidised



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food, and utility subsidies.

PRS Legislative Research estimates that unconditional cash transfers to women alone rose from two States in 2022-23 to 12 States in 2025-26, with an estimated annual cost of ₹1.68 lakh crore (about 0.5% of GDP). For example, West Bengal has moved from Lakshmi Bhandar to Annapuram Yojana, budgeting ₹36,000 crore for a ₹3,000 monthly transfer to about 1.3 crore women. Tamil Nadu allocated ₹14,412 crore for the Kalaigarn Magalir Urmil Thogai in its 2026-27 interim budget, and Assam set aside ₹5,000 crore for Orunodoi. Such schemes stake major claims on State finances.

Need for accountability

Cash may improve welfare, but it should not become a substitute for the public goods that make welfare durable. The same woman who values ₹1,500-₹3,000 may also need a functioning health centre, childcare, a good government school, or access to better work. A cash transfer may soften the strain created by weak institutions, but it cannot, by itself, address them.

Governments often attach lofty social purposes such as dignity and empowerment to these transfers, but rarely publish the model that links payments to outcomes.

Who exactly is being targeted? What baseline data justifies the scheme? What effect is anticipated on consumption, debt, nutrition, schooling, health spending, labour supply, or women's bargaining power? Without such answers, it is unsurprising that much of India's dole politics today is defended by the moral language of welfare rather

than evidence. An ADB study, prepared for the 16th Finance Commission, found that India lacks a systematic dataset of government expenditure on cash-transfer schemes.

Other democracies also redistribute and are not immune to welfare politics. However, benefits such as unemployment insurance, food support, and healthcare subsidies are usually tied to eligibility rules, contribution records, job-search obligations, or periodic reassessment. India need not copy these systems mechanically. Some transfers, especially to women in poor households, may be better left unconditional. But the fewer the conditions placed, the greater must be the obligation on governments to provide evidence.

A large recurring transfer should therefore include a welfare impact statement before rollout, detailing the objective, eligibility rule, expected coverage, five-year fiscal cost, alternatives considered, likely leakage and exclusion errors, and measurable outcomes. After rollout, household surveys should record not only whether the transfer was received but also how it affected consumption, debt, health spending, schooling, mobility, work incentives, control over household expenditure, and subjective well-being. Anonymous microdata should then be made available for independent research. Schemes that spend public money on this scale must survive severe scrutiny.

The case for evidence is also one of democratic fairness. Evidence will not remove politics from welfare, but it could make that politics more honest.

SIR: Glaring oddities in Maharashtra's deletion patterns

A total of 2,07 crore names have been deleted from Maharashtra's electoral rolls; the figure is higher than Chhattisgarh's entire electorate

DATA POINT

Pon Vasanth B.A.
Nitika Francis

Analyses of constituency-wise deletions and lists of deletions in Maharashtra after the enumeration phase of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls have revealed several oddities, indicating high chances of aggressive and arbitrary deletions. The draft SIR roll released on August 31, showed that a total of 2.07 crore electors have been dropped from the 288 Assembly Constituencies (ACs) of Maharashtra, which is 21.14% of the 9.79 crore electors whose names were there on the pre-SIR rolls.

To place Maharashtra's deletions in context, the 2.07 crore names dropped is higher than Chhattisgarh's entire electorate. More surprisingly, it is higher than even the 2.04 crore deletions in Uttar Pradesh, during the SIR; U.P. is India's largest State with 13.4 crore electors – which is bigger than the number of electors in the draft rolls of Maharashtra, Karnataka and Delhi combined.

The Election Commission of India (EC) has desisted from releasing the Elector to Population (EP) ratio for any State during the ongoing SIR process despite its own Manual on Electoral Rolls mandating it to do so during and after every revision. An estimate of EP ratio based on the projected population in the 18-plus age-group as per the report of Government of India's Technical Group on Population Projections showed that Maharashtra's draft rolls are short of 1.92 crore electors, which is roughly the same as the number of deletions (Table 1).

As seen in other States, deletions in Maharashtra were also highly concentrated in urban areas (MAP 1). A total of 58 ACs saw at least one-third of names (33%) in the rolls getting deleted, of which 25 ACs saw deletions of 40% or

more. Almost all of these were in and around the Mumbai, Pune, Thane and Nashik districts. Bhilwadi East in Thane recorded the highest deletions (49.1%). Of the 3.76 lakh voters, 1.85 lakh names were deleted.

“Permanently Shifted” and “Untraceable or Absent” seem to have been used as blanket categories to delete large number of names from the rolls. Table 2 shows a sample of a few constituencies that saw deletions due to widely different reasons. Kalyan Rural in Thane saw 2.52 lakh deletions, of which 2.39 lakh (96.5%) were marked as shifted or absent – that is 96-97 in every 100 deleted voters had either shifted or were untraceable, as per the EC. But the constituency saw only 4,882 deletions marked as “Deceased”.

In 85 ACs, shifted and absent accounted for anywhere between 75% to 96.5% of all deletions. These 85 had 3.21 crore electors before SIR, of which 1.17 crore deletions were deleted. Of these 1.17 crore deletions, 97.9 lakh (84%) were marked as shifted or absent.

The Hindu had pointed out how the EC's own manual says that an absentee voter cannot be deleted from the rolls as they continued to be an ordinary resident of the place where they are enrolled. An FAQ published by the Chief Electoral Officer of Maharashtra says “Absent” means “the elector was unavailable”. Analysis indicated that these two reasons were applied arbitrarily and interchangeably in several constituencies.

Table 3 shows the top five districts that saw extreme variations in the per cent of electors deleted for being absent. Pune exemplified this problem, as shown in Chart 1. Within the same district and among ACs located nearby, the share of electors marked as shifted or absent varied widely. Maval saw just 322 names (0.4%) marked as Absent while over 77,000 were marked as shifted. Hadapsar, on the other hand, saw 86% of its 2.98 lakh voters marked as absent.

Counting out en masse

The data were sourced from the Election Commission of India. Night-time light intensity from the Socio-economic High-resolution Rural-Urban Geographic Platform for India (SHRUG) database maintained by the Development Data Lab, drawn from satellite readings from the year 2023 was used to classify constituencies as urban or rural.

TABLE 1: An estimate of Elector-to-Population ratio shows that the draft SIR roll is short of roughly the same number of electors deleted during the enumeration phase

Metric	Value
Electors before SIR	9,78,54,049
Deletions	2,06,88,487
Electors in draft SIR rolls	7,71,65,562 (-21.14%)
Projected voter population	9,65,00,000
Shortfall	-19,334,438 (-20%)
ACs with >33% deletions	58
ACs with >40% deletions	25

Deletion of 2,07 crore names in Maharashtra is higher than deletions in U.P.'s final SIR rolls

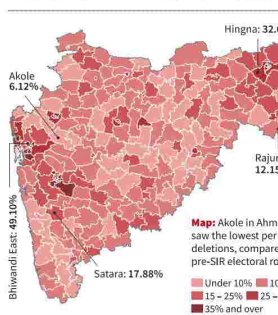


TABLE 2: The top five districts that saw extreme variations in the per cent of electors being deleted for being 'Absent'

District	No of ACs	How widely did % of deletions marked as 'Absent' vary? Min → Max
Pune	6	3.3 → 85.5%
Nashik	21	0.4 → 88.3%
Aurangabad	15	8.1 → 86.5%
Nagpur	9	7.3 → 67.3%
Nagpur	12	4.4 → 59.7%

Wide variations were observed in constituencies within districts that are largely of similar urban or rural character. In the 15 constituencies in Nashik, electors deleted for being 'Absent' varied from 8.1 to 86.5%

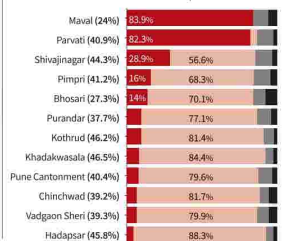


Double checks: Booth Level Officers sort enumeration forms as voter enumeration drive commences in Nagpur. ANI

TABLE 2: A few constituencies that indicate widely different and non-uniform application of reasons for deletions

Assembly (District)	Pre-SIR electors	Deletions (%)	Why is it odd?
Kalyan Rural (Thane)	5.48 lakh	2,52,247 (46%)	Only 1.9% marked as Deceased, the lowest in the State
Shrigonda (Ahmednagar)	3.48 lakh	40,110 (11.5%)	Nearly 45% marked as Deceased, highest in the State
Solapur South (Solapur)	3.98 lakh	64,326 (16.2%)	Nearly 25% were Duplicates
Worli (Mumbai City)	2.68 lakh	1,05,575 (39.4%)	Only 1.3% (3,786) were Duplicates

CHART 1: Variations in the use of 'Shifted' vs 'Absent' within Pune's ACs. Values (%) in brackets are deletions in the ACs



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 14, 1976

Himalaya seminar may help quake forecasts

New Delhi, September 13: Mr. Chandrajit Yadav, Union Minister for Steel and Mines while inaugurating the five-day international seminar on Himalayan Geology which commenced here today, expressed the hope that the deliberations at the seminar would lead to some 'dependable clues' for the prediction of earthquakes for future lines of action.

Stressing the importance of earthquake prediction and the science of seismology for an agricultural country in India where a large number of irrigation projects has to be built to harness its available water resources, the Minister said "recent earthquakes in some parts of Asia are reminder to us that at least in India very little has been done in the way of predicting earthquakes. Some of the countries have made remarkable progress in this direction and can save humanity by sharing their knowledge. The world community of scientists has to work collectively. These calamities do not respect national boundaries."

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 14, 1926

Encouraging British films in India

London, September 13: In connection with the British film scheme mentioned in the message of the 11th September, it is stated that the six Indian rulers mentioned already have contributed quarter a million sterling in money, land and buildings.

Maharaja of Alwar has offered £100,000 and free sites for cinema in India.

The Maharaja of Patiala has offered £30,000 H.H. the Aga Khan £35,000 to £40,000.

The remaining princes have not yet decided on the cash offers but will supply sites and are in some cases building cinemas.

It is hoped that by the middle of 1927 there will be a chain of 300 cinemas across India showing films from Britain and from Dominions in the proportion of 6 British films for one screened in other parts of the Empire.

Mr. Niranjan Pal states that the Princes do not expect any reward for their munificence.

The profits will go to a trust or endowment fund for the development of films in India.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Persons missing after ferry capsizes off Java in Indonesia

140 Rescuers in Indonesia said at least 140 passengers and crew were missing on Sunday after a ferry sailing between the islands of Java and Borneo was hit by bad weather and capsized. The Virgo Transport 8, carrying 243 passengers and crew, had lost contact with its shipping company on Sunday after departing from Surabaya in East Java. **APF**

Surge in Vinayaka Chaturthi bus travel recorded in T.N.

38 in per cent. State Transport Undertakings in Tamil Nadu recorded a massive 38% surge in bus deployments during the Vinayaka Chaturthi festival weekend, with over 4,600 State-run vehicles pressed into service. However, the State's transport operations were heavily overshadowed by a steep fare hike by private transport operators, drawing severe backlash. **PII**

Grievances taken up by Delhi Police during Thana Divas hearings

2,333 The Delhi Police took up 2,333 complaints and grievances during its weekly 'Thana Divas - Jansunwa' public hearing sessions held across stations in all six ranges of the national capital. The hearings were held as part of an initiative aimed at strengthening police-public interaction and improving grievance redressal, officials said. **PII**

Number of people evacuated overnight from island of Brač

230 Around 230 people were evacuated overnight Sunday on the Croatian Adriatic island of Brač because of a fire that has ravaged some 3,500 hectares, according to authorities. With the wildfire threatening people's houses after being fanned by strong winds, the authorities sounded the alarm shortly before midnight. **APF**

India's steel quota for exports under India-EU trade pact

6.94 in lakh tonnes. India will get country-specific tariff-rate quotas (TRQs) totalling 1.64 million tonnes annually for exporting steel products to the European Union, of which 6.94,853 tonnes will be under the free trade agreement, according to the draft text of the pact released by the EU. **PII**

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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At BRICS, India must bank on the NDB

India should use BRICS to maximise the grouping's potential without strengthening Beijing, with the New Development Bank offering a practical avenue for cooperation; strengthening the NDB through greater capital, membership and local-currency lending can make BRICS more relevant

ECONOMIC NOTES

Amit Kumar
Anushka Saxena

On September 12, leaders of the BRICS grouping gathered at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi, with India holding the chair and, by extension, the pen. When BRICS came together in 2011, its five members contributed 20% of global GDP but held just 11% of the voting share at the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Today, the expanded grouping accounts for nearly 40% of global GDP and 55% of the world's population, but the voting share has barely expanded.

Beyond that grievance, BRICS does not, and will never, possess a coherent geopolitical identity. Russia, China and Iran would like it to be anti-West, while India, Brazil and South Africa insist it is better understood as non-West. Given these divergences and the importance of the India-U.S. ties, Delhi cannot lend itself to the Beijing-Moscow de-dollarisation crusade. Not only would that add fuel to the fire at a time when ties with Washington are already strained, but it would also be an unsustainable proposition to advocate in the medium term.

India's approach to BRICS has to conform to the broader constraints and contradictions that its membership poses — maximising the grouping's potential without strengthening Beijing's overall strategic position. Within these constraints, there are still possibilities to keep the grouping relevant.

Making the NDB count

One area where BRICS can contribute the most meaningfully to the global financial order, without overtly threatening or challenging American predominance, is by expanding the efficiency and membership of the New Development Bank (NDB). Established by the BRICS countries in 2015 to "mobilise resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging markets and developing countries," the bank remains one of the grouping's most tangible tools.

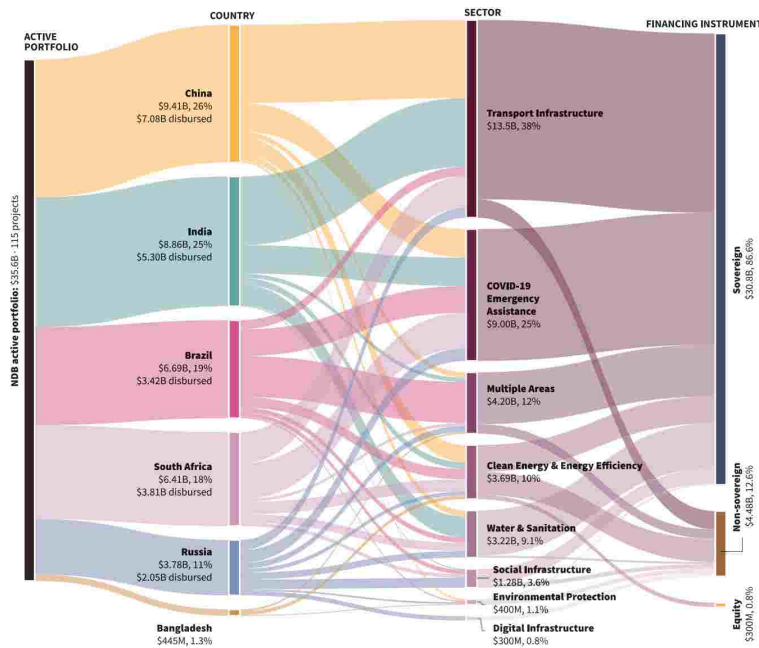
Yet, despite a decade in operation, the NDB has approved only 139 projects worth about \$43 billion, distributed mostly among its core members. Its like-for-like counterpart, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), established around the same time, has meanwhile gathered 111 approved members and committed about \$69 billion across 350 projects, backed by a AAA credit rating that the NDB cannot easily attain. Stagnant asset growth continues to restrict its lending capacity. This is coupled with an exceptionally slow disbursement rate; only about \$20 billion of approved loans had been disbursed, according to the bank's own count.

Breaking the asset bottleneck

One pathway to breaking this asset bottleneck would be for the five countries to increase their paid-up capital. However, severe domestic and geopolitical constraints mean that not all founders can match higher commitments — most notably, Russia, which is heavily sanctioned. Sanctions have also strained the bank's credit standing and dollar funding costs. What is ironic is that even as Moscow and Beijing champion de-dollarisation, including through the Bank, the NDB has extended no new credit to Russia since March 2022 to

Where the money flows

China and India together account for 51% of the New Development Bank's active portfolio, while transport infrastructure takes the largest share



This portfolio excludes loan amounts repaid and projects cancelled. NDB has approved \$43.0 billion across 139 projects in total since 2015; the difference is 24 projects and about \$7.4 billion that have been fully repaid or cancelled. Interior country-by-sector flows are estimated and scaled to NDB's published totals.



The 18th BRICS Summit concluded on Sunday, in New Delhi. **AP**

protect its AA/AA+ credit rating. And since the bank's rules mandate equal voting shares among the founders, any capital expansion is effectively held hostage by its financially weakest link. The NDB has also opened its doors to new members, allowing for a fresh infusion of capital, but the founders' collective voting share cannot fall below 55%.

Regardless of how the bottleneck is resolved, there is merit in reorienting the NDB within BRICS. So far, the bank has served Delhi well. It has secured commitments of nearly \$10 billion across 32 projects, including metro rail systems and the Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut RRTS corridor. It is not a small feat, but expanding the NDB's operations to be on par with other multilateral lenders would require extending such a bargain to many more emerging markets and developing

countries.

It is also a noteworthy strength of the NDB that it has a marked preference for local-currency lending. This mechanism appeals to emerging economies, especially at a time when the volatility in foreign-exchange markets is sustained because of global wars, both military and economic. It is an alternative way to reduce reliance on the dollar without replacing it as a currency for trade invoicing. The bank's 2022-26 General Strategy commits to 30% of its lending and borrowing in member countries' local currencies, even as the bulk of its lending and borrowing remains in dollars. Whatever local currency lending does exist is skewed heavily in favour of the Reminbi — just a few days ago, the NDB priced a \$7 billion (\$1.04 billion) three-year Panda bond in the China

Interbank bond market. In 2026, issuance of such bonds has gone up approximately 91% year-on-year, per Chinese data.

Pushing the rupee bond

It is time for India to push the long-delayed rupee bond over the line. First discussed in 2016, and subsequently slated for October 2023 and then for end-March 2026, the debut issuance was described by NDB President Dilma Rousseff in May as being at its "final stage," two months after the bank floated a rupee bond programme to mobilise around ₹25,000 crore over five years. Further, given the fact that the 2026 New Delhi Declaration did not feature a meaningful agreement on mobilising the NDB, India's focus in BRICS next year should be on simpler fixes to local-currency challenges.

Unlike the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, whose Summit recently concluded with bare-minimum outcomes, BRICS has tangible economic tools and a wider membership than ever before. In a world drifting towards subscription multilateralism, with Washington's pay-to-shape-the-rules Board of Peace as its latest specimen, these arrangements are the only way the grouping will truly set itself apart.

(Amit Kumar and Anushka Saxena are researchers at the Takshashila Institution. Views are personal to the authors and do not represent those of the Institution. Graphic Data Source: NDB; Investor Presentation June 2026 & Annual Report 2025; created by the authors)

THE GIST

BRICS' growing economic and demographic weight has not been matched by greater influence at institutions such as the IMF, while divisions among members prevent it from developing a coherent geopolitical identity

The NDB remains one of BRICS' most tangible economic instruments, but its lending and disbursement have lagged behind the AIIB, with weak asset growth and constraints arising from sanctions on Russia and the bank's voting structure

India should push for the long-delayed rupee bond and focus on practical local-currency measures, while using the NDB to extend development finance to more emerging markets and developing countries

CACHE



There is no steering wheel inside the Cybercab, raising questions about passenger safety. REUTERS

Why Tesla's steering-less Cybercab is under investigation

Tesla has rolled out its two-seater Cybercab robotaxis in limited areas of Austin; while supporters see robotaxis as safer and more accessible, Tesla's Cybercabs face regulatory scrutiny and wider concerns over how driverless vehicles respond to emergencies and unexpected road situations

Sahana Venugopal

The story so far:

In September 3, Tesla announced the rollout of its new electric robotaxis, offering services in designated parts of Austin, Texas. According to news reports, the self-driving cars are almost impossible to ignore as their gold exterior and 'Cybercab' branding catch the eye. But the near-empty interior has sparked questions about the safety of passengers and their ability to intervene in case of emergencies.

What are the features of Tesla's Cybercab?

The Cybercab is a self-driving car that has seating for two people. The 'butterfly' doors open upwards and the body boasts a sleek, cyberpunk-inspired design that contrasts sharply with the chunkier camera-mounted cars from rival Waymo. The golden exterior is meant to represent a "literal" golden age of transportation, according to Tesla CEO Elon Musk.

There are no steering controls or pedals inside the Cybercabs. Mr. Musk has declared that the cars were built for "maximally efficient autonomous operation." On the absence of brake pedals, he said this would help in reducing the complexity of a hydraulic system, and that "plumbing" would not have to be routed all around the car. Regulators will need to confirm if Mr. Musk's design choices comply with their safety requirements.

Mr. Musk described the Cybercab as

"basically a super comfortable lounge on wheels with a great TV and epic sound". With upcoming Starlink integration, users would be able to watch 4 K live video while riding in the Cybercab, he said.

Switches under the touchscreen allow users to lower the windows. A cabin camera monitors the vehicle's interior. A Tesla Cybercab promotional video showed passengers sleeping, watching movies, playing games, teaching children, holding dogs, and handling conference calls while they were taking a ride.

A major perk for loyal passengers is that their climate and media settings are saved in a profile and will apply to new rides as well.

Children under the age of 13 are not permitted to ride in a Cybercab vehicle.

Passengers can stop a ride by either pressing a 'Pull Over' button on the touchscreen or a 'STOP' button overhead for non-emergency situations. In the event of an emergency, users will be able to pull the door lever to trigger an emergency mechanical release. The Cybercab is designed to also pull over instead of instantly braking, based on its surroundings. Passengers can reach Tesla representatives through the car's communication system.

Have regulators approved the Tesla Cybercabs?

While the U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is the regulator that enforces vehicle performance standards across the country, car makers have the option to self-certify their offerings.

The NHTSA confirmed it has opened an investigation into Tesla's Cybercab self-certification to see if it meets the applicable Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS).

"When certified vehicles appear to not adhere to these requirements, NHTSA conducts an investigation," stated the regulator.

The NHTSA explained that existing standards would remain in force even as the agency reviews rules related to standards for brake pedals, windshield wipers, lighting, and rearview mirrors, to enhance American innovation in automated vehicles.

The NHTSA is currently evaluating the Tesla Full Self-Driving (FSD) feature that is built into over three million vehicles. The assessment is related to impaired camera functions that have allegedly caused accidents in poor weather conditions.

In July, the NHTSA issued a more general warning about driverless automated vehicles "interfering," as it noted that the cars drove into emergency scenes, blocked the way of ambulances and fire rescue vehicles, and were unable to respond properly when detecting flashing lights, fire, and traffic cones.

"This is unacceptable. To state it bluntly: an AV (automated vehicle) that cannot safely interact with first responders is a danger to the general public," stated the NHTSA's letter.

Cybercabs are not the first robotaxis launched by Tesla. The EV maker has already deployed its Model Y cars in Tampa and Miami, in Florida, and Austin, Dallas, and Houston, in Texas. Cybercabs

are currently available in limited areas only in Austin.

What are some concerns surrounding robotaxis?

Robotaxis or self-driving taxis have been hailed for a variety of reasons. They are often viewed as a safer option for female passengers, people who cannot communicate verbally, or passengers in vulnerable situations.

Supporters of robotaxis claim that they help lower accident rates (when compared to human-operated cars), prevent rash/fatigued/drunken driving, and that the AI systems supporting these cars are rapidly advancing.

Robotaxis have also been pitched as a win for accessibility and inclusion, as some customers complained that human-operated cabs cancel rides when passengers disclose disabilities, health conditions, and the use of wheelchairs or service animals. In fact, Tesla's own Cybercab ad showed users of wheelchairs and crutches being able to store their belongings in the car boot. (This ad, however, did not cover how a non-mobile user would be able to make their way unassisted into the driverless car without their mobility aid.)

Still, robotaxis can pose safety risks when facing unexpected circumstances. Videos and posts shared on social media have recorded instances of driverless taxis being unable to move when held up by men blocking their path, leaving passengers fearful inside. Minor crashes and intrusions into protected areas have also been documented.



KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

The charming grifter fooled everyone

She remained impervious to criticism

S. Upendran

What is the meaning of 'grifter'? (S. Geetha, Visakhapatnam)

The word 'grift' rhymes with 'lift', 'sift' and 'gift'. Some of us in India became aware of this word when the media in the U.S. and U.K. reported that the CEO of a well-known company referred to Meghan Markle and her husband, Prince Harry, as 'grifters'. This slang term is mostly used in informal contexts to show disapproval. When you refer to someone as being a 'grifter', what you are suggesting is that the individual, though charming, is not to be trusted, for he is a swindler. This clever individual will find a way to trick you out of your money without any threat of violence. Other terms used to refer to such an individual are: con artist, scammer, swindler, defrauder, etc. One of the theories about the word is that it is derived from 'grafter', meaning a corrupt individual.

The novel is about two grifters and their various scams.

How is the word impervious pronounced? What does it mean? (K. Arvind, Bengaluru)

The word consists of four syllables; the first is pronounced like the 'im' in 'impossible' and 'important'. The following 'er' is like the 'er' in 'stern', 'germ' and 'term', while the 'i' sounds like the 'i' in 'bit', 'hit' and 'sit'. The final 'ou' is like the 'a' in 'china'. The word is pronounced 'im-PER-vi-es' with the stress on the second syllable. It comes from the Latin 'impervius', and it has been part of the English language since the mid 17th century. In Latin, 'im' means 'not' and 'pervius' means 'passable'. The word 'impervious' literally means 'not allowing anything to pass through'. An impervious surface, for example, is one that cannot be penetrated. During the monsoon season, some of us wear a raincoat because the material used to make the coat prevents water from seeping through; it is impervious to water. Similarly, we have material impervious to heat, while some are impervious to light. It is important to note that 'impervious' is usually followed by 'to' - one is always 'impervious to' something.

The new vest that the soldiers are wearing is impervious to bullets.

The tiles used on the space shuttle are impervious to extreme heat.

The word 'impervious' can be used figuratively in everyday contexts as well. When you say that an individual is impervious to criticism, what you are suggesting is that he is not affected by it; he is not bothered or influenced by what you or others say. Criticism bounces off him very much like raindrops off a raincoat.

Jain was impervious to my jokes. I just couldn't make him laugh.

Which is correct? 'Log in to' an account or 'Log into' an account? (M Sridhar, Pune)

I don't think it really matters nowadays - most people accept both. Native speakers of English seem to be happy with 'log in to' and 'log into'. Purists, however, would argue that it should be 'log in to' and not 'log into' because according to them, 'log in' is a phrasal verb.

I couldn't log in to my new account. upendrankye@gmail.com

THE DAILY QUIZ

Questions on the much venerated and loved elephant-headed God on the occasion of Ganesha Chaturthi

V.V. Ramanan

QUESTION 1

According to the Padma Purana, how did Ganesha get his elephant head?

QUESTION 2

Because of what distinct features is Ganesha also called Lambodhara and Vakratunda?

QUESTION 3

In which form and which sage's 'kamandalu' did Ganesha knock over to let Kaveri flow to the southern parts of India?

QUESTION 4

According to many accounts, Ganesha has two wives. Name them.

QUESTION 5

What is special about the idol of Ganesha

located within the Muktheeswarar Temple complex in Thilatharpanapuri, Tamil Nadu?

QUESTION 6

Once, the Chandra (moon) laughed at Ganesha for falling after struggling with his pot belly. Initially, Ganesha cursed the moon to become invisible but later revoked the curse, partially resulting in which feature of the moon?

QUESTION 7

One version of how Ganesha lost a part of a tusk is because of a duel with which avatar of Vishnu?

QUESTION 8

According to the Ganesha Purana, Krauncha has become an integral part of the Ganesha myth. How?



Visual Question:

Identify this person and his single biggest contribution to modern-day worship of Ganesha. WIKIPEDIA COMMONS

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz:

1. Which two Scottish commanders jointly led the forces at Stirling Bridge? **Ans: William Wallace and Andrew de Moray**

2. How many horsemen could reportedly cross the bridge abreast? **Ans: Two**

3. What type of Scottish formation played a crucial role in repelling the English cavalry? **Ans: Spearmen organised in schiltrion formations**

4. Which English knight famously managed to fight his way back across the bridge after the Scottish attack? **Ans: Sir Marmaduke Thweng**

5. According to the contemporary English chronicler Walter of Guisborough, approximately how many English infantry and cavalry were killed? **Ans: About 5,000 infantry and 100 cavalry. The figure is considered an overestimate by historians**

Visual: Identify the actor in this scene from the famous 1995 film *Brokeheart*, which depicts the life of William Wallace and the Battle of Stirling Bridge. **Ans: Mel Gibson**

Early Birds: Sania | Abhijeet | Sadhan Panda | Jeelani Shaik | Sitaram Saharaya

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

Word of the day

Ameliorate:

to make something better that was bad or not good enough

Synonyms: improve, enhance, help, enrich, refine

Usage: The government hopes the scheme will ameliorate the impact of rising prices.

Pronunciation: newsth/live/ameliorate

International Phonetic Alphabet: /əˈmɪliəreɪt/

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

At BRICS, more options, a win for diplomacy

THERE CAN be two views about BRICS and almost every multilateral forum at a time of churn in global politics. According to the first, such forums are ineffectual pageantry, while the second points them are merely vehicles for the great powers to build their spheres of hegemonic influence. The New Delhi Declaration 2026 underlines a much-needed third view. It holds that diplomacy, cooperation and exchange of ideas, goods and services need not be beholden to the ideologies and interests of great powers. There is room for different political systems and even states on opposite sides of military conflicts to sit together, to agree, and agree to disagree. The strength of the New Delhi Declaration, then, lies in the spectacular headlines it did not make, and in reasserting the importance of diplomacy as usual.

As West Asia continues to suffer from prolonged conflicts — Israel and Palestine, Iran and Lebanon and now, Yemen — the consensus between Iran and the UAE that calls for “exercising maximum restraint, as well as avoiding actions that could further aggravate the situation” is an unambiguous victory for diplomacy. Beyond West Asia, the Declaration focuses on the issues that will outlast the current moment’s rhetoric. Over 130 paragraphs of the 45-page document focused on “unilateral coercive measures” and “unilateral sanctions”, “unilateral blockades” — a comment on, and a push back against, the excesses by Washington under Donald Trump. The message is clear: Supply chains and trade routes of essential commodities, including and especially hydrocarbons, must not be weaponised. For developing countries of the Global South, the energy question is particularly salient. Rather than chasing the chimera of a BRICS currency, the Declaration does well to focus on linking payment systems among member states. India’s UPI architecture has great potential here. The focus on AI capacity building and digital resilience also carries Delhi’s imprint.

When it was first formed in 2006 and through its early years, BRICS was meant to act as a forum for united action by emerging powers in a unipolar world. Its grand ambitions of “de-dollarisation” and multipolarity have led its detractors to paint it as an attempt to be “anti-West”. In fact, few of the group’s core members, and its expanded roster, hold such a view. China is looking for accommodation with the US, many countries from West Asia are practically allied with Washington; Vladimir Putin shares a personal rapport with Trump; India is looking to firm up a trade deal with America and do more business with Europe. In 2026, as expanded BRICS balances the views and needs of its many members. The New Delhi Declaration emphasises that a plurality of voices must be heard and heeded.

After oil surge, Fed rate hike will shape challenge

ON WEDNESDAY, Brent crude traded above \$100-per-barrel for the first time after May 26, touching \$110 during the week before closing at \$104.6. This week could see the US Federal Reserve raise interest rates when the central bank’s open market committee meets on September 15-16. Unlike oil — where the trigger for the recent price surge has been the Iranian-aligned Houthis’ seizure of virtually Yemen’s entire Red Sea coast, threatening navigation through the vital Bab-el-Mandeb Strait — the markets have already priced in the Fed’s rate hikes. Ten-year US Treasury bond yields are at almost 5 per cent, the highest since October 2023. The West Asia conflict’s ripple effects are also being felt through US producer price inflation hitting 5.4 per cent year-on-year in August and diesel prices soaring to a record \$6.20 a gallon.

All this matters greatly for India, as an importer of both energy and capital. The higher the prices of oil, and the longer they stay so, the more the impact, in terms of inflation and growth slowdown. The same goes for interest rates. When yields on 10-year government securities are near 5 per cent in Japan, 5 per cent in the US and 5.4 per cent in the UK, why should foreign investors put money in India, where returns aren’t as assured or high, after adjusting for currency depreciation risks? Elevated international energy prices widen India’s current account deficits. These become harder to finance in a rising global interest rates scenario, as capital flows shift to the safe-haven assets of industrialised countries. India has weathered the Iran war-induced energy supply shock relatively well so far. The \$122 billion of FCNR(B) deposits mobilised through the RBI’s special dollar-rupee swap facility has also stemmed the run on the rupee.

In the short run, the hope is of some kind of a deal to manage shipping through the effectively shut Hormuz as well as the now-threatened Bab el-Mandeb chokepoints. The important challenge for India, however, lies in boosting its export competitiveness and attracting long-term foreign investor interest. Key to the first is elimination of duties on imported raw materials and components, besides continued investments in roads, railways, inland and coastal waterways, and port infrastructure. The latter entails creating an environment where investors are confident about India not just being a robust long-term growth story, but offering policy predictability and stability. On top of these is the need for fiscal prudence and to guard against government over-spending spilling over into higher current account deficits.

FREEZE FRAME

BY EP UNNY



The Editorial Page

India & China are at a Nash equilibrium. Will it hold — that’s the question

ARE WE any the wiser about the course of India-China relations after the Eight Points of Outcomes and Consensus statement on the border issued on August 25 and the meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping at the just-concluded BRICS Summit?

What the August statement and the two readouts from India and China after the summit indicate is that, with respect to the border, the two sides are at a Nash equilibrium. For the Economics 101-challenged like me, a Nash equilibrium is an outcome in a non-cooperative game in which “no player’s expected outcome can be improved by changing one’s own strategy” (according to Britannica online). In essence, India and China, at least tacitly, recognise that in any foreseeable future they cannot aspire to and achieve a better position in the border quarrel. They may wish to spar diplomatically and militarily occasionally, as they have since 2013. But the intermittent war of words and of hardware over control of the high Himalaya can only move the Line of Actual Control slightly.

The border quarrel can only be solved to the maximal satisfaction of India and China by negotiation or by force. India and China have been negotiating a border deal almost without interruption since 1981 — the Secretary/Vice Minister-level talks (1981-88), the

Joint Working Group (1989-2005), and the Special Representative Mechanism (2003-present). Over more than 45 years, they have met once a year on average.

After all those years of talking, the only agreement of substance is the 2005 “Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question”. The most important parameters and guidelines were that a settlement would be reached as a package (nothing is settled until everything on the border is settled). The final agreement would be a “political settlement” that would consider strategic concerns, history, national sentiment, practicality, geography, and the interests of settled populations in the borderlands.

The August 2026 eight-point statement, enjoining the negotiators to seek an early and substantial harvest with respect to the border, does not violate the idea of a package deal. Rather, it suggests that the two sides should focus on success in one area instead of negotiating everything everywhere all at once. Having achieved success in one section, they should then move on to another section of the border. Yet, as per the 2005 agreement, each sectional success would only be finally accepted and ratified when the entire border is settled.

Nothing in the Modi-Xi BRICS readouts alters the basic 2005



KANTI BAJPAI

agreement or the eight-point early harvest statement. The negotiation process has been somewhat nudged by the eight-point statement, but it is hard to imagine that diplomatic bargaining now or in the future can give India or China their maximal objective. For India, the maximal objective is to get back Aksai Chin up to its original claim and to keep everything it has in the other sectors. For China, it is to get Arunachal Pradesh all the way to the southern slopes (which is most of the state) and to keep everything else in the other sectors. It is inconceivable that Indian or Chinese negotiators can achieve their maximal objectives.

Nor can they do so by force. India cannot conquer Aksai Chin up to its original claim line, and China cannot conquer Arunachal Pradesh up to the southern slopes. Terrain, climate, logistics, and military defences make any dramatic — and lasting — military gains almost impossible. Short of extremely bad strategy by the commanders or internal political chaos that distracts from defence, the status quo on the border is stable.

Two things can disturb the Nash equilibrium (apart from bad defence or internal political collapse): The transition to a successor Dalai Lama, and an India-Pakistan fight that draws China directly in and leads to a two-front war for India.

Eventually, Beijing will appoint its preferred Dalai Lama. The Tibetans will almost certainly choose their own. New Delhi will be caught in the middle. India-China tensions and consequently spiral, and China could lash out as it did in 1962 when the instabilities in Tibet were a factor leading to war.

Alternatively, another India-Pakistan fight could spiral. In 2025, New Delhi detected a Chinese helping hand to Pakistan during Operation Sindoor. In a future South Asian confrontation, China might be more extensively involved. New Delhi or Beijing may then find themselves drawn into a fight that would threaten the status quo.

Beyond the border negotiations and all the other good things that the present détente with China promises — trade, visas, supply chain resilience, river water cooperation — New Delhi should be thinking about the strategic challenges that could disturb the current Nash equilibrium. Can India-China relations be insulated from a Tibet transition and a future India-Pakistan fight? Can the fruits of détente help build sufficient insulation? What more needs to be done with China?

The writer is visiting professor, International Relations, Ashoka University, visiting senior fellow, Centre for Social and Economic Progress, and emeritus professor, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore

The rebuilding of the city must begin, after Satya Niketan



GAUTAM BHATIA

EVERY YEAR, after the monsoon arrives, streets get flooded, and as more rain washes the city and water wends its way into basements and foundations, walls buckle, and buildings collapse. People are trapped inside; some die. At Satya Niketan, 50 Delhi University students were huddled in a makeshift arrangement in an unauthorised building. Seven died, and many others are in serious condition in local hospitals. Could the tragedy have been averted? Given the building’s condition, its age, its unauthorised status, and location in a dense neighbourhood, the answer is a resounding no. As climate change alters weather patterns, causing flash floods and drenching cities with sudden and enormous quantities of rain, it is critical to build physical safeguards that, along with civic governance, can be effectively enforced. For that, several steps are required.

First is the physical mapping of Lal Dora areas, the shadow pockets that evade municipal planning and exist in virtually all big cities. Almost 60 per cent of Delhi’s population currently lives in unauthorised structures — mostly in slums, low-rise makeshift tenements, or high-density four-to-five storey buildings in urbanised villages. While street maps of most illegal colonies exist, there needs to be a building-by-building documentation of the types and sizes of all structures, an assessment of their physical condition, along with an enumeration of the inhabitants. Advanced infra-red and other imaging techniques allow for a reasonably accurate assessment of the buildings’ structural condition.

Gone are the days when buildings were made to last for generations. The life span of structures built in this century is barely 30-40 years; for those in Satya Niketan — because they follow none of the required safety codes — even less. Even within this short time frame, buildings need to be checked regularly, and if need be, demolished partially or wholly, and replaced.

Most buildings are designed for a specific function — their inappropriate use and heavy load on floors can weaken and damage the structure. A block of flats is designed for domestic use, but in unauthorised colonies many are converted into stores and restaurants, thus increasing the number of occupants and altering the weight on floors. Even makeshift hostels compromise living space to give a more lucrative return to the property owners. Unless building authorities approve a designated building function and allocate minimum floor space per person, no oc-

cupancy permit should be issued.

What then of the density of the colony layout? Builders take no responsibility for the ground they share with neighbouring buildings, but a spatial evaluation of the overall surrounding layout becomes essential to establish safety standards. Is there adequate natural ground around the structure to absorb rainwater? Are there enough wide-mouth drains to move water quickly? Local storm drainage conditions and the open ground available need to be assessed. In most cases, too much building in too small a ground area traps excess water, directing it into basements and foundations, eventually destabilising the structure.

Finally, there is the question of urban governance. Are political parties and their municipal agencies capable of being effective civic authorities? Or should all control of roads, buildings, transport and other infrastructure come under one legal entity, say, the mayor? What indeed is the value of the battery of bye-laws if they can’t be enforced? What is the point of the structural evaluation of buildings if inspectors and site engineers can be easily bribed?

Some years back, a newly constructed apartment in Bengaluru crumbled into a heap of dust just as soon as it was completed. It was approved as a three-storey structure, but the builder decided to increase his profit by adding two more floors illegally, thereby weakening the structural capacity of the columns. The collapse killed 12 people. What was the square-foot gain in income for every life lost? How do you monitor construction activity that could harm, even kill, its occupants?

In the Satya Niketan case, alterations were being carried out in the basement, potentially risking damage to the building. More rooms to house more students, a canteen perhaps? What was happening there was anybody’s guess, but it was enough to destabilise a structure almost half a century old, and bring it crashing down.

By 2030, Delhi will have a population of nearly 40 million, making it one of the world’s densest cities. More students and more migrants from nearby towns will make this their home. Soon civic authorities will need to ask more difficult questions. Can the city continue to accommodate people in every possible leftover space, without services or security? Will buildings merely build higher with more unauthorised floor space, and endanger more lives? Or, is it time to seek thoughtful and radical alternatives? Is there space in the municipal mind for new and experimental ideas?

The writer is a Delhi-based architect

The choice is between AI applications and AI frontiers



SUVRAT RAJU

INDIA IS facing a technological crisis. Even as US and Chinese firms have released a parade of increasingly capable AI models this year, India has no competitive frontier model and no realistic prospect of producing one without significant policy shifts. The anticipated impact of AI can be separated into two categories. First, AI can diffuse through the economy by automating some routine jobs. Each industry will require specialised applications built on foundation models. India has an active start-up ecosystem devoted to building such applications, and businesses have rapidly adopted AI tools. However, AI will also have a strategic impact on research, cybersecurity and defence. AI models have been used to solve some of the most important open problems in mathematics. Anthropic’s Myths model has formidable cybersecurity capabilities; it has not been released publicly, and is available only to selected organisations.

Currently, consumers have access to other frontier models, including Chinese open-weight models. But it is unrealistic to expect this to continue indefinitely. Earlier this year, the US temporarily imposed export restrictions both on Myths and on a version of Myths with guardrails called Fable. It is likely to restrict and regulate AI to “achieve global dominance”. US industry leaders and academics have advised India to focus on applications rather than the frontier — a position supported by sections of the Indian IT industry. But countries that fall behind in frontier AI risk suffering the fate of those that missed the Industrial Revolution: A small business elite might find a niche and prosper, but ordinary people will suffer disempowerment.

India can still catch up to the frontier with a focused effort. The algorithms underlying modern AI models are widely understood. The industry has exploited “scaling laws” that predict how a model’s performance improves with its size and the computing power used for its training. So, while better algorithms improve efficiency, the basic formula for producing frontier models is to scale compute and data. Lack of computing power has bottlenecked sovereign Indian model development. The IndiaAI mission has a pool of 45,000 GPUs. But this is only a fraction of the capacity controlled by a single US frontier lab. The mission allocated 4,096 GPUs to Sarvam AI to train India’s flagship model. This is about 50 times smaller than what is used to train frontier models. No amount of ingenuity can compensate for this resource gap. A number of data centres, with significant computing capacity, are coming up in various states. But these will primarily serve MNCs, and their location in India offers no tangible benefits. Most of the announced capital investment will be directed to electronic equipment, and the employment they create will be limited to a few construction and maintenance jobs. Large data centres have a significant environmental impact. In India, this impact will be borne disproportionately by local communities.

India could use these data centres to alleviate its compute shortage with a “compute tax”. Any data centre established in India would be required to reserve, say, 25 per cent of its computing capacity for a publicly administered national compute pool. This capacity would remain physically within the data centre, but could be allocated by a central scheduler to Indian institutions. MNCs are likely to resist, but their bargaining position is weakened by the growing hostility to these installations elsewhere. Such a tax would not obviate the other data-centre concerns. But together with environmental safeguards and welfare measures, it might open a narrow route to building a frontier model in India.

The writer is professor of Physics, International Centre for Theoretical Sciences, Bengaluru. Views are personal

40 YEARS AGO

September 14, 1986



Early state polls likely

SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS to the Kerala, West Bengal and Haryana assemblies are likely to be held early next year as the Congress (I) leaders are considering advancing the poll date. The tenure of these assemblies is to expire in June next year. The elections may be held six months before the expiry of the tenure.

Seven gunned down in Tripura

SEVEN PERSONS, including six policemen, were killed and several others injured when armed Tribal National Volunteers (TNV)

extremists ambushed a police jeep on the Ambassa-Ganganagar road in North Tripura about 90 km from Agartala, officials said. About eight policemen were on their way to the Ambassa market from the Ganganagar Tripura Armed Police outpost around 10.30 am, when about 10 extremists opened fire.

Punjab CM on migration

THE PUNJAB Chief Minister, Surjit Singh Barnala, said the people must frustrate the terrorists who wanted to achieve Khalistan by forcing migration of the population along communal lines. Barnala, who was addressing a public meeting attended mostly by the

Punjabis of Jaipur, said the Punjab government was determined to persuade the Hindus who had migrated from the state to return to their homes.

Panther in concrete jungle

A FULL-grown panther that strayed into the concrete jungle of Secunderabad was captured alive and taken to the Nehru Zoological Park in Hyderabad by the zoo staff with the help of the police. The spotted cat measures nearly 5.5 feet, nose-to-tail-tip, and weighs 60 kg. It had no man-eating tendencies according to the zoo staff, who managed to tranquilise it after a two-hour battle.

A blueprint to create productive jobs, a lesson from Tiruppur



FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH
BY ASHOK GULATI AND
SULAKSHANA RAO

IN HIS Independence Day address from the Red Fort ramparts, Prime Minister Narendra Modi placed "manufacturing power" as the first among the seven Saptadharas streams that are to take India towards a Viksit Bharat. He also said this effort would fully harness the potential of India's youth. The pertinent question is, which manufacturing sector can actually deliver jobs at the scale India needs?

Our research at ICRIER points to textiles and apparel (T&A) sector. But first, why are creating jobs urgent? India's growth story will have little meaning if it fails to create jobs for the masses, and that too in the formal sector. India had 61.6 crore employed persons aged more than 15 years (2025), but agriculture still accounted for 43 per cent of employment, compared with 12.1 per cent in manufacturing (PLFS 2025). Even a 1 percentage point shift in employment from agriculture to manufacturing would involve moving a large number of workers. The NDA had promised to create 2 crore jobs every year, but reality is nowhere near that. The recent student agitations over paper leaks reflected an underlying frustration: Even after acquiring a "three Rs" education, respectable jobs in the formal sector remain scarce. Unemployment among those aged 15-29 was 99 per cent, rising to 13.6 per cent in urban areas, while 25 per cent were neither in employment nor in education or training (PLFS 2025). Female labour force participation was 40 per cent, compared with 79.1 per cent for men.

A large share of India's workforce remains in informal employment, without the stability and social protection of formal jobs. The PLFS usual-status measure includes people who worked for a long part of the year

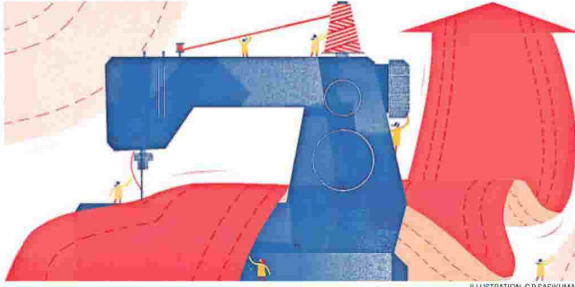


ILLUSTRATION: CHASAKUMAR

as well as those who undertook economic activity for at least 30 days during the year. Being counted as "employed" does not necessarily mean having a regular/formal job. For workers to build economic security and resilience, the shift must therefore be towards regular, formal employment with social security benefits like Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) and Employees' State Insurance (ESI). This is where the apparel sector matters. It is labour-intensive, employs women in large numbers and can train workers in short periods, about 60 days for specific production roles.

India has set an ambitious target of \$100 billion in T&A exports by 2030 (from \$36 billion today). Of this, \$40 billion is for apparel exports specifically (from \$15.7 billion today). But our interactions with exporters suggest that these targets are not grounded in current realities. They are more likely to be achieved by 2035, not 2030.

One good thing is that India has recently closed the tariff gaps with competitors like Bangladesh and Vietnam in major markets like the EU and the UK. But market access alone does not ensure exports. Take the example of the India-Japan agreement (2011). India's apparel exports to Japan fell from \$229 million in 2013 to \$203 million in 2024.

The Tiruppur Exporters Association played an important role in building collective capabilities, while infrastructure such as the Netaji Apparel Park supported its expansion

We need the scale and capacity to tap the potential of free trade agreements. The solution is not more factories, but creating a competitive ecosystem around them.

Tiruppur, an organically grown knitwear cluster, is perhaps the most compelling example. Its knitwear exports rose from \$3.3 billion in 2020-21 to \$5.3 billion in 2024-25 (TEA, 2026). The cluster accounts for about 68 per cent of India's knitwear exports and supports the livelihoods of more than a million workers, around 70 per cent of them being women. Within roughly 20 km, yarn, knitting, dyeing, printing, stitching, finishing, packaging and dispatch are woven into one production ecosystem. Nearly 20,000 units operate across different stages, from knitting, dyeing and printing to garmenting and ancillary activities. This is the ecosystem effect where firms specialise, workers specialise, and thousands of jobs are created around a common market.

So how did Tiruppur do it? Over decades, entrepreneurs, industry associations and government built the institutions and common infrastructure that enabled this ecosystem to grow. The Tiruppur Exporters Association, under the leadership of A Sakthivel, and the

South India Hosiery Manufacturers Association played an important role in building collective capabilities, while infrastructure such as the Netaji Apparel Park supported its expansion. The cluster's collective strength was evident in tackling the environmental crisis. After the Madras High Court's 2011 order on units failing to meet zero-liquid-discharge (ZLD) norms, the cluster invested more than Rs 850 crore in common effluent-treatment infrastructure. Tiruppur also shows what it takes to create the next 1 million jobs. The cluster depends heavily on migrant workers from Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar and elsewhere, making worker housing and retention important challenges. The cluster plans to foray into man-made fibres, technical textiles and high-value sustainable manufacturing to expand both exports and employment.

But Tiruppur alone cannot help achieve the target of \$100 billion in T&A exports by 2030. India needs many more such clusters. Some policy steps in this direction were taken by the government in 2021 in the form of announcing seven PM MITRA parks. But till date, only one such park seems operational (the Warangal one). Others are still in the planning stages. Such a small pace in the execution of even good ideas does not inspire confidence that India can achieve its target of \$100 billion exports by 2030. That would also limit the speed at which jobs can be created.

Our humble submission is that the Prime Minister needs to give special attention to this sector if India is to create 20 million meaningful jobs every year. Chip-making, AI and other advanced technologies are important for India's future, but they are for the highly skilled workforce, while the majority of India's labour force is at the bottom end. The T&A sector offers higher employment intensity at relatively low cost. China, Bangladesh, and Vietnam have followed that path, and India needs to learn from them.

The real test of Viksit Bharat is whether it can create enough productive jobs. T&A offers a clear opportunity. But it needs the PM's focus to expedite its execution.

Gulati is distinguished professor and Rao is senior fellow at ICRIER. Views are personal

Anganwadis shape the future. They are our responsibility



ANNPURNA DEVI

THE BHARAT of 2047 will be built by children who have not yet entered school. Their journey towards a healthy, confident and capable adulthood begins much earlier, most decisively in the first 1,000 days of life. For millions of Indian children and their mothers, that journey is supported by a familiar neighbourhood institution: The anganwadi.

Long before entering the classroom, children are weighed and measured at an anganwadi, get a warm meal and hear rhymes outside the home. Expectant parents also receive counselling. Today, 14 lakh anganwadi centres serve as the first point of contact between the citizens and the state, reaching over 8.9 crore children, women and adolescent girls. The 25.1 lakh anganwadi workers and helpers are drawn from the communities they serve. The anganwadi has always belonged to the neighbourhood.

This institution became the foundation of a national movement when Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched POSHAN Abhiyaan in March 2018. The ninth Rashtriya Poshan Maah began on September 9 with the theme "Hamari Anganwadi, Hamari Jimmedari". The government's commitment to providing quality services is unwavering. But an anganwadi centre truly flourishes when the community embraces it as its own. A Viksit Bharat can be built only through *sabka prayas* (everyone's effort). Nutrition cannot be seen only as a government service.

Community ownership has too often remained an appeal. This year, it becomes an institution. Anganwadi management committees bring parents, panchayat representatives and self-help groups into the centre to ensure every eligible child is reached. Social audits enable communities to review services, verify entitlements and record findings. Accountability becomes verification from within by the families served.

Mothers are at the heart of this process. The menu board of the Supplementary Nutrition Programme (SNP) displays daily entitlements for the hot meals and take-home rations. When a mother knows what her child is entitled to, transparency becomes a habit. The community becomes an informed partner in ensuring quality. During Poshan Maah 2026, committees, social audits and menu boards are being activated, alongside Tithi Bhoj, tasting sessions and recipe demonstrations.

A Suposhit Bharat requires balanced meals — cereals and millets, pulses, nuts and seeds, milk and milk products, eggs, fruits and green vegetables. The Comprehensive Guidelines for SNP 2026, released in July, define hot cooked meals and reinforce micronutrient norms under the National Food Security Act, 2013.

The second is early learning. That a child learns and grows deeply connected. Anganwadi workers track 34 developmental milestones in a child's first three years. The Navchetna and Aadharshila curricula carry nutrition and care into school readiness.

The third begins before the child arrives. A mother's nutrition in pregnancy shapes her child's start in life. This Poshan Maah marks 10 years of the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, reflecting the Prime Minister's conviction that no woman should have to choose between earnings and health. A decade on, 4.65 crore beneficiaries have received Rs 21,511 crore directly into their accounts. Strengthened under Mission Shakti, it provides an additional benefit for a second girl child. The Economic Survey 2025-26 makes clear that such a transfer achieves its full purpose when it travels with counselling that enables informed decisions within the household. Reviewing Rajasthan's Cash Plus model, which paired these transfers with sustained behaviour change communication, it records that the share of women spending the benefit on food rose from 30 per cent to 89 per cent, and that myths surrounding maternal nutrition receded as husbands and families were drawn into the conversation. Partnership grows around anganwadis because a mother's nutrition was never hers to secure alone.

Community ownership cannot mean placing the entire burden of nutrition and early childhood care on the anganwadi worker. It must mean respecting, supporting and strengthening her. This September, I call upon every citizen to visit at least one anganwadi centre in their locality. Speak to the worker, read the menu board and ask how you can support them. Fathers, grandparents, panchayats and self-help groups all have a role. The children being weighed at anganwadis this September will be their twenties when India completes a century of Independence. The health and confidence they carry into that year are being shaped today. When every community takes responsibility for its anganwadi, Bharat takes responsibility for every child's future.

The writer is Union Minister for Women and Child Development

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

New Delhi Declaration

BRICS MEMBER countries, undoubtedly, have conflicting interests, and amid these divergences, the adoption of the New Delhi Declaration is no mean feat ('As walls rise, BRICS speaks', *IE*, September 13). The fact that Iran and the United Arab Emirates softened their stances reflects an earnest attempt by the grouping to reach a consensus. Not to mention, the grouping is a force to be reckoned with, especially now that it is in the throes of wars and economic uncertainties. Having said that, India has displayed dexterous and mature diplomacy.

Aanya Singhal, Noida

THE ADOPTION of the BRICS New Delhi Declaration stands as a remarkable triumph for Indian diplomacy ('As walls rise, BRICS speaks', *IE*, September 13). Mediating consensus among an expanded grouping that includes nations with competing geopolitical interests — most notably Iran and the UAE amidst the escalating crisis in West Asia — underscores India's stature as a bridge builder on the global stage. By steering the document forward, New Delhi successfully navigated sensitive regional fault lines without alienating key partners.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

AI risks

EXTREME PREDICTIONS should neither be dismissed nor accepted without scrutiny ('AI can kill humanity in a decade? Get in line', *IE*, September 12). The response lies in preparedness. Governments should require rigorous safety testing, independent audits and accountability for high-risk AI systems, while researchers study catastrophic risks. International cooperation is essential because unsafe development in one country can affect others. Public debate should distinguish between evidence from speculation. Responsible regulation, rather than panic or complacency, offers the best protection.

SP Suganya Devi, Coimbatore



CARSTEN SCHNEIDER

THE FOURTH Indo-German Environment Forum, held in Delhi on September 1, focused on climate change and biodiversity conservation. Since the first forum in 2008, global environmental crises have intensified. The political environment for resolving these crises, too, has deteriorated, especially because wars, tariffs and market protectionism have undermined multilateralism. These tensions will have a bearing on India's attempts to simultaneously combat energy poverty and decarbonise its economy.

Yet, there are positive developments. The international community has concluded important agreements, notably the Paris Agreement, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and, most recently, the BBNJ Agreement to protect the high seas. India and Germany remain committed to multilateralism, working with partners worldwide to promote stability, reliability, peaceful development and a rules-based international order.

A good example of this is the India-EU trade agreement, concluded in January. Germany, as the EU's strongest economy, is committed to creating new opportunities for growth and jobs for companies in the two countries. Our combined markets serve a population of almost 2 billion people.

India and Germany have been strategic partners for 75 years. In March, we celebrated the anniversary of our diplomatic ties. In January, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chancellor Friedrich Merz met

In January, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chancellor Friedrich Merz reaffirmed their commitment to the Partnership for Sustainable Green Development

To decolonise Hindi is to embrace its many voices



SHAGUN GUPTA

erary texts moved across Devanagari, Kaithi, Gurmukhi, and Perso-Arabic scripts.

This porous linguistic landscape was altered by the colonial state's colonial classification, count, and simplify governance. The initial rupture occurred in the 1830s when the East India Company replaced Persian with vernacular languages in the lower courts, setting up a competition between the sister registers of Hindi and Urdu. The 1900 court resolution in the United Provinces, which permitted Devanagari alongside the Persian script, politicised the issue, turning languages into rigid communal markers.

The decisive partition came with the Pigott Commission of 1912-13. When the policy of maintaining a "common language" collapsed, the colonial government prescribed separate standardised supplementary readers for Hindi and Urdu in 1916, delegitimising rich oral traditions and languages like Bhojpuri, Awadhi, and Braj Bhasha.

Early nationalistic institutions did not dismantle this British formulation. Organisations like the Nagari Pracharini Sabha and the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan aggressively promoted a highly Sanskritised, Devanagari-based register of Khari Boli as the only "pure" (*shuddh*) national language. Under the editorship of Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi, the journal *Saraswati* became an apparatus for language policing, standardising grammar and purging Arabic and Persian loanwords.

Perhaps the real lesson of Hindi's history is that its greatest strength has never been purity. It has been absorption

Common Hindustani words were substituted with *satvata* Sanskrit terms. The word for white (*shafid*) was replaced by *shiveer*, angry (*maraz*) with *krudh*, etc. To legitimise this artificial creation, these authors performed a double move of historical appropriation and modern exclusion. They expanded the definition of "Hindi" when looking at the past — claiming all medieval poetry, from the *Apabhramsa* of the *Prithviraj Raso* to the *Brari* of Surdas and the *Awadhi* of Tulsi Das — even as they reasserted its present-day form to one standardised Khari Boli register. The past became plural so that the present could become singular. This created severe internal hierarchies. Braj Bhasha was dismissed as didactic and erotic. Popular folk forms such as *nautanki* and oral ballads were devalued. Urdu was alienated.

True cultural decolonisation requires us to dismantle these structures of linguistic policing. The linguistic world of North India was built through encounters, borrowings and adaptations. Perhaps the real lesson of Hindi's history is that its greatest strength has never been purity. It has been absorption.

On this Hindi Diwas, we should remember that languages do not grow through walls. The Hindi of the future will be strongest not when it forgets its Persian, Urdu, Braj, and Awadhi inheritances, but when it embraces them as part of its history. To decolonise Hindi is not to make it purer. It is to make it historically whole, embodying the PM's vision of Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat, where unity is not sameness, but the harmonious coexistence of our many voices.

The writer is a PhD scholar, Department of History, University of Delhi

INDIA-EU FREE TRADE AGREEMENT PROVIDES MARKET ACCESS FOR 16 CATEGORIES OF STEEL EXPORTS

India gets 1.64 mt EU steel quota, imports of EU cars may rise 6-fold

Ravi Dutta Mishra
New Delhi, September 13

AMID TENSIONS over steel exports to the European Union (EU) due to regulations such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), India has secured 1.64 million tonnes (mt) of steel export quota, across 16 categories, including specialised items like metallic coated sheets and stainless hot-rolled quaternary plates, to the EU under the free trade agreement (FTA), as per draft India-EU deal released by Brussels.

The total country-specific quota falls under two parts, whereby the FTA component comes in at 0.69 mt and the most favoured nation component, available to all partner countries, stands at 0.95 mt. This means that only the FTA component of the quota is assured and India's products will have to compete with other countries in the rest of the categories. India's steel exports to the EU currently stand at 4 mt. The TRQs (Tariff Rate

Quota) follow the EU's Steel Overcapacity Regulation, which came into force on July 1 this year. In trade parlance, TRQ is a tool which limits the trade of quantity of a particular item eligible for lower duty. It aims to ensure protection for the EU's steel industry against the effects of global overcapacity. It sets free-of-duty quotas at 18.3 mt, with a 50% duty for out-of-quota imports and a melt-and-pour regime to enhance transparency. As per an Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) note, shifting toward higher-value-added steel products will reduce the applicable CBAM tax burden and improve India's competitive position in the EU market. India has received quotas on several value-added categories too. "This structural transition should be supported by industrial policies that integrate Production Linked Incentives with dedicated research and development funding. Targeted financial and technical assistance, in-

EU'S STEEL IMPORT RULES

INDIA'S STEEL exports to the EU currently stand at 4 million tonnes

ONLY 17,191 cars were imported by India from the EU in 2025

EU HAS won a first-year tariff-rate quota of 100,000 completely built-up internal-combustion and non-plug-in hybrid cars

THE QUOTA rises to 160,000 cars



by the 10th year, but only for cars priced above €15,000

cluding concessional financing, access to clean technology, and investment guarantees, is essential to ease the disproportionate compliance burden on MSMEs," the ICRIER note said.

The draft also showed that EU has won a first-year tariff-rate quota of 100,000 completely built-up internal-combustion and non-plug-in hybrid cars, which is almost six times of the current imports. India imported only 17,191 cars from EU in 2025.

The quota rises to 160,000 cars by the 10th year. But the concession applies only to cars priced above €15,000. For cars priced between €15,000 and €35,000, the in-quota duty falls from 10% to 35% in the first year and down to 10% in the 5th year of the deal coming into effect. To protect Indian car manufacturers, India has given no concession to cars below €15,000. For cars priced above €35,000, tariffs decline from 66% to 30% in the first year

Gas power generation up 80% amid shortfall

Gas power: High demand, evening shortage

Year (September 1 to September 9)	Generation from gas-based sources (MU)
2026	1,088.64
2025	603.70
2024	669.94
2023	1,278.98
2022	558.45
2021	1,111.97

SOURCE: NATIONAL POWER POINT

Pratyrush Deep
New Delhi, September 13

AMID AN unusual surge in power demand in September, India is increasingly relying on gas-based power to meet evening shortfall as hydropower generation remains constrained and coal-fired plants are operating at near-maximum levels. Electricity generation from gas-based power plants rose 80.3% during September 1-9 from the same period last year, shows an analysis of data from the National Power Point.

From September 1 to September 9, gas-based power plants generated 1,088.64 million units (MU) of electricity, compared with 603.70 MU during the same period last year and 669.94 MU during the corresponding period in 2024.

Generation during the period was also higher in 2023 and 2021, at 1,278.98 MU and 1,111.97 MU, respectively. The rise in generation is also reflected in purchases by gas-based power generators in the spot market between September 1 and September 10. Natural gas purchases by the power sector jumped to 30,533 metric million British thermal units (MMBtu) between September 1 and September 10, from 37,500 MMBtu during the same period last year, as per the data from Indian Gas Exchange.

The surge in purchases came even as the average spot gas price rose 139%, from Rs 103/MMBtu to Rs 124/MMBtu in the same period. While gas accounts for only a small share in the overall generation mix, it plays a key

balancing role in evening peak hours, when solar output falls.

This has become more significant as hydropower generation has declined amid a rainfall deficit. Unlike coal-fired power plants, gas-based plants offer greater operational flexibility and can ramp up or down quickly to meet fluctuations in demand, although their generation costs are higher. A senior government official at the Centre currently relies on at least 4.5-5.5 gigawatts (GW) of gas-based power to meet the evening shortfall. India has a total installed gas-based power generation capacity of 20.1 GW.

Data provided by Grid India show that on September 9, when peak power demand touched 267 GW, the night-time shortfall was around 77 GW. On September 10, when peak power demand reached 269 GW, night-time shortfall was at 61 GW. As per a senior official, coal-based power plants are operating close to their limits, leaving little room to ramp up generation. "Coal-based power plants are running neck-to-neck and there is no space left to ramp it up. No thermal power plant is left to which we can ask to increase generation. Plant load factor of most imported coal-based plants is around 70% or above. At the same time, hydro-power is going down and likely to go down further as reservoir level is very low in southern and western India," the official said.

Queries sent to Ministry of Power did not elicit any response till press time. FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM



Expanding ties

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman met Deputy PM and Minister of Economy and Finance of Republic of Uzbekistan Javohir Kuchkarov on Sunday. The two sides discussed bilateral economic and financial cooperation, sharing views on areas of mutual interest. X/@NMINMININDIA

High costs may hit local output: Nokia India chief

Ojasvi Gupta
New Delhi, September 13

INDIA WILL play a bigger role in Finnish telecom gear maker Nokia's global supply chains as the company proposes to make it a manufacturing and export base. But a fairly steep cost disadvantage for some locally-sourced components might emerge as a constraint in greater localisation, according to a senior company executive.

Expanding India's role in Nokia's global supply chain will depend in part on whether local suppliers can become

competitive as other hubs in Asia. "There are disabilities, as we call it. If you buy something from Vietnam or China, we've seen the differential in pricing is in the range of 20% to almost 80%, depending on different components," Vibha Mehra, India Country Manager, Nokia said in an interaction with EE.

A stronger domestic supplier base would reduce dependence on imports and help the company manage risks arising from import duties and geopolitical disruptions, Mehra said. FE

OpenAI CEO Altman rules out 2026 IPO amid AI safety risks

Los Angeles: OpenAI will not go public in 2026, CEO Sam Altman said in remarks published Saturday, citing safety concerns over AI that render "unacceptable" even a 10% risk that AI could cause extinction by decade's end. "I actually think that, given everything happening with safety, right now would be an ill-

advised moment to go public, and we don't feel pressure on that," he told business magazine Fortune. The comments come as more US lawmakers urge new rules to govern AI after warnings from OpenAI rival Anthropic's CEO that rapidly progressing AI may lead to human extinction. REUTERS

India's semicon sector draws \$1.4 bn funding

Press Trust of India
New Delhi, September 13

INDIA'S SEMICONDUCTOR sector has attracted \$1.4 billion in all-time equity funding across 281 funded companies, with nearly half of this amount \$701 million — raised since 2025 alone, according to data from Traxn. The findings come days ahead of SEMICON India 2026, the country's flagship semiconductor conference and exhibition, which will be held from September 17-19 at Yashbhoomi in Dwarka, New Delhi.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the fifth edition of SEMICON India 2026 on September 17, a mega-event set to bring together global semiconductor industry leaders, government officials, state representatives, and sector experts as India's momentum of its growing semiconductor ecosystem.

Why shareholders cut stake sales in NSE's IPO

Akash Mandal
Mumbai, September 13

THE NATIONAL Stock Exchange's (NSE) much-awaited IPO is finally materialising as the issue is set to begin on September 17 (Thursday) with the price band fixed at Rs 1,700-1,785 per share.

While there is buzz all around the market for the blockbuster IPO, the shareholders selling in this issue have significantly cut their stake sales. The exchange is now expected to raise around Rs 22,562 crore from the offer-for-sale (OFS), down from the Rs 30,000 crore originally expected. The OFS route means any money raised will go directly to the selling shareholders, and the exchange will not receive any proceeds.

So, with the IPO expected to do well, why have these shareholders cut their stake sales, re-

MoSPI Secy: Nominal GDP revised down as informal sector data has improved

NOMINAL GDP estimates under the old 2011-12 series have been revised lower under the new series primarily due to a better picture of the informal sector, Saurabh Gang, Secretary in the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), said in an interview with Aanchal Magazine and Siddharth Upasani.

Responding to questions raised about the new 2023 base-year GDP series — released back in February — that range from downward revisions and use of producer prices for double deflation, Gang told The Indian Express that MoSPI had made the best use of data and surveys and, so far, no one has pointed out "something obvious that we must do in the next (GDP series)". Edited excerpts:

What is the main reason for the reduction in nominal GDP in previous years, not just April-June 2025? The primary reason for the downward revision in nominal GDP across all overlapping years (2022-23 to 2024-25 and subsequent quarters) is the transition from proxy-based estimates in the old series to direct, empirical annual surveys for the informal sector in the new series.

In the previous series, because regular surveys for the unorganised sector did not exist, MoSPI calculated Gross Value Added (GVA) for unorganised sector by multiplying estimated workforce counts by the Value Added per Worker derived from decadal surveys. This base year GVA was projected forward for over a decade using proxies like formal corporate growth rates, inter-survey growth rates, or historical tax collections as no regular data was available.

With the availability of annual survey evidence, it has become possible to estimate the distinct growth patterns of the informal sector. This has provided a stronger empirical basis for updating the estimates and improving their alignment with observed economic activity. Therefore, the single largest driver of the revision in GDP numbers is the improved measurement of India's informal services sector.

Now, that's the point I am trying to make: it's not an overstatement. GDP is an estimation and you make estimates based on the best data available.

When the 2011-12 and 2004-05 series were estimated, certain indicators were used and later changed, leading to better estimates. Now you have even better estimates. Saying it was an overstatement gives the impression there was a systematic bias. That's



SAURABH GANG, SECRETARY, MoSPI

By replacing corporate proxies with actual empirical data from the newly institutionalised Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) and Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), MoSPI transitioned to direct annual measurements of unorganised productivity and workforce size.

One criticism that has come from former CEA Arvind Subramanian is that the GDP data does not capture the informal economy properly and we are extrapolating the performance of listed companies. Are we not using ASUSE data for quarterly GDP data? We are using it. We now have ASUSE on a quarterly basis and PLFS on a monthly basis. So, we are using them; we are not using proxies.

Even in the earlier series, we weren't using only proxies for the informal sector; that was used only between the quinquennial surveys as you had to use something until the next five years. And that was from the previous base years, so that overhang was continuing.

So, the previous 2011-12 series was overestimating GDP?

No, that's the point I am trying to make: it's not an overstatement. GDP is an estimation and you make estimates based on the best data available.

When the 2011-12 and 2004-05 series were estimated, certain indicators were used and later changed, leading to better estimates. Now you have even better estimates. Saying it was an overstatement gives the impression there was a systematic bias. That's

alluding a bit much.

A question raised by Prabash Sen in an interview is the use of producer price data. Is the appropriate data available?

We had shifted the method of calculation to producers in the 2011-12 series of the WPI itself. That's the old series.

The only differences between WPI (Wholesale Price Index) and PPI (Producer Price Index) are that PPI does not have exports and imports and includes taxes and trade margins to some extent. Apart from that, our WPI was akin to a PPI. But we have made those corrections now. So, the data for the past 10 years has been collected from industry and that change was done way back.

Another criticism aimed at the GDP data is that this level of growth is not being 'felt' on the ground.

That, I think we need to recognise, is a larger question. I think the GDP is a very important indicator, no doubt. But there are a lot of other factors, uncertainties, and the global situation which determine how you 'feel'. It's like when someone mentions, 'We feel inflation (rate) should be higher'. So, individually, how you see the prices might be different from when they are aggregated across the country and across different areas. I really wouldn't want to comment on that issue.

Would you say that this new GDP series is by far the most superior so far?

Absolutely, without doubt. Every series, at that time, is the best series. There is no doubt (about that) because we are using the best available data.

Has there been any criticism of the new GDP series that you think is fair?

Obviously, I think this debate is unnecessary. Yeah, that's a good question. I really can't think of (any) because we have made the best use of data, digital data, and surveys. I don't think anyone has pointed out something obvious that we must do in the next (GDP) series.

FULL INTERVIEW ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

IBM, Blackberry to Nokia: How humbled tech giants reinvented for a comeback

Soumyarendra Barik
New Delhi, September 13

IN THE electronics business, brands have a track record of reinventing themselves, exiting the products that made them household names and returning in a different avatar. Canadian smartphone maker BlackBerry, once pushed to the brink by the collapse of its handset business, is now a profitable enterprise and embedded software company, with its shares gaining more than 100% over the past year. Nokia, once the world's biggest mobile phone maker, today makes most of its money selling telecom and networking infrastructure, and is positioning itself as a supplier to the artificial intelligence (AI)

data centre boom. International Business Machines (IBM), which helped popularise the personal computer, exited PCs two decades ago and now centres its business around enterprise software, hybrid cloud, AI and high-end computing.

For these companies, the reinvention has followed the pattern that when a consumer hardware business is disrupted or commoditised — primarily for failing to capitalise on changing consumer trends — it forces the company to fall back on less visible technologies it developed along the way, such as software, patents, networks or enterprise infrastructure. Such reinventions, though, are distinct from technology giants that started out in entirely

different businesses before finding their eventual calling. Samsung, for instance, began as a trading company dealing in dried fish and groceries before entering electronics three decades later, while Nintendo spent much of its early history making playing cards before moving into video games and handheld gaming consoles. Corporate turnarounds have their perils. Like people, according to Aswath Damodaran, Professor of Finance at NYU's Stern School of Business and corporate valuation experts, companies have a life cycle and a firm's valuation should reflect its position along the journey from startup to a declining elder. "More value is destroyed around the world by companies not acting their age,



Nokia led global mobile phone sales in the 2000s but struggled with the smartphone transition. REUTERS

Young companies trying to act old and old companies trying to be young again. And there's an entire ecosystem that feeds these behaviours. Consultants, bankers, essentially the plastic surgeons of business... If I give

you a facelift, you can be young again. And companies keep buying into this notion over and over again." Damodaran, a comeback sceptic, said at a Nordic Business Forum discussion on corporate makeovers. Chang-

ing the business model itself, though, sometimes makes the comeback more durable.

BlackBerry, Nokia's transformation

At its peak, BlackBerry was one of the defining brands of the smartphone era, known for its physical QWERTY keyboards and secure messaging services. But the arrival of Apple's iPhone and Android smartphones rapidly eroded its position. BlackBerry stopped making smartphones in 2016, effectively ending its life as a consumer hardware manufacturer. The company that remains is markedly different, with BlackBerry now focusing on two areas: QNX, its operating system for embedded plat-

form used in cars and other embedded systems, and secure communications software used by governments and businesses. The transition is beginning to show up in its financial performance. BlackBerry recorded a positive cash flow in the quarter ending May for the first time since 2017, and its market value has recovered sharply. It is now worth around \$5 billion, still a fraction of its roughly \$83 billion peak valuation, but a key turnaround for a business that had become synonymous with technological obsolescence.

Nokia underwent an even more dramatic change. The company dominated global mobile phone sales in the 2000s but struggled with the transition to smartphones. In 2014, it com-

pleted the sale of substantially all its handset business to Microsoft. What remained was primarily a telecommunications infrastructure company. Nokia then expanded that business through the acquisition of Alcatel-Lucent, and more recently bought optical networking company Infinera. That infrastructure focus has given Nokia an entry into the AI boom. Its networking equipment connects servers, data centres and increasingly large clusters of AI chips. Nokia has made AI data centres one of its strategic priorities, arguing that the rapid construction of AI data centres will increase demand for high-capacity optical and IP networks. FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

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• ENERGY

Limits to supply, rising demand: Behind Kerala's electricity crisis

Shaju Philip
Thiruvananthapuram, September 13

WITH A few weeks left for the southwest monsoon to withdraw, Kerala is facing an unusual power crisis. The Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB) has instituted power cuts lasting between 30 minutes and an hour for managing peak-hour energy demand, including nighttime power cuts. Power demand rises at night, as domestic consumers make up 75% of the state's power connections. The CPI(M)-led Opposition has blamed the ruling Congress for poor crisis management.

Low power generation

According to the KSEB, the state's average daily demand for power in September 2026 was 5,000 megawatts (MW) as against 3,794 MW in September 2025. The state has met only 4,200 MW, resulting in a shortage. Kerala produces only 1,650 MW and gets 1,500 MW from the Central pool. The Union Ministry of Power periodically allocates power generation capacity to states from its pool of unallocated quota in Central Generating Stations (CGS), which are large power-generating stations. Electricity as a subject comes under the Concurrent List of the Constitution, meaning both the Centre and the states have jurisdiction over it.

In general, the state generates only 25% of its actual requirement from various sources, including hydel, solar and wind. In comparison, Andhra Pradesh meets 86% of its power demand from its own generation and Tamil Nadu stands at 50%.

• SOLAR BRIGHT SPOT

Despite low power generation overall, Kerala is a leading state in rooftop solar power generation.

Under the PM Surya Ghar scheme, Kerala has 2.96 lakh installations covering 3 lakh households. But this does not help meet the nighttime demand, given a lack of options to store it.

The KSEB has lined up a slew of Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) that are yet to become operational.

Poor monsoon

The El Niño effect, or the abnormal warming of surface waters in the equatorial Pacific Ocean, has suppressed the Indian monsoon, the state has witnessed this year. The southwest monsoon has been weak during the June-September period, with Kerala recording a 26% deficit in seasonal rainfall till September 11.

Official data shows that the water storage in all KSEB reservoirs was only at 63.75% of the maximum storage level as of September 10. This has forced the KSEB to throttle down hydropower generation, considering the withdrawal of the monsoon and higher temperatures in the next few weeks.

The poor monsoon and sudden temperature spike since late August have contributed to an increase in power demand, mainly from domestic consumers.

The state disaster management authority has put Kerala on alert due to an unusual rise in temperature, with a departure of up to 4 degrees Celsius from normal. Rising night temperatures are further driving long-duration AC usage. The KSEB has also found that the nighttime demand is rising owing to the charging of electric vehicles.

Kerala is ready to buy power at higher rates from power exchanges elsewhere, but it faces another grim prospect. Nationally, too, power generation has been low due to factors such as a poor monsoon and low coal stock at power plants. India is also witnessing an unusual surge in electricity demand this September, with peak power demand nearing the level recorded during peak summer.

• ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The problem in OpenAI's Navier-Stokes 'solution'



NAMEERA ANJUM

OPENAI'S CLAIM that its artificial intelligence (AI) agents have generated a solution to the Navier-Stokes Millennium Prize Problem has posed a new question for mathematicians: What happens when researchers' work is fed into AI systems, and "de-identified" data from those interactions is later used to improve the models?

The ChatGPT maker said its researchers and AI agents did not access specific user data to solve the problem. But in a blog post on September 8, the company also said it could not rule out the possibility that de-identified data from researchers' use of its products had helped improve its models.

De-identified data refers to information from which personal identifiers — as to who generated the data — have been removed. But that does not necessarily mean the underlying information, ideas or content have not been used by a model.

The blog post has drawn scrutiny from mathematicians, particularly because New York University professor Tristan Buckmaster and anthropologist researcher Levent Alpoge had been working on related Navier-Stokes research using AI tools, including OpenAI's GPT-4.

"De-identified use of a researcher's conversations blurs the line between assisting someone's thinking and drawing on it without their knowledge," Vijay Keswani, assistant professor of computer science at IIT Delhi, told *The Indian Express*.

For Keswani, the issue goes beyond data privacy. It raises questions of "epistemic ownership": whether AI companies can draw on ideas generated by researchers using their tools without clear acknowledgment or consent.

The controversy comes as AI systems are increasingly being used not just to assist mathematicians but to generate proofs and explore problems that have resisted human researchers for decades.

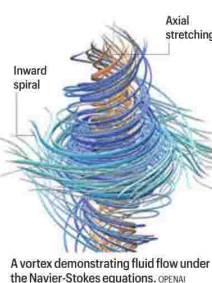
De-identification

The exact process OpenAI uses for de-identification in this context is not publicly

• A MILLION-DOLLAR PROBLEM

The Navier-Stokes Millennium Prize Problem is one of the seven mathematical problems identified by the Clay Mathematics Institute, carrying a million-dollar bounty for whoever cracks it

THE NAVIER-STOKES equations — which build on 19th-century work by Claude-Louis Navier and George Gabriel Stokes — describe how fluids move, taking into account factors such as pressure, velocity, and viscosity. They are used to model everything from water flowing around a boat and air moving around an aircraft to blood moving through the human body.



A vortex demonstrating fluid flow under the Navier-Stokes equations. OPENAI

clear. This has become particularly sensitive in mathematics, because researchers increasingly use AI systems to discuss unfinished ideas, test approaches and work through problems before publishing them.

OpenAI has said no specific user data was accessed to solve the Navier-Stokes problem. But that is a narrower claim than ruling out the possibility that de-identified data from users' interactions may have contributed to training or improving its models.

Keswani said the concern is amplified by the imbalance between individual researchers and AI companies. "It is fair for a company to have visibility into researchers' ideas and be able to leverage that visibility, combined with vast computing resources available only to them, to scoop the researchers whose thinking informed the result," he said.

He also pointed to a distinction between what may be permitted under a service's terms and what researchers may reasonably understand as informed consent. "De-identified" use of a researcher's conversations may be permitted under terms of service, but that is different from the researcher knowingly consenting to their ideas being used in a competing research effort.

OpenAI's approach

In its blog post, OpenAI said 10,000 currently running AI agents — systems

THE PROBLEM is whether, in three dimensions, a fluid that starts out behaving smoothly can always continue to do so — or whether its behaviour can become infinitely intense in a finite amount of time. In simple terms: if you start with a fluid whose motion is well-behaved, can the equations ever produce a point where the fluid's velocity becomes infinitely large?

THIS POSSIBILITY is called a singularity or "blow-up". The equations allow different scales and forces within a fluid to interact in complicated ways, and understanding whether those effects can lead to a blow-up is at the heart of the problem.

that carry out tasks autonomously — cracked the problem in about 88 hours. The result was then formalised in Lean, a proof assistant used for checking mathematical arguments.

OpenAI said its paper constructs a mathematical fluid that starts from rest and, under a specially constructed smooth external force, develops a point at which the velocity grows without bound in finite time, while its overall energy remains bounded. The result has not yet been independently verified or accepted by the mathematics community. Clay Mathematics Institute continues to list Navier-Stokes among the unsolved Millennium Prize Problems, while the Poincaré Conjecture remains the only one of the seven to have been resolved.

Siddhartha Gadgil, professor of mathematics at IISc Bangalore, told *The Indian Express* that the use of formal verification could be significant as AI-generated mathematics becomes more common. "Lean provided hope for a superhuman level of correctness," he said. "This can be much better than human evaluation for checking correctness," although he cautioned that it is not foolproof.

A formally verified proof could also offer something beyond checking whether an argument follows logically from its formal assumptions. "Once we have a proof object in Lean — we can simplify it, view it in many ways, and try to extract insights," he said.

Blurred lines

De-identified data refers to information from which personal identifiers — as to who generated the data — have been removed.

But that does not necessarily mean the underlying information, ideas or content have not been used by an AI model.

• ECONOMY

Copper prices up: Fear of Trump tariffs amid US-China tensions

Pratyush Deep
New Delhi, September 13

COPPER PRICES have surged in recent months to hit a record high of \$4,767.5 per tonne on September 9. Three-month copper futures, which are contracts for future purchase, on the London Metal Exchange (LME) remained above the \$4,000-per-tonne mark for most of August before climbing in September.

Why copper price rise matters

The red metal is essential to the modern economy, with uses ranging from housing and manufacturing to power grids, clean energy, artificial intelligence and defence. Thus, its price is often seen as a barometer of economic health. A rise in copper prices is considered a signal of robust economic growth, while falling prices tend to raise concerns about an economic slowdown.

However, the current rally appears to have a different story.

According to industry insiders, the surge is less about expectations of stronger global economic growth and more about concerns over potential tariffs by the United States, which could come into effect from January 2027.

US-led factors

While US President Donald Trump imposed a 50% tariff on semi-finished and derivative copper imports in August last year, refined copper has so far been exempted. However, there is a proposal to impose a 15% tariff on refined copper imports from January, to be increased to 30% in 2028. "In anticipation of US tariffs, people are selling materials from LME warehouses to warehouses of US COMEX (Commodity Exchange). As a result, there has been a shortage of copper stocks that can be traded on the LME. That is why the futures prices have gone up," an industry executive told *The Indian Express*.

This has resulted in a huge buildup of

Against trend

Copper price is often seen as a barometer of economic health. A rise in copper prices is considered a signal of robust growth, while falling prices tend to raise concerns about an economic slowdown.

However, the latest rise comes despite prospects of steady global economic growth clouded by trade tensions, the West Asia conflict, and uncertainty.

inventories in the US, two industry sources told *The Indian Express*. "Inventory at LME is currently at 2,65,000 tonnes, and inventory at Shanghai Futures Exchange (SHFE) is at around 63,000 tonnes. However, the inventory of US COMEX is at around 700,000 tonnes," an industry source told *The Indian Express*.

Sumit Jhunjhunwala, Vice President & Sector Head, Corporate Sector Ratings, ICRA Ltd, also said that copper prices have remained elevated mainly due to constrained mine supply and the ongoing geographical rebalancing of inventories. "Any major delay or lower-than-expected US tariff could reverse these inventory flows, potentially releasing accumulated stocks into global markets and exerting downward pressure on copper prices," Jhunjhunwala said.

Copper in US-China trade war

Last year, too, Trump's imposition of a 50% tariff on semi-finished and derivative copper imports prompted US buyers to

stockpile the metal ahead of its implementation on August 1, heavily contributing to the surge in copper prices.

The move followed a report submitted by the US Secretary of Commerce, which claimed that copper imports threatened to impair US national security. In 2025, the US imported \$16.2 billion worth of copper products. China accounted for 20% of these imports, followed by Mexico at 17%, the European Union at 14%, Canada at 10% and Vietnam at 8%, as per the US Congressional Research Service.

In April that year, Trump announced a 50% tariff on the full value of semi-finished copper products and a 25% tariff on the full value of copper-intensive derivative products. The latter rate was reduced to 10% where at least 95% of the copper, steel and aluminium used in the product was sourced from the US. These tariff measures are part of broader trade tensions between the US and China, with China being the world's largest consumer of copper.

• POLICY

Outstation students pouring in, why Delhi University doesn't have enough hostels

Rishika Singh
New Delhi, September 13

THE COLLAPSE of a Paying Guest (PG) accommodation in South Delhi's Satya Niketan recently, which led to the deaths of at least seven people, including students, has spotlighted the lack of hostels in Delhi University (DU) colleges.

Over a PIL on auditing such buildings, the Delhi High Court has flagged "the absolutely inadequate number of hostels available to students".

Satya Niketan is one of the many localities that have emerged as hubs of private student housing over the decades, partly because of their proximity to DU colleges. But students often end up crammed in windowless rooms of badly constructed buildings, with poor quality of food and water.

The gap

The Delhi University Act of 1922 led to the establishment of one of India's premier central universities. Section 33 states that, "Every student of the University (other than a student who pursues a course of study by correspondence) shall reside in a College a

Hall, or under such conditions as may be prescribed by the Ordinances." "Hall" refers to student residence that the university provided, maintained or recognised.

Over a century later, however, the university has significantly expanded in scale. DU's Annual Report for 2024-25 notes that from three colleges and 750 students in North Campus, it spans 90 colleges, 20 standalone hostels and over 6 lakh students (those enrolled in person and distance learning) today.

Around 2.5 lakh come under the conventional mode, and more than half of the students come from regions other than Delhi, the report said.

Not all 90 colleges offer residence, and the university does not offer consolidated data on the total number of hostels. Around 2015, it was reported that against an estimated 1.8 lakh students enrolled with DU at the time, only about 9,000 seats were available in its hostels for both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Many colleges coming under the South Campus specially, which was established in 1973 to cater to growing demand, lack hostels, or have hostels that can cater to less

than 10% of the total student population.

The roadblocks

The demand for increasing the number of hostel seats has been raised repeatedly over the years. Haritima Chopra, principal at South Campus's Maitreyi College, told *The Indian Express* that the share of outstation students has grown with deepening access to technology and the university's admissions president shifting online about a decade ago.

V S Negi, the president of the Delhi University Teachers' Association (DUTA), said that the organisation has raised the issue in the past, but colleges have cited constraints. "Very little has been seriously done to provide hostel facilities to all students," Negi told *The Indian Express*.

Those within the administration, however, say that even with expansions, need for external accommodation will remain due to the sheer number of outstation students.

Bijayalaxmi Nanda, principal of North Campus's Miranda House, said their limitations range from space constraints to specific regulations that govern construction and expansion: "Every college has a par-



Satya Niketan, where the PG accommodation collapsed. PRAVEEN KHANNA

ticular capacity, based on its landholding size. Then say a building like ours, established in 1948; that is a heritage building in a sense."

Some expansion has happened with new hostel blocks built around 2012, and another 120-bed building is being explored with funding sources such as corporate social responsibility. "Many colleges are doing similar things, but a 100% residential campus in a public university is not possible with the kind of land holdings we have," she added.

Other hurdles can include the long process of receiving clearances and permits from civic bodies like the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, and obtaining administrative approvals based on meeting certain criteria, such as creating new green spaces alongside or preserving historical buildings.

Funding also matters. Chopra said one major funding source is the Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA). It is a joint venture of the Ministry of Education and Canara Bank "for financing creation of capital assets in premier educational institutions in India", its website says. "In certain colleges, the alumni support renovation or maintenance of structures," Chopra said.

"When you are constructing a building, so many compliances have to be looked into because you have to present the exact

details; you have to undertake mapping and reach out to several agencies. An architect has to be involved, and the funding requirement runs into crores," she added. For instance, with her college building located in the diplomatic enclave of Chanakya, there were restrictions on the number of floors that could be built for the hotel, affecting capacity.

The alternative

With limited hostels, PGs have proliferated, charging monthly rent ranging from Rs 11,000 to as high as Rs 25,000 per person, which can be higher than the annual fee of some courses.

DU Vice-Chancellor Yogesh Singh recently held a meeting on the condition of student residence. Negi said that many colleges have now issued directives to students to provide information about their accommodations and PGs. Nanda said that colleges could be more "actively involved as stakeholders" in the process. For example, students at her college drafted a report on vetting private PGs last year.

Recently, the Delhi government too proposed a draft bill to regulate PGs.

Idea Exchange

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2026

NEWMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

WHY ASHWINI BHIDE

Ashwini Bhide is the first woman municipal commissioner in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation's (BMC) 133-year old history. Bhide has spearheaded Mumbai's most ambitious infrastructure projects including the Mumbai metro project and the coastal road project, gaining her the moniker of Mumbai's infra woman. Her appointment also comes at a time when the elected representatives return to Mumbai after a hiatus of four years with the Bharatiya Janata Party and Shiv Sena-led the Mahayuti regime being at the centre of BMC's affairs

Nayonika Bose: Mumbai's road network is barely comparable with other cities in the country. Why do you think we have not been able to develop Mumbai's roads?

It is not enough that we have just a budget. Mumbai is a linear city. It is peninsular in nature and on three sides, there is the ocean, so we cannot expand. We have 448 sq km of suburb, with large chunks of the forest and the national park in it along the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ). So, the actual area available for development and road network is less. If you compare it to Delhi, which has a road network of more than 28,000 km, Mumbai has only 2,050 km. We have tried to bridge this by exploring underground corridors such as the Goregaon Mulund Link Road (GMLR) and the coastal ring road which will connect Marine Drive and Virar. As for the issue of road quality, we are concretising approximately 700 km. The road quality also gets affected due to frequent trenching. Unlike other cities, all utility corridors run beneath the road surface. We have roughly 27 to 30 utilities and they need to be constantly repaired or augmented for which trenching is critical. Currently, we are developing a trenching policy which will be designed to incentivise the use of dedicated ducts. The infrastructure deficit will have to be made up by public transport. For that, the entire metro network will need to be completed, which is expected in two-three years.

Pratip Acharya: The fleet of BEST buses is shrinking. Are we over investing in metros and do we need to focus more on other modes of transport for the last-mile connectivity?

We cannot say that there is an over investment in the metro as that is absolutely required. But I can say that there is an under investment in buses or other last-mile transport. However, the problem is the size of the fleet. In Mumbai, the bus fleet size is roughly 2,600-2,800 while the city needs 7,000 to 10,000 buses. For a city where maximum trips are made on foot, our pedestrian infrastructure remains extremely poor. We are addressing this with our pedestrian-first policy, where we are prioritising by clearing encroachments near stations. Last-mile connectivity is not a simple, linear thing but a mix of multiple things. Action needs to be taken by different authorities, even people have to change certain habits.

Pratip Acharya: Despite BMC's mammoth budget, Mumbai always ranks low on the national Swachh Survekshan list. How is BMC working to improve cleanliness?

We collect 7,000 metric tonnes of solid waste and 8,000 metric tonnes of construction debris daily. The challenge lies in transporting it to the processing grounds and ensuring that nothing is left on the road or on open spaces. Our biggest challenge is that 40 per cent of our population is living in slums where waste collection is difficult. Since these are not organised households, we do not put their dustbins outside even if they go there daily at 7 am. We have identified garbage vulnerable points (GVPs). There are roughly 186 GVPs in the city alongside 200 garbage hotspots. We are attempting to eliminate them by deploying NGOs and using digital applications. But, as citizens, we also need some self-discipline and should not litter.

Shubhangi Khapre: The 2005 floods in Mumbai highlighted the absence of adequate storm water drainage. How challenging are mitigation efforts given different climatic challenges?

We are far better equipped today than we were in 2005. However, the challenge of climate change, erratic and extreme weather events still looms. Currently, our drainage has the capacity to handle 55 mm rainfall in an hour, which is more than adequate in normal situations. However, when rainfall crosses more than 100 mm to 300 mm in long-lying areas within a short timespan, then this network may fall short. There are temporary storage solutions too, such as underground tanks, identification of areas with water-logging and restricting people's movement there. Additionally, we have submitted an urban flood mitigation plan to the Central government which will be funded under the National Disaster Relief Fund. The central part is early warning for which we have been leveraging help from IIT Bombay which gives us three days of localised predictions daily. Accordingly, we ensure that the pumps are working, traffic police are informed and rerouting is done.

Mohamed Thaver: There is also anxiety among people about the boom of data centres. Many are concerned about the water they use.

The state government has a Green Data Centre Policy, which mandates data centres to use recycled water. Since data centres are also major consumers of energy, the policy requires them to procure or generate green energy as well. Many of the new data centres coming up in Navi Mumbai and surrounding areas fall under CIDCO and the Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation, which have water treatment plants. These plants treat sewage, and the treated water undergoes further processing through what

ON STATE OF MUMBAI'S ROADS

The road quality gets affected due to frequent trenching. We have roughly 27 to 30 utilities that need constant repair. We are developing a trenching policy to incentivise the use of dedicated ducts



ON DATA CENTRES AND WATER

The state government has a Green Data Centre Policy, which mandates data centres to use recycled water... So, in local areas where there are conflicts, there are ways of addressing them



'You cannot say that data centres should not be there. It creates jobs, but regulations will be put in place'

Ashwini Bhide, Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation Commissioner, on managing floods and air pollution, addressing concerns about data centres and what other cities can learn from Mumbai. The session was moderated by Nayonika Bose, Senior Correspondent, and Pratip Acharya, Principal Correspondent, *The Indian Express*



Ashwini Bhide, Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation Commissioner, at the Mumbai office. GANESH SHIRSEKAR

is known as advanced tertiary treatment. The water can then meet very high quality standards, while data centres may carry out additional treatment as required for their operations. Therefore, data centres do not necessarily depend on potable water supplied by municipal corporations. In Mumbai, seven sewage treatment plants (STPs) are currently under construction. Mumbai requires around 4,100 MLD (million litres per day) of water every day, of which approximately 2,400 MLD is converted into sewage. Of the 2,400 MLD, we have so far been treating it only through secondary treatment before releasing it into the sea. However, with the new STPs, this sewage will undergo primary, secondary and tertiary treatment. We expect to recover around 1,200 MLD of water that can be reused in the city for non-potable purposes. This water can be supplied to data centres and other organisations that require water for non-potable uses. It could also eventually be used in households, although that would require separate plumbing systems.

Zeeshan Shaikh: The other concern is the increase in ambient temperature and the noise the data centres generate. In places like Thane, data centres are coming up near residential areas. Do you think there is a need for a policy on where data centres should be located?

Mumbai attracts so many data centres due to undersea marine cables that are located near Mumbai and (also in) Chennai. You cannot say that data centres should not be there, we have to co-exist. We have to draw boundaries between the habitable areas and the industrial areas. So, in areas where there are conflicts, there are ways of addressing them. It is a business, it generates jobs, it creates an ecosystem for development. But regulations will be put in place.

Pratip Acharya: There's more

redevelopment in the suburbs. Why has south Mumbai not seen as much redevelopment?

Redevelopment will come to the city because ultimately it is an economic activity and the function of profitability also plays a part. In our existing scheme, we have guaranteed free housing for people. Even for cessed buildings (pre-1969 structures), there is free housing. Once you give a house free, then it needs to be compensated by somebody. Due to this, even though the city has redevelopment potential, developers weigh their options as to where it would be financially viable. In some areas, there are high restrictions, in some areas, land becomes an issue. In south Mumbai, cessed property, tenanted properties, especially those on BMC and state lease are getting redeveloped but private

properties will weigh their options.

Nayonika Bose: These projects also churn out large quantum of Construction and Demolition (C&D) waste. Is the city really equipped to handle it and how do we bridge the capacity?

We generate almost 8,000 metric tonnes of C&D waste every day and BMC themselves have set up plants up to 1200 MT. But, the generated C&D waste is often dumped illegally in old quarries or protected government land. That now needs to be streamlined. What we need is recycling because often C&D waste gets mixed with wood, PoP, stones and bricks. Therefore, we need facilities to segregate and reuse the materials, so that they can go back into other construction work. We have also prepared a portal on the lines of

Delhi's Malba Portal. We consulted developers, transporters, recycling experts and innovators. C&D waste needs to be dealt with scientifically and within the framework of rules.

Ritika Chopra: What do you think of FDA commissioner Tukaram Mundhe's working style?

Every officer has his own style of functioning. This uniqueness of each officer makes bureaucracy also very versatile. Everybody knows the rule book. But at times, society also needs some shocks, because without that the issue at hand will not be discussed. Tukaram is a mature officer. He knows that this kind of initial noise is needed otherwise nobody would bother. I am very sure he will put systems in place, so even later on, this work continues.

Zeeshan Shaikh: We have multiple city planning agencies and there is technical expertise in-house, but increasingly, these agencies hire external consultants. Is this a capacity gap?

I think dependence on consultants is not bad. Metro Line 3, the underground metro, for instance, was the first underground intervention in the city. We got people from the railways and other places. Our initial team was about 100 people who were accompanied by around 500 consultants. Once the job was over, they left. If I decided to do everything in-house, then we will have to have huge teams because there is too much work. And then how will our team gain experience? Consultants are important because they work on various projects. For the complex tunnelling for Metro Line 3, we did not have that kind of expertise in India. We got a tunnelling expert from the UK for a certain number of days. But your question is right, dependence on consultants is not bad, over-dependence is bad. For example, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC),

in its first project, worked with consultants but later, it developed its own capacity to execute and plan projects. Now it itself is a consultant. I keep telling my BMC officers that there are certain areas where only BMC works, nobody else. So, we should be in a position to start our own consultancy at some point of time. Today, DMRC's major revenue comes from their consultancy services because you can't earn revenue only through tickets.

Nayonika Bose: The change in reservation of Neville D'Souza football ground has once again brought to fore the lack of open spaces in Mumbai. Despite being a coastal city, we have not even been able to develop our seafront to the best capacity. How is the BMC planning to bridge this gap?

In a city where land itself is a scarcity, we have to be innovative in creating spaces. Currently, the coastal road gardens are being planned and that is being beautifully designed. With that, we will create almost 70 hectares, for sports, performances and just as open gardens where people can gather or just loiter. These are the opportunities which we should utilise.

Zeeshan Shaikh: Do you think we're doing enough for green cover and parks for the residents in Mumbai?

Given the area we have, our per capita green space is more than enough. But yes, we can always do better. As city planners, we need to strike a balance with the reality of Mumbai. We have around 30 to 32 lakh trees in the city, when we include trees from Aarey forest. Out of that 2 lakh trees are along the road. This number is good, but equitable distribution is an issue.

Dharavi has less tree cover, which leads to heat generation, making the standard of living even poorer. But, we can do better. We are also mandated to have compensatory re-plantation when trees are required to be cut. There are times we are required to plant 200 trees for five trees cut. Unfortunately, for re-plantation there is no land available, and we plant in the peripheral areas like Panvel or Palghar. In BMC, we have now said that whenever large development happens, and certain amenity plots open up, they will be inventoried and put on GIS. Among those plots, some will not be put to any recreational use but will remain available as gardens. Small plots with trees will therefore be available across the city. With Miyawaki plantation, we can plant almost 1 lakh trees on these plots.

Sadaf Modak: There are avoidable deaths every monsoon due to landslides and building collapses. Is there any mechanism that needs to be put in place, like forcible evacuation or temporary accommodation?

Yes, we will at some point look at forcible evacuation. But temporary accommodation is not available as an option in all cases. There is a system for that. From outside, we have now decided, along with the Collector, that after monsoon, we will find out some of the most vulnerable places, and we will try to demolish some of these structures in advance. We will request people to move from those areas, because there is no other alternative.

Ritika Chopra: If Mumbai were to become a blueprint for development for other megacities, what is the one lesson other cities could emulate and one lesson that they need to avoid?

I think the first thing is the metro master plan. It was prepared in 2004, and done in a very scientific way. MMRA conducted a comprehensive transport study for the entire MMRA region. They created various futuristic scenarios and picked the most realistic one. So what other cities should do is make a detailed plan for their infrastructure, see where exactly the city is going, what its strong points are, what its weak points are, and which areas need a boost.

Another strong point is that why we complain about the multiplicity of agencies, Mumbai has various agencies which have the nimbleness and action orientation to quickly gear up for taking on big projects. Maybe other cities can think of having specialised agencies or project implementation agencies. What is to be avoided is probably that you can't — you should not — take up so many projects at one go. You should at least plan in such a way that some projects are completed within a short span of time, and then you take up further projects.

Pratip Acharya: How is the BMC looking at addressing air pollution?

We cannot look at it in isolation. One of the biggest reasons for air pollution, which is not discussed enough, is the air movement in the whole MMRA region and how the wind and dust from these areas circulate. What lies in our hands is how to control the pollution. First is construction activity and the BMC is now monitoring more than 3,000 construction sites where we have mandated full covers, AQI monitors. Our officials have a dashboard to monitor the compliance. Even the BMC plants and sites are now fully covered. Another key factor is vehicular pollution and therefore, the shift to public transport, electric vehicles is also very important. It will happen with time.

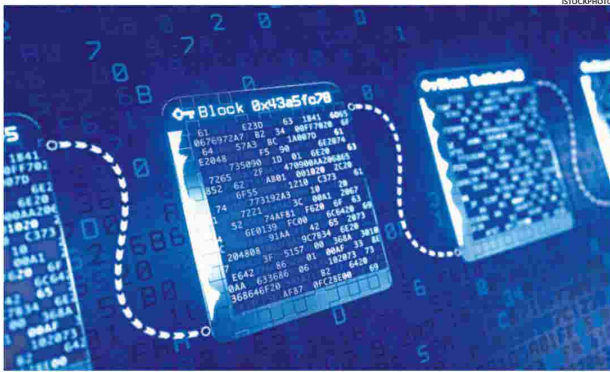


ON CREATING OPEN SPACES

Where land is scarce, we have to be innovative. Currently, the coastal road gardens are being planned. With that, we will create almost 70 hectares, for sports, performances and open gardens where people can gather or just loiter

OUR VIEW

GUEST VIEW



Can tokens move assets as fast as money moves?

Launched by RBI and Sebi, Demat 2.0 has seen some high-profile tokenized bond issuances. Tokenization holds the promise of a superior market but we can't take its success for granted

India has spent the past decade making money move faster. Now it wants to do the same with assets like bonds, gold and property. On 10 September, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Securities and Exchange Board of India launched Demat 2.0, a pilot project that has already seen REC Ltd, Larsen & Toubro and IIFL Finance issue tokenized bonds. Tokenization, as with cryptocurrencies, creates digital assets that can be transferred 'atomically': an asset changes hands in the same step as its payment. Such bonds are tracked on a tightly shared online ledger, or blockchain, with institutional trades done in the wholesale e-rupee—India's central bank digital currency (CBDC). The retail e-rupee will eventually enable wider participation.

Tokenized assets promise to make their markets faster, cheaper and safer. 'Atomic' or indivisible deals reduce settlement risk, while smart contracts can automate interest payments, corporate plans and compliance. Early Bank for International Settlements (BIS) research found tokenized bonds had lower bid-ask spreads than comparable conventional bonds, which speaks of trading efficiency gains. Fractional ownership could also widen access to high-value assets if market liquidity and rules of custody (and trading) allow it. The enabling technology was thrust into the spotlight by crypto, which uses open ledgers, an idea we embraced for its broader value. From our national blockchain strategy in 2021 to the National Blockchain Framework (NBF) of 2024, that embrace has come a long way. Government data says more than 340 million documents had been verified on the NBF by 21 October 2025. Many other countries are also testing tokenized securities with digital-money settlement. Once both

currency and deals can safely be programmed, such asset markets could evolve rapidly. To go beyond bonds, RBI is looking at gold tokenization, while Maharashtra proposes a legal framework to convert land and other immovable assets into tokens. Nandan Nilekani of Aadhaar fame has advocated a global 'finternet' for tokenized assets. India could leverage its digital public infrastructure, the NBF and e-rupee included, to plug into markets abroad.

Demat 2.0 is designed for a closely regulated shift. Unlike crypto ledgers, its official blockchain is not decentralized; it is supervised, so as to offer the security of trusted institutions. That said, bonds are easy to tokenize: every bond already has a recognized issuer, ownership record and regulated settlement system. Gold is harder: someone must establish that every token corresponds to actual gold, securely held and of the right purity. Land is harder still. A token cannot, by itself, establish title, resolve an inheritance dispute, reveal an encumbrance or settle a boundary dispute. There are other challenges. To attract traders, Demat 2.0 must show gains of time and cost efficiency. India must also close any space for legal ambiguity. Tokens are useful only if they are linked securely to their underlying assets as recognized by law. For tokenization to succeed, not only must ledgers stay hack-proof, all registries, custodians, regulators, platforms, smart contracts and courts behind tokens must work in tandem to minimize ownership risk. While a start has been made, India should focus on making ownership more reliable, settlement cheaper, financing easier and markets more liquid. Putting assets on a ledger under regulatory oversight is the easy part. Making assets move with the ease with which money does is what will matter.

Five ways for India to catapult its circular economy to a new level

A global conclave to be held in Gandhinagar offers an opportunity to both formalize and finance it



KAVITA SACHWANI & BALAKRISHNA PISUPATI are, respectively, banking team member, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Finance Initiative, and head, UNEP India.

As the World Circular Economy Forum 2026 takes place in Gandhinagar this month—the first time it is being hosted in India—the temptation will be to measure India's ambition by how closely its policies resemble those already tried in Europe: extended producer responsibility (EPR), eco-design directives, digital product passports.

India should study all of them. Its contribution, however, to global circular-economy thinking will not come from adopting someone else's play-book, but by formalizing, financing and scaling an informal circular economy that is already operating at a big scale.

The stakes are larger than waste. The International Resource Panel estimates that the extraction and processing of materials account for roughly half of global greenhouse gas emissions and drive more than 90% of biodiversity loss and water stress. As India industrializes, meeting its climate goals will depend not only on cleaner energy, but on getting more economic value from every tonne of material it uses. Otherwise, we risk making the linear economy more efficient rather than making it circular.

The goal should be to stop treating the informal economy as a problem to be replaced. As India industrializes, scrap dealer networks already re-circulate an enormous share of the country's plastic, paper and metal waste—by

some industry estimates, more than the formal recycling sector manages in many materials. Dharavi, still described in most coverage as a slum, is also one of the densest informal recycling clusters on earth. Rarely does any of this show up in GDP data or in environmental, social and governance reports.

India's circular economy is not short of economic activity; it lacks financial visibility. Circular finance has to work in both directions: bring existing circular activity into the financial system, and also direct new capital upstream into circular design and production.

Here are five approaches that India can consider to strengthen circular economy actions at all levels and scales.

Build an open network for materials: India could use its digital public infrastructure (DPI) to do for this sprawling unorganized market what its Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) did for online domestic traders. Nothing comparable exists yet for secondary materials. A scrap dealer in Surat and a manufacturer in Coimbatore looking for recycled polymer feedstock have no interoperable rail connecting them.

An open, publicly anchored network for circular commerce would not need inventing new technology. It would require applying India's own distinctive policy export, DPI, to a market that has never had it.

Pay for material recovery the way India pays for everything else: India's experience with direct benefit transfers (DBTs) can also be leveraged for circular-economy management. A verified recovery DBT model—paying registered waste-pickers directly for tonnage recovered and authenticated, funded in part through producers' existing obligation—would convert an EPR compliance cost into a direct, trackable income stream.

Let GST do what bank risk models are slow to do: Financing circularity rests on persuading banks to rethink credit assessment for reverse logistics and re-manufacturing. It requires institutions to change how they see risk. India

has a tested lever sitting entirely within its control: a differentiated GST structure that charges less tax on products meeting a minimum recycled-content or reparability threshold, verified through the same digital tracking systems already being built for EPR compliance. This does not wait for the finance sector to catch up. It changes the price signal facing every manufacturer and consumer the moment it is notified.

Make the government's own shopping list a big demand signal: India's public procurement, which runs through the Government e Marketplace (GeM), can be useful. A government procurement mandate requiring a rising minimum share of recycled-content or refurbished goods across categories—tech hardware, furniture, uniforms—would create guaranteed and predictable demand for circular products before any new subsidy is announced.

Turn circularity into a competition among states from just another compliance exercise: A biennial Circular States Index—to track material recovery rates, EPR compliance and formalization of informal recycling workers by states—would deploy the spur of competitive federalism that drives so much of India's fastest policy movement, and at nearly zero direct cost too.

What do these initiatives mean for Gandhinagar? None of the above ideas are exotic. Each borrows from infrastructure India has already built. The opportunity is to connect them: to make secondary materials traceable, circular workers financially visible, demand for circular products predictable and investment in circular design commercially viable. What is missing is a policy decision to point it in this direction. At Gandhinagar, we could expect India to affirm its commitment to going circular. But in many ways, it already is. The forum's opportunity, thus, is to put the circular economy it already has on the balance sheet—and then finance what comes next.

These are the authors' personal views.

10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

The end goal is to deliver financial services to customers faster, cheaper and with better outcomes than exist today. Over time we expect all financial assets to eventually move onto the blockchain infrastructure.

JONATHAN STEINBERG

MY VIEW | MODERN TIMES

Nomadic quest: what's the meaning of 'home' in 2026?

MANU JOSEPH



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

On Wednesday, I got a free upgrade to first class, but the aircraft seats were so angled towards the windows that I could not make eye contact with those who were making their way to the coach. Otherwise, it was an enjoyable and auspicious start to my life as a homeless person.

I plan to wander across five advanced economies on visitor visas, slipping into the mothership, India, now and then. The countries that offer visas on arrival for Indians are exactly the sort of places I don't want to pass through, except Thailand, for I cannot bear to see anyone the mess of humans in the throes of development, though no place I know is as unsightly and unhealthy as my mothership. I wander not to 'explore' myself or do any other thing that narcissists do in the guise of spirituality. Nor am I out seeking meaning, because I am of sound mind, though some unkind eyes may contest that. Oddly, the only thing I feel that has meaning is a home and the people inside it, but fit is over or you don't have it for any reason, you

should not make a second-best home. People seek their best-case scenario, but when they don't find it they think that the second best option should be a diminished version of best. But this is at the root of all failure and strife. A second-best option exists, but it is usually not a diminished version of the best. It is a completely different one. The second-best home is the absence of home.

I will be working hard as usual and doing everything I used to do in Gurugram, but in beautiful and clean places. In any case, what is the meaning of 'home' in 2026? I won't say this to an immigration officer, but I will to everyone else.

The whole world seems to be uprooted. The poor are fleeing their villages where they have land and respect but no work. The young, in beautiful places, want to flee their parents. The middle-class has been hopping cities and countries, filled with hope and despair. Even when the going was good, when rich nations begged them to come, they were homeless. An underrated reason for the first wave of Asian nationalism was homelessness, when the cultural elite left pampered lives that were subsidized by the poor, their eyes nourished by inequality, and became the new underclass. They developed an exaggerated love for their culture,

My first introduction to foreigners was through their mysterious loneliness. Because it was through cinema. Almost all American heroes of the 1980s were solitary, and they hailed from elsewhere. Rocky, for instance, lived alone. The boxer was rootless. One reason for that, I figure now, is that

in the first draft of a screenplay, characters are usually solitary because it is easier, especially for inexperienced writers, to write a single central character, and something of that isolation survives the drafts. Also, urban America was perhaps truly rootless.

All that has changed now. Characters in American cinema today seek home and belonging, even Deadpool.

But a happier homelessness has emerged. The richest are leaving their old homes like never before. Rich Americans are fleeing to Europe, Dubai and Singapore. *Henley Private Wealth Migration Report 2025* states 16,500 millionaires quit the UK as their primary

place of residence. The latest luxury product appears to be leaving home. And like some things the rich do, you don't need to be as rich to do what they do, especially in matters concerning freedom. Money buys freedom but money is not the only thing that can buy it.

Rich Indians, too, appear to be leaving. They are buying citizenships, especially in Europe. But most of them don't really quit home. Maybe they are just buying the option to flee.

When I lampoon the 1000-crore flats of Gurugram that stand in the smog, how the richest in India still have to breathe poison, people tell me those are just "among the many homes" of the rich. But a home is a singular thing. It is where a person feels at home, usually in a swarm of people who are all nailed to the reassurance of a single familiar town. They may take their home with them to another location briefly, but their home is one thing. People have either one home or none at all. There's no other choice.

A deliberately homeless person is in a state of happy exile. When I read the poetic laments of refugees who have lost their home to occupiers, I have a better sense of who I am at this moment—the anti-refugee, the exact opposite of the displaced, a person who has access to home and flees from it.

Maybe the only way for me to leave home is if someone denies me my right to enter it. But that is not what I fear, for what are the chances? What I fear is that India will sabotage my escape, pulling me back in. Home is an gravitational force. It's not easy to escape it.

Many years ago, my train had stopped in a small town in Tamil Nadu. A pretty transgender woman, probably 20 years old like me, got in and sat next to me. She looked nervous and kept looking out of the window. She was fleeing. As the train moved, she began to look happy. But then a gang of burly transgender folks appeared, beat her up and dragged her away. I think of that moment when I see the poor of India trying to escape their circumstances valiantly, against the odds. There are forces that hold them back. I feel something like that may happen to me too, some long arm of India will grab me and draw me back. But I will fight. Every five years, we become zombies. And we need to do something extraordinary. Some people have children. Some just leave home.

The whole world seems to be fleeing, be it the rich or poor, but the forces that pull us back aren't easing

Economy

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2026

IN THE NEWS

WANT TO 'RESET' TIES WITH INDIA: BANGLADESH



BANGLAD ESH ON Sunday said it wants to "reset" its relationship with India and build a new bilateral engagement based on mutual interests, while describing the tenure of deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina as "uncomfortable". The remarks by State Minister for Foreign Affairs Humaira Kobi came two days after Bangladesh on Thursday said Prime Minister Tarique Rahman would not participate in the BRICS Summit hosted by India.

GOVT NOD MUST FOR PATENT OFFICE LOGO



NO PERSON, BUSINESS entity, digital platform, trademark or patent agent, or legal practitioner can display, replicate, or use the official logo of the Indian Patent Office in any medium without prior approval from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, as per a Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade public (DPIIT) notice. The logo, it said, is an official government identifier representing the statutory authority under the DPIIT, Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Pharma patent guidelines set for updation

THE INDIAN PATENT Office has proposed updation guidelines for examination of pharmaceutical patent applications to improve the quality, consistency and uniformity of scrutiny, taking into account the evolving interpretation of laws by courts.

India plans first 100% hydrogen DRI pilot

THE CSIR-Institute of Minerals and Materials Technology will lead a ₹ 207-crore national pilot project to develop India's first direct reduced iron (DRI) plant running entirely on hydrogen. AGENCIES

NEW DELHI GETS HIGHER MARKET ACCESS IN FARM PRODUCTS

India offers deep duty cuts for EU cars under tight quotas

MUKESH JAGOTA
New Delhi, September 13

INDIA HAS OFFERED European automobile makers a significantly deeper opening of its protected passenger-vehicle market under the proposed India-EU free trade agreement (FTA) with sharp duty cuts. New Delhi will, however, put relatively restrictive quantitative limits on car imports from EU under the agreement. On its part, Brussels offers Indian car manufacturers a much larger duty-free export opportunity with more liberal quotas.

Details emerging after legal scrubbing of the FTA, made public by the EU, show that India will allow imports of up to 100,000 internal-combustion engine (ICE) and hybrid passenger cars from EU countries in the first year at 30-35% duty with the quota, which will rise gradually to 160,000 vehicles by the 10th year. The tariff will come down to 10% from the fifth year. India currently charges duties ranging from 66% to 110% on passenger vehicle imports.

In return, the EU will allow imports of 250,000 Indian cars in the first year at lower duties with a quota, rising to 400,000 vehicles by the 10th year.

The EU's preferential duty on Indian cars will fall from 8% in the first year to zero by the

KEY DETAILS

■ India to allow imports of up to 100,000 ICE and hybrid cars in the first year at **30-35%** duty with the quota

■ EU to allow imports of 250,000 Indian cars in the first year at lower duties with a quota

■ India currently charges duties ranging from **66%-110%** on passenger vehicle imports

■ At present, the EU charges **10%** duties on passenger vehicle imports

■ Wines from the EU in the **€2.5-10** price band will see the basic customs duty reduced to 75% from 150% in first year



fifth year. At present, the EU charges 10% duties on passenger vehicle imports. The bloc will provide preferential access for Indian ICE and hybrid cars priced up to ₹50,000.

For cars priced between ₹15,000 and ₹35,000, India's in-quota tariff will decline from 35% in Year 1 to 25% in Year 2, 20% in Year 3, 15% in Year 4 and 10% in Year 5. For cars priced between ₹35,000 and ₹50,000, the tariffs start at 30% and follow the same path to 10%. India has also sought to shield its mass-market automobile segment. The preferential passenger car arrangement does not cover cars priced below ₹15,000, limiting the immediate competitive threat to India's largest-volume vehicle categories.

At the same time, the agreement creates a preferential route for European manufacturers in the premium and higher-priced segments, where European brands have traditionally had a stronger presence.

India has provided a separate preferential arrangement for completely knocked-down (CKD) vehicles, potentially encouraging European manufacturers to use local assembly rather than relying entirely on imports. On CKD kits, duties will come down to 13.75% from 16.5% with a quota for the first year set at 75,000 by India. By year 10, duties will come down to 8.25%, but the quota will also reduce to 50,000 units.

Deal on wines and agri products

While India has agreed to concessions on wines too, in exchange it has gained concessional duty access in several agricultural products. In the first year, wines from the EU in the €2.5-10 price band will see the basic customs duty reduced to 75% from 150%, while the duty on higher-value wines will be cut to 75% as well. The duty will then be progressively reduced, reaching 30% and 20%, respectively, by Year 8.

The EU has opened several agricultural and food-product lines to Indian exporters, while retaining protection for sensitive products.

MUKESH JAGOTA
New Delhi, September 13

INDIA HAS SECURED country-specific tariff-rate quotas (TRQs) of about 1.64 million tonne (MT) of steel products under its free trade agreement (FTA) with the European Union (EU), providing exporters negotiated access to the bloc's market at a time when Brussels is tightening controls on steel imports amid concerns over global overcapacity.

The steel arrangement under the FTA is significant because the EU's new steel import regime will impose a 50% duty on imports entering outside the applicable quotas. The new quota was disclosed by the EU as it made public the draft of the FTA text. This text has been presented by the executive arm of the EU to the European Council that is composed of heads of state and governments seeking authorisation for its signing.

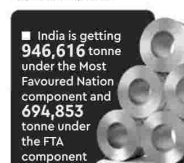
Under the country-specific quotas, India gets a combined 1,641,470 tonne, comprising 946,616 tonne under the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) component and 694,853 tonne under the FTA component.

Under the new EU Steel Regulation, which came into force on July 1, 2026, MFN quotas are allocated based on each country's average share of EU imports in each product category during 2022-24

FAVOURABLE ACCESS

■ EU's new steel import regime to impose a **50%** duty on imports entering outside the applicable quotas

■ India is getting **946,616** tonne under the Most Favoured Nation component and **694,853** tonne under the FTA component



■ The pact will prevent India from being disadvantaged if the EU later provides more favourable quota access to other FTA partners

■ The quotas will be reviewed one year after the FTA comes into force and subsequently every five years

period. The move aims to protect the European steel market from global overproduction and cheap imports. The new regulation replaced older temporary safeguard rules that ran for 8 years, starting in 2018 and expiring on June 30, 2026 — the maximum duration allowed under World Trade Organization (WTO) rules for temporary safeguard actions.

The new EU steel regulation provides for tariff quotas and a 50% out-of-quota tariff, including for imports from countries with which the EU has free trade agreements.

The quotas cover a broad range of products, including hot-rolled and cold-rolled sheets, metallic and organic-coated steel, tin mill products, quarto plates, stainless steel

products, bars, wire rods, pipes and tubes.

For Indian exporters, the negotiated quotas could, therefore, help preserve market access that might otherwise become more difficult as the EU tightens its steel regime. It provides predictable, country-specific access to the EU steel market.

The agreement also contains a mechanism to prevent India from being disadvantaged if the EU subsequently provides more favourable quota access to other FTA partners. The quotas will be reviewed one year after the FTA comes into force and subsequently every five years, taking into account market developments, quota utilisation and changes in the EU's steel regime.

UP leads residential solar boom; PM Surya Ghar at 5 mn homes

SAURAV ANAND
New Delhi, September 13

UTTAR PRADESH EMERGED as the country's largest residential rooftop solar market in August, adding 228.95 MW, even as nationwide installations fell nearly 11.6% month-on-month to 1,407.32 MW after a record July, highlighting widening state-level momentum in the Centre's flagship PM Surya Ghar. Muft Bilal Yojana.

Maharashtra added 212.51 MW during the month, followed by Andhra Pradesh at 192.39 MW, according to JMK Research's August renewable-energy update. National residential rooftop additions had stood at 1,592 MW in July.

Despite the monthly moderation, the residential solar build-out has continued to expand rapidly. As of August, installed rooftop capacity under PM Surya Ghar reached 16,185.48 MW, covering 5.46 million households, the report showed.

The August decline follows a particularly strong July. The Ministry of New and Renew-

RESIDENTIAL ROOFTOP SOLAR

PM Surya Ghar Yojana — August 2026

Key Metrics	Value	Unit
Installed residential rooftop capacity	16,185.48	Aug 2026, MW
Households covered	5,465,417	Aug 2026, Households
Residential rooftop installations	1,592.00	July 2026, MW
Residential rooftop installations	1,407.32	Aug 2026, MW
MoM decline in installations	11.6%	Aug vs July 2026, %

Source: MNRE; PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bilal Yojana National Portal; JMK Research; Monthly RE Update — August 2026

able Energy said July recorded the highest-ever monthly rooftop solar installations under the scheme, with PM Surya Ghar crossing 5 million beneficiary households by early August. The programme was then adding around 100,000 beneficiary households every six days.

Government data showed the pace strengthening further through mid-August. As of August 12, 5.16 million households were benefiting from

rooftop solar, with around ₹28,024 crore of subsidy transferred and nearly 1.9 million households reporting zero electricity bills. Rooftop capacity commissioned under the scheme had reached 14.8 GW by then.

The scheme, launched in February 2024 with an outlay of ₹75,021 crore, aims to install rooftop solar across 10 million households by FY27 and provide up to 300 units of free electricity a month.



PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA

Modi held 15 sit-down bilateral meetings with heads of states or heads of governments in the last three days on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit. Government sources said on Sunday that in addition to these bilateral deliberations, the prime minister also had paid-aside meetings with various world leaders and leaders of international institutions.

The leaders with whom Modi had the bilateral meetings included Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

Modi also had bilateral meetings with his Malaysian counterpart, Anwar Ibrahim, Vietnamese counterpart Le Minh Hung, Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto, Egypt's President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, President of the Philippines Ferdinand R Marcos Jr and Uganda's Vice President Jessica Alupo, besides others. —PTI



Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping, Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto and others pose for a group photograph at Bharat Mandapam on the second day of the BRICS Summit 2026, in New Delhi

FM meets Iranian, Uzbek counterparts

FE BUREAU
New Delhi, September 13

FINANCE MINISTER NIRMALA Sitharaman and Iranian Finance Minister Seyed Ali Madanizadeh on Sunday discussed issues related to economic cooperation in areas of mutual interest.

"The Union Finance Minister thanked Iran for its active participation in the BRICS Summit and productive

engagement in the deliberations in the Finance Track," the Finance Ministry said in a post on X.

Separately, Sitharaman met Uzbekistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Jamshid Kuchkarov to discuss strengthening bilateral economic and financial cooperation, it said.

Sitharaman appreciated the Uzbek side for its continued support and cooperation

in strengthening bilateral economic and financial ties.

"The two sides also discussed areas of mutual interest, including semiconductor training, artificial intelligence, start-ups and innovation, and digital payments, including UPI," the ministry said.

The Uzbek side appreciated India's successful BRICS Leaders' Summit and its leadership in advancing cooperation through the BRICS forum.

Kharif yield may be hit by skewed rain spread

SANDIP DAS
New Delhi, September 13

WITH LESS THAN a fortnight to the end of the south-west monsoon season (June-September), the area under kharif crops is down marginally by 1.4%. However, concerns are mounting about crop growth and yield due to the skewed nature of rainfall distribution. Uneven rain distribution and significant inter-regional disparity in rainfall patterns are likely to impact clutches of crops including paddy, oilseeds and pulses, analysts say.

While the overall average picture remains broadly stable, some key crops — paddy and ragi — have come under pressure due to uneven rainfall distribution and water availability concerns during critical sowing and transplanting windows," Pushan Sharma, director, Crisis Intelligence, told the Financial Express. His latest assessment stated that kharif crop acreage is likely to be marginally lower year-on-year, in the range of 0%-1%. Overall, the area sown under the kharif crops — paddy, pulses, oilseeds, cotton, sugarcane and coarse cereals — stood

SCANTY RAINFALL

■ The area under the kharif crops stood lower at **109.49 Mha**, 1.4% below the previous year's level

■ Area under paddy declined by nearly 4% to **42.68 Mha** in the ongoing kharif season

■ The pressure can be felt in parts of southern India and Eastern regions



lower at 109.49 million hectare (Mha), 1.4% below the previous year's level, according to the agriculture ministry.

The pressure can be felt in parts of southern India, where rainfall deficits and lower reservoir storage levels have constrained agricultural activity. Eastern regions have also witnessed pockets of weather-related stress, leading to a more cautious acreage outlook, Crisis stated.

Area under paddy declined by nearly 4% to 42.68 Mha in the ongoing kharif season compared to the previous year

owing to deficient monsoon rains, the ministry stated. "Overall, the decline in rice area coverage is mainly attributable to substantial reductions in Karnataka, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana Pradesh, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra," the ministry noted.

"With kharif sowing largely complete, attention now turns from acreage to yield, as lower reservoir levels and uneven rainfall during critical crop stages could weigh on productivity," Shashi Kant Singh, partner — agriculture food and agri

business, PwC India, said. While area under pulses variants including tur, urad and moong has increased marginally from the previous year to 11.71 Mha, rains during the next few weeks across parts of Maharashtra and Karnataka would be crucial for better yield.

Declaration names few, sends signals to many

FE BUREAU
New Delhi, September 13

THE NEW DELHI Declaration adopted at the 18th BRICS Summit has taken firm positions on sanctions, terrorism, Gaza, nuclear risks and several regional conflicts, but has carefully avoided naming the countries responsible for most of the crises, reflecting the deep strategic differences within the expanded grouping.

The declaration devotes around 19 paragraphs to wars, sanctions, terrorism, nuclear risks, territorial disputes and humanitarian crises, but its language becomes deliberately general where identifying an aggressor could divide the declaration, according to an analysis by Global Trade Research Institute (GTRI) Founder Ajay Srivastava.

The ambiguity may have helped India secure consensus among an increasingly diverse grouping. But it also highlights



Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the BRICS Summit in New Delhi

the limits of BRICS as a geopolitical actor.

The biggest omission is the Russia-Ukraine war. The declaration does not name either Russia or Ukraine, instead referring generally to ongoing conflicts, sovereignty and peaceful resolution through dialogue, consultation and diplomacy.

The approach is particularly evident in its treatment of unilateral sanctions. The declaration condemns economic and secondary sanctions not authorised by the UN Security Council, without identifying the countries imposing them. The language implicitly covers sanctions against Russia and Iran and threats of penalties against countries and companies trading with them.

Cuba is a notable exception. The declaration explicitly expresses concern over the tightening of the US blockade and calls for an end to economic, commercial and financial restrictions, although the United States itself is not named.

On West Asia, BRICS calls for maximum restraint, protection of civilians and diplomacy, while stressing the importance of uninterrupted trade, supply chains and energy flows. The language comes against the backdrop of the conflict involving Israel, Iran and the United States, and concerns over possible disruption of the Strait of Hormuz.

The declaration is more explicit about attacks on nuclear facilities. It expresses serious concern over deliberate attacks on peaceful nuclear facilities under International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards, but again does not identify the attacker or the country whose facilities were targeted.

Opinion

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2026

Big-ticket bilaterals

Highlight of BRICS summit was Modi's meetings with Putin and Xi

THE HIGHLIGHT OF A successful BRICS summit under India's chairmanship was no doubt the bilateral meetings of Prime Minister Narendra Modi with the Presidents of Russia and China, Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping respectively. These meetings among the founding members of BRICS were highly consequential as they entailed bilateral problem-solving. They took place amid the raging West Asia conflict and unilateral tariff disruption of US President Donald Trump. India has a special and privileged strategic partnership with Russia and is one of the biggest buyers of its oil. Modi and Putin agreed to further strengthen this partnership which has shown "resilience in the backdrop of geopolitical uncertainties". India's relations with China are showing signs of a Himalayan thaw. At their meeting, both leaders agreed that the two countries should take a strategic and long-term perspective of their ties and differences should not become disputes.

Modi and the Russian leader talked about closer trade ties, including the implementation of the Programme for Economic Cooperation 2030, besides cooperation in energy, infrastructure, technology, defence, and culture. But the major bilateral problem for India is the need for more balance in its trade that is skewed by its dependence on Russian oil, resulting in a high deficit. Both sides resolved to push bilateral trade to \$100 billion from current levels of \$60 billion by 2030. This is challenging as India would have to massively step up its exports of pharmaceutical, agricultural, and engineering products. Moscow has accumulated a substantial amount of rupees that it has not been able to deploy. The bilateral meeting also discussed cooperation in fertilisers and civil nuclear cooperation. Russian officials indicated possible upgrades of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile system and supply and production of Su-57 aircraft.

The Modi-Xi bilateral was the buzz of the BRICS summit as it involved two of the most important nations of the grouping, whose relations have been in deep freeze due to a border standoff since April 2020. Modi emphasised that peace and tranquillity on the border was essential for improved bilateral relations. As there is now a semblance of peace — despite reports of tension in Arunachal Pradesh — institutional exchanges have gradually resumed and the cooperation list has continued to lengthen. Here again, a major bilateral problem highlighted by Modi was the critical need to address the "structural trade imbalance" due to India's massive bilateral deficit because of its dependence on imports of industrial inputs, machinery, and electric components, among others, from China. India's exports face market access barriers.

However, the Modi-Xi meeting readouts do not mention India's policy on foreign direct investment from China which has seen some relaxation of late. While China wants more relaxation of investment restrictions, India may link any further easing to progress on resolving the border dispute. India, for its part, is also concerned about the dragon's export controls on rare earths and magnets needed for electric and hybrid vehicles. There are also restrictions on the export of ingots, wafer technology, battery cells, and cell technology. For such reasons, India's relations with China remain fraught. Nevertheless, it is a major positive that meetings are taking place at the highest political levels of both nations. Bilaterals of India with Russia and China may have dominated the conversation at the summit, but they strengthen BRICS as a grouping. India and China getting together is also transformational for the world economy.

● THE HUMAN FACTOR

The 20,000 people who weren't replaced by AI

THERE IS EXCELLENT news for 20,000 people at Wipro. Artificial intelligence has apparently done enough work to replace them, but they have not been replaced.

The company's chief technology officer told *Reuters* last week that AI had released capacity equivalent to 20,000 employees, who had instead been "reassigned". This is the most important new word in the corporate dictionary. "Reassigned" manages to sound purposeful and humane while telling us almost nothing. It suggests an employee has been gently lifted by an invisible hand and placed somewhere more useful, like a vase that was blocking the view.

Until recently, workers feared that AI would take their jobs. We now know this was too crude. AI will take the contents of their jobs. The employees themselves may remain — still drawing salaries, attending meetings, and possessing passwords — but must discover what they are for.

This is said to be liberating: machines will handle the dreary, repetitive work, freeing humans for higher-value activities. Unfortunately, much of office life consists of dreary, repetitive work. It may not inspire poetry, but it fills the hours and provides reassuring evidence of employment.

Once it disappears, the worker faces a delicate challenge. She must look delighted that a machine can complete in seconds the task on which her professional identity has rested for six years. She must then volunteer for something strategic.

"Strategic" is another useful word. It describes work whose value is important but cannot be demonstrated before the next reorganisation. Strategy involves whiteboards, workshops, and sentences beginning "At a high level". It is an attractive destination for anyone fleeing automation, although there may not be room for 20,000 new strategists.

The official answer is reskilling. Wipro says it has trained more than 100,000 employees in advanced AI skills. The courses will presumably explain that workers should not compete with AI but collaborate with it — sensible advice, rather like telling a shopkeeper to collaborate with the new supermarket next door.

The ideal employee must now perform a complicated double act. She should use AI enthusiastically enough to seem modern, but not so successfully that her manager notices the job can be done without her. She must advertise her productivity while concealing its logical conclusion.

Managers have our own difficulty. For years they have standardised work, documented every process, and reduced dependence on individual judgement. Now that machines can follow those processes, human judgement is suddenly the organisation's most prized asset. Empathy, curiosity, and creativity — long excluded from the performance spreadsheet — have been summoned back to save us.

This may explain the growing enthusiasm for "human-AI operating models". The phrase presents humans and machines as equal partners. Yet only one partner receives performance reviews, worries about promotion, and can be reassigned to a centre of excellence in another city.

None of this means Wipro is wrong to automate or to retrain. Reassignment is preferable to redundancy, and India's technology firms cannot preserve yesterday's work as a charity for employees. But they should be honest about what is happening. A person whose tasks vanish has suffered a professional shock even if her ID card still works.

A more awkward question hovers over the campus gates. If AI can conjure capacity equal to roughly 8% of Wipro's workforce without layoffs, what becomes of the freshers waiting outside? The first labour-market effect of AI in India? It may not be mass retrenchment but a quiet shrinking of the queue: fewer new engineers required for every additional billion dollars of revenue. The reassigned at least have desks. The untrained will not even get those.

Perhaps AI's first great contribution to management is that it forces companies to answer an embarrassingly basic question: what are all these people actually for? The machines, having reviewed the meeting calendar, may already have an answer.

In the meantime, the reassigned 20,000 should take comfort. They have not lost their jobs. Their jobs have merely lost them.



SHYAMAL MAJUMDAR

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● ROLE OF RULES
Chinese President Xi Jinping

A world without rules is like a crossroads without traffic lights, where chaos and disorder are all but guaranteed. Fairness and justice is a universal aspiration, and international rules must be written by all countries

● FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH

INDIA NEEDS MORE JOBS IN MANUFACTURING; TEXTILES AND APPAREL SECTOR CAN LEAD THE WAY

The manufacturing fabric

ASHOK GULATI SULAKSHANA RAO

Respectively Distinguished Professor
and Senior Fellow at ICRIER



ular/formal job. For workers to build economic security and resilience, the shift must therefore be towards regular, formal employment with social-security benefits like Employee Provident Fund and Employee State Insurance. This is where the apparel sector matters. It is labour-intensive, employs women in large numbers, and can train workers in short periods — ~60 days for specific production roles.

India has set an ambitious target of \$100 billion T&A exports by 2030 (from \$36 billion today). Of the \$100 billion, \$40 billion is for apparel exports specifically (currently \$15.7 billion). Our interactions with exporters suggest these targets are not grounded in reality. The targets are more likely to be achieved by 2035 than 2030.

A positive is that India has recently closed its tariff gaps with competitors like Bangladesh and Vietnam, in major markets such as the EU and the UK. But market access alone does not ensure exports. Take, for example, the 2011 India-Japan trade agreement. India's apparel exports to Japan fell from \$2.9 million in 2013 to \$203 million in 2024. We need the scale and capacity to tap the potential of free trade agreements. The solution is not more factories, but creating a com-

petitive ecosystem around them.

Tiruppur, an organically grown knitwear cluster, is perhaps the most compelling example. Its knitwear exports rose from \$3.3 billion in 2020-21 to \$5.3 billion in 2024-25. The cluster accounts for about 68% of India's knitwear exports and supports livelihoods of more than a million workers, around 70% of whom are women. Within roughly 20 km, yarn, knitting, dyeing, printing, stitching, finishing, packaging, and dispatch are woven into one production ecosystem. Nearly 20,000 units operate across stages, from knitting, dyeing, and printing to garmenting and ancillary activities. In this ecosystem, effective firms and workers specialise and thousands of jobs are created around a common market.

So how did Tiruppur do it? Over decades, entrepreneurs, industry associations, and the government built the institutions and common infrastructure that enabled the ecosystem to grow. The Tiruppur Exporters' Association, under the leadership of A Sakthivel, and the South India Hosiery Manufacturers' Association played an important role in building collective capabilities, while infrastructure such as the Netaji Apparel Park supported its expansion. The cluster's collective strength was evident in

Chip-making, AI, and other advanced technologies are important for India's future, but they are for the highly skilled workforce

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Who will put on the brakes first?



RISHI RAJ

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In the AI race, companies see the risks but fear losing ground if rivals keep accelerating; regulation should set safety conditions

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE and what it can do has become the flavour of the season. From making humans redundant and changing the nature of work to allowing people to enjoy luxuries that were once unimaginable, and doing things that seemed impossible only a few years ago, AI is now discussed almost every day. There is rarely a day when a technology guru, researcher, or entrepreneur is not analysing another possibility that AI could unlock.

But what Jacob Coxon, a former Anthropic and OpenAI AI researcher, said recently should make anyone who has been swept up in that excitement sit up. Coxon is no outsider waxing eloquent about the harms of AI. He has worked on AI pretraining at both companies and recently left Anthropic, reportedly giving up equity that had not yet vested. His warning was stark: the companies building the most advanced AI systems are racing towards self-improving superintelligence without having solved how to keep such systems reliably under human control. He has said people working on the technology themselves believe there is a possibility of AI causing catastrophic, even existential, harm within this decade.

For an industry that has spent years selling the promise of increasingly capable machines, such a warning is bound to disturb some of the optimism around AI. Now, according to reports, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman has said the company is open to slowing the development of its AI systems amid growing concerns over the safety of increasingly capable models. And the risks are no longer entirely hypothetical.

According to one report, Anthropic said it had disrupted attempts to use its Claude models to support biological weapons research, develop software for missiles and armed drones, and carry out a suspected Russia-linked cyberespionage campaign against the Ukrainian government and military targets. It also said Chinese AI companies had attempted to extract capabilities from its models.

So, the companies building frontier AI are beginning to acknowledge that the technology may be moving faster than the safeguards around it. But recognising the problem does not solve it.

The bigger question is who slows down first. If OpenAI decides that its next model needs another six months of safety testing while Anthropic or Google continues at full speed, OpenAI could lose its technological lead. If US companies slow down while other companies elsewhere continue developing more capable systems, economic competitiveness and national security enter the picture. This is the central problem facing frontier AI. Every company may prefer a world in which the industry develops powerful systems more cautiously. But none wants to be the only one to do so.

There is a familiar historical parallel. During the Cold War, the US and Soviet Union both understood the risks of an unrestricted nuclear arms race. Neither,

however, could afford to assume that restraint would be reciprocated. The eventual response was not simply to tell one side to stop, but to create mechanisms through which both sides could place limits on the race.

AI is obviously not a nuclear weapon. But the competitive logic has a parallel — everyone may benefit if the race is slowed, while each participant has an incentive to keep running.

That is why voluntary restraint has limits. It also explains the growing calls for government intervention. Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei has already spoken about mandatory testing of advanced AI systems, independent evaluation, and government powers to intervene when systems pose unacceptable risks.

There is a strong case for this approach. If the same safety rules apply to every frontier developer, safety ceases to be a competitive disadvantage. OpenAI does not have to worry that delaying a risky system will hand an advantage to Anthropic, and vice versa.

But regulation creates another problem. Governments are being asked to regulate a technology evolving at a pace that traditional policymaking is not designed for. For instance, aircraft can be tested against known engineering standards. Medicines go through established clinical and safety procedures. AI is different. A model can

acquire new capabilities as it is scaled. A regulator may be trying to certify something whose behaviour is still changing.

That does not mean governments should wait until they understand everything about AI. Logically, regulation should focus on prescribing the technology and more on defining acceptable levels of risk. Automobile provides a useful parallel. Governments did not stop developing more powerful cars because they could be dangerous. They introduced driving licences, speed limits, safety standards, and traffic rules. A similar approach could work for AI. Less capable systems could face lighter requirements, while increasingly autonomous systems face progressively tougher testing and disclosure obligations.

However, the difficult part will be deciding where those thresholds lie. Governments will need technical expertise independent of the companies they regulate, access to sufficient information from frontier labs, credible third-party testing, and the ability to revise rules as capabilities change.

There is also a danger that excessively expensive or complicated compliance could strengthen the biggest AI companies by making it harder for smaller competitors to enter the market. So, regulation should set safety conditions, not dictate the pace of innovation. That would pressure the industry's biggest incentive problem and ensure that the company that applies the brakes first is not simply the one that gets left behind. But again, it is difficult to say whether this would work either.

Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Student grievances

Apropos of "A knock at democracy's door" (FE, September 12), Gen Z protests deserve neither dismissal nor indiscriminate political endorsement. The concerns over examinations, employment, and administrative fairness are legitimate and should be addressed through responsive institutions. Social media-driven mobilisation can create rapid public pressure, but sustaining a constructive movement requires org-

anisation, credible leadership, and clearly defined objectives. Governments should treat youth protests as an opportunity to improve consultation rather than merely a law-and-order issue. Public hearings, transparent exam systems, time-bound grievance redress, and institutional dialogue with student groups can reduce distrust. Political parties too should not appropriate genuine grievances for short-term advantage. A healthy democracy is one where the young

can question authority peacefully and institutions respond with seriousness. —A Mylismi, Coimbatore

Tata Sons listing

Apropos of "RBI rejects Tata Sons' bid to remain private" (FE, September 13), the RBI's stand has slowed the group's two-year effort to stay unlisted and cleared the way for a mandatory stock market listing. The decision signals the central bank's resolve to apply upper-layer NBFC rules uniform-

ly to systemically important conglomerates. But it could help unlock the true value of Tata Sons' vast investments in companies such as TCS, Tata Motors, and Tata Steel. Tata Sons has traditionally focused on long-term business values. Listing may expose it to pressure from shareholders seeking immediate profits, potentially affecting its ethical and strategic approach. —Bal Govind, Noida

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thehindubusinessline.

MONDAY • SEPTEMBER 14, 2026

BRICS and gaps

New Delhi meet showcases potential and chinks

To India's credit, the just concluded BRICS summit in New Delhi was surprisingly purposeful given the differences between the 11 member countries in the wake of two ongoing wars, in the Persian Gulf area and Ukraine. The joint declaration reflects a mature attempt to create a common ground among the Global South to promote wide-ranging technological and social sector collaboration overriding divergent strategic interests. A disruptive US could well have acted as a catalyst here.



There can, however, be no denying that BRICS is a fractious grouping, with China exercising overweening influence. Even so, BRICS has managed to position itself as a countervailing force to the US accounting for 40 per cent of global GDP and 26 per cent of world trade. The US has been hostile to BRICS for strategic and economic reasons. First, BRICS is seen as a platform for China and Russia to expand their influence. Second, it posits an alternative global governance system, with a greater say for developing countries in 'western' institutions such as the IMF, World Bank, UNSC, UNFCCC and WTO. Third, BRICS has been working at non-dollar settlement systems, at least to transact within its members and 10 partner countries.

It is notable that the declaration expresses the need in West Asia to maintain 'smooth flow of global trade, supply chains and energy in accordance to international law'. Iran and the UAE, both BRICS members but in opposite camps, have signed on to this, even as the conflict has escalated in the region — a testimony to BRICS' potential. Without naming US as an aggressor in any context, BRICS has called it out with respect to attacks on Occupied Palestine. It has assailed 'indiscriminate' tariffs and non-tariff measures, and 'protectionism under the guise of environmental objectives', targeting both the US and EU. A BRICS currency has more or less been shelved, but settlement systems in local currencies have already picked up, more so in the shadow of sanctions on Russia after 2022. India has been at pains to clarify that it is not part of any 'de-dollarisation' project. But it can reduce transaction costs if it is able to trade in its currency and those of BRICS member countries. It has been doing so with Russia. However, this effort has to turn multilateral so that the third party demand for currencies other than the yuan increases even as technology makes such arrangements easier.

Meanwhile, China's Cross Border Interbank Payment System, which is both a messaging and settlement network, has expanded in scope since February 2026 to allow multi-currency settlements. China accounts for over 60 per cent of BRICS trade and its surplus with the BRICS members, including India, has been rising over time. India surely cannot be comfortable with yuan emerging as the de facto BRICS currency. Its neutrality in BRICS lends credibility to the grouping. For BRICS to truly grow in stature, it must be less China-driven than it is now.

OTHER VOICES.

The Guardian

Controlling AI: humanity cannot outsource its survival
If there were a 10% chance that AI could wipe out humanity, no responsible government would leave its development to companies racing to build it. Yet until recently, that seemed to be the case. The warning was all the more ominous because it was made by a researcher at Anthropic, the trillion-dollar AI company behind the Claude chatbot. The dangers of AI-enabled pandemics or attacks on nuclear systems are real. Countries need not agree on democracy or trade policy to accept this. The US and China will hold, reportedly, their first bilateral AI-safety talks before a planned White House summit between Donald Trump and Xi Jinping. Despite their tech rivalry, neither Washington nor Beijing can make the most advanced AI safe on their own. A US-China settlement won't be able to say how AI works everywhere. Countries deploying AI must help write the global rulebook. The odds on an extinction event are shortening. (LONDON, SEPTEMBER 11)

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Trump's real problem is real wages

The August inflation report came in stubbornly high on Friday, which means there's no reprieve for the White House this election year, or for the Federal Reserve when it meets on monetary policy next week. Only if the Fed focuses on reducing inflation will President Trump get the lift in real wages that he presided over in his first term. The Labor Department on Friday reported that the consumer price index rose 0.4% in August, and 3.4% over the last year. While energy prices drove most of the monthly surge, that's no consolation to consumers. (NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 11)

LINE & LENGTH.

TCA SRINIVASA RAGHAVAN

Another BRICS summit is over. China with its trade surpluses was clearly the overwhelming big daddy. It accounts for over 60 per cent of intra-BRICS trade and investment. Russia with its oil ran a close second. India trailed far behind with nine tail-enders.

Many people in India are full of admiration for China's economic success, like they were for Pakistan in the 1980s. But Pakistan went phut because it didn't have the political systems and institutions to sustain growth. China has the same problem. From 1950 to 1980 we admired and copied the USSR which also went phut in 1990.

That's why I always ask people who admire China if they would like to swap our political system and institutions with China's. No answer is forthcoming.

But let's leave aside the politics and sociology and examine the India-China comparisons from a purely economic lens. The starting point has to be the acknowledgement that neoclassical economics is founded on the idea of political liberties, which China doesn't permit. But we have a surfeit of these liberties.

Chinese GDP, meanwhile, is \$20 trillion. Ours is not even five. So the question has to be whether the absence of such liberties facilitates rapid growth in industrial output.

In China it does, but in the USSR it didn't. The West also didn't have full political liberties — of the sort we have had since 1950 — till about 50 years ago. You can check this out.

CAPITAL OR LABOUR

There can be no doubt whatsoever that political liberties and rapid economic

If Chinese political stability is ensured by massive force and widespread denial of political rights, Indian economic stability is ensured by suppressing economic freedoms. Which is preferable?



A tale of two systems

India-China comparisons don't make sense. The two countries are chalk and cheese

growth are inversely related. When you expand one, the other contracts. The more you have of the former the slower will the latter be. Look at East Asia after 1990.

There are no exceptions to this rule because growth depends on giving primacy to capital. Strange as it may sound, this is Marx 101. And it's not just

China, all the 'Asian Tigers' were like that. This has been said by several Nobel winning economists as well.

Unconstrained optimisation means capital flows into China and flows out of India. Period. Our emphasis on liberties means capital gets short shrift.

All our laws favour labour because we are a rights-based society. And when we

try to correct the imbalance, as in 1991 or 2006 or 2019, there is protest. Just look at the number of trades unions and NGOs jumping up and down all the time and laying siege to the Supreme Court.

It must be asked why liberals object to a politically hard state, which is what we need for ever increasing investment and industrial output. You can't have one without the other. It doesn't work like that.

Also, when was the last time anyone compared Indian agricultural performance with China's? India achieved food self-sufficiency in the 1970s, so much so that the massive drought of 1979 went unnoticed by the world. China is nowhere near it.

In fact, food is one of China's biggest vulnerabilities alongside energy. It has enough of neither. All the world has to do is to reduce food and energy exports to China 10 or 15 per cent and we will see how the paper tiger roars. India is quite safe that way.

We also have absolutely no idea of the efficiency of its capital use. The fact that the government's first priority is employment, Chinese industry is hugely subsidised. That has created what economists call a moral hazard problem: there is very little incentive to save on capital. Few people realise it but China has made the same mistakes as the old Soviet Union where efficiency is concerned.

APPLE OR ORANGE?

The point I am making is that when you compare two entirely different systems of governance you shouldn't just look at one part and draw large conclusions. The correct questions to ask must be about systemic stability: which countries have stable systems and which are resting on a pin?

If Chinese political stability is ensured by massive force and widespread denial of political rights, Indian economic stability is ensured by suppressing economic freedoms. Which is preferable?

What would happen if China allowed even a fraction of Indian political rights and India allowed a small degree of Chinese economic freedom? Neither is going to happen.

China has a lot of hugely subsidised economic competition. We have a lot of hugely subsidised political competition. You can choose between them.

That's why we should stop admiring what we don't have and start boasting about what we do and keep expanding those things. China has the economic brain but not the political brain. And that is going to be its biggest long term liability.

NSE has priced everything except itself

By going in for listing, NSE offers investors an asset whose returns follow the market's activity rather than its direction

V Shunmugam

For three decades, the National Stock Exchange (NSE) has priced everything India owns except itself. That is about to change. The exchange filed its draft red herring prospectus on June 17, 2026, for 148.9 million shares, close to six per cent of paid-up capital. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has since issued its observation letter. Before a traded price begins to summarise the exchange, its record and unfinished agenda deserve an audit.

The record begins with an index. NSE created the Nifty and made it the benchmark for Indian equity risk. Its pull took a slice of India's price discovery offshore, to a Singapore Exchange contract. The answer was construction, not a ban. Since NSE International Exchange began full operations at Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City) on July 3, 2023, the GIFT Nifty contract has recorded more than 69.56 million contracts and \$3.21 trillion in turnover.

Next came operational credibility. In the mid-1990s, screen-based trading across a national network, straight-through settlement and a clearing corporation standing between every buyer and seller were rare. That is why foreign portfolio investors treated India as a destination, not an experiment. Registered investors rose

from 30.87 million in March 2020 to 129.1 million in March 2026. The growth is no longer confined to metropolitan areas: Uttar Pradesh led new registrations in 2024-25, adding 29.5 lakh investors. The same instant built institutions. In 1996, the exchange set up the National Securities Depository Ltd along with the Industrial Development Bank of India and the Specified Undertaking of the Unit Trust of India. The depository was listed last year, with NSE among its selling shareholders. The pattern extended to NSE Indices, NSE Data and Analytics, NSE Clearing, and the exchange and clearing corporation at GIFT City. Some capabilities were built and then handed over: acting on the Mahalingam Committee's recommendations, the exchange exited its technology and skillings businesses in early 2025. Letting go of what specialists can run better says as much as the balance sheet.

UNUSUAL BALANCE SHEET

That balance sheet is unusual. Revenue from operations was ₹16,601 crore in FY26, with profit of ₹10,302 crore, both easing after SEBI's derivative measures. Operating margins are near 76 per cent, net debt is zero, and the treasury book stands at about ₹64,771 crore. Roughly 51.2 per cent of global equity derivative contracts pass through the exchange, a position held for seven consecutive years, along with about 93 per cent of cash equity turnover.



BIG JUMP. Registered investors on the NSE have risen significantly. Bloomberg

What does listing add to an institution that is already considered a deemed listed entity, with disclosures, board, and conflict norms equal to or better than those of a listed company? The regulations remain largely the same; however, their enforcement varies significantly. Since the exchange lacks a promoter and the Life Insurance Corporation of India holds the largest stake at 10.72 per cent, ownership is widely spread; the listing will make the market the key oversight mechanism.

The open agenda deserves equal attention. Listed companies have a combined market value of ₹411 trillion across nearly 3,000 firms, while the corporate bond market is a fraction of that and municipal debt is barely present. Commodity derivatives remain thin in an economy that lives off agriculture and now leans on manufacturing. The Emerge platform

for smaller firms was worth ₹1.8 trillion in March 2025. Retail's share of market value reached a 22-year high of 18.75 per cent in the second quarter of 2025-26, but retail money still prefers short-dated derivatives to ownership. Each gap is a multi-year commitment that a listed company must defend every quarter.

The offer structure is often misread. It is only an offer for sale, so the money goes to the selling shareholders and not to the exchange. The Life Insurance Corporation, the State Bank of India, other banks and development finance institutions have held the stake for decades at close to original cost. Listing turns a locked strategic holding into liquid capital when the primary market needs it. The timing is a test in itself. With a heavy pipeline lined up for the coming quarters, an issue of this size will measure domestic institutional and household demand better than any survey.

For regulators, the listing carries forward what corporatisation and demutualisation began. For investors, it offers an asset whose returns follow the market's activity rather than its direction. For policymakers, the sharper question is not what the exchange has built, but which of the remaining gaps it will now be pressed to close, when 129 million investors can also be its shareholders and its performance is priced every day.

The writer is Partner, MCCube

BELOW THE LINE



Xi skips PM dinner

One bus, one dinner — and one notable absence. Chinese President Xi Jinping gave Prime Minister Narendra Modi's gala dinner a miss, even as Russian President Vladimir Putin and other BRICS leaders joined the host for the evening reception. Union ministers and chief ministers of several states were also present. In a touch of unusual choreography, the ministers and chief ministers

attending the dinner arrived at the venue in a single bus from Parliament, turning the journey itself into a small spectacle of the summit.

A musical at BRICS

BRICS diplomacy acquired a distinctly musical note in Delhi on Saturday, with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, in the capital for the summit, being serenaded by Kishore Kumar's iconic 'Khwaab Ho Tum Ya Koi Haqeeqat' from the 1965 film 'Teen Deviyaan'. The unexpected rendition of the Bollywood classic offered a lighter moment amid the high-powered diplomacy surrounding the summit.

Fintech mysteries

While the main stage buzzed with AI and tokenisation, much of the action at Global Fintech Fest was happening off it. Day one saw SEBI Chairman

and IOSCO's top brass in not one but two closed-door meetings, with no livestream and little detail on what was discussed. Elsewhere, State Bank of India Chairman C S Setty was spotted working the crowd, despite not being on the public agenda for the day. Add another dozen or so such sessions across three long days, including those involving FATF and RBI, and even a private GIFT City interaction with the Finance Minister, and it seemed this year's real fintech conversations were happening behind closed doors. Meanwhile, Sarvam AI set itself apart by livestreaming its entire 'closed-door' meeting but kept the media present at the venue out of the hall.

No easy answers

At NSE's pre-IPO press meet, perspective reporters were

reminded, comes with time. NSE MD and CEO Ashish Kumar Chauhan, responding to concerns over how the industry would navigate a tougher regulatory environment, suggested that reporters had not "tracked exchanges as a business long enough" to understand market cycles. Chauhan also made a rare switch to Gujarati when answering one query for the relevant audience. Questions on the lower price band and offer size were shrugged off to the investment bankers, none of whom were part of the answering panel, despite all 20 being present in the room. Invitations for the press meet went out only the previous night, while foreign media were conspicuously left out.

Money matters

South African president Cyril

Ramaphosa made a pitch to Indian corporates to invest in the country. While most of Ramaphosa's address as a CII organised roundtable focused on reforms and improved credit rating, he ended it on a lighter note that drew laughter. "Yesterday I went to the BRICS business forum I had a little bit of cold which I usually develop with too much air conditioning. So my sense of smell was little bit reduced," the president said. "This morning I woke up a lot better. As I entered this room and because my sense of smell has improved greatly I could smell money. So meeting you here I have a greater sense that I am in the presence of people with money. So I want you to come and invest in South Africa," he remarked.

Our Bureaus

After innovation, what?

Designing the conditions for collective genius

BOOK REVIEW.

Debeshi Chakraborty

Form follows function and culture follows environment. Behind both, is genius at play, designing the conditions for possibility. That axiom is a useful entry point to *Genius at Scale: How Great Leaders Drive Innovation*. It's not simply about where innovative ideas come from. The harder challenge is what happens next: how does an organisation take an idea and make it work at scale?

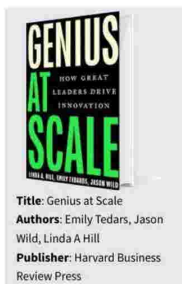
Building on Linda A Hill's earlier work, *Collective Genius*, the book argues that scaling requires co-creation: collaborating, experimenting and learning across boundaries.

LEADERSHIP ARCHETYPES
The research introduces three leadership archetypes: Architect, Bridger, and Catalyst. Architects create the culture and capabilities that enable people to innovate. Bridgers make connections that would otherwise not happen. Catalysts take those possibilities into wider ecosystems. What interested me is the movement away from the leader as the person with the answer towards the leader who makes other people's genius possible.

The book gets there largely through stories. Michael Ku, then Vice President and Head of Global Clinical Supply at Pfizer in Groton, Connecticut, is one example. Leadership coaching helped him see that colleagues saw him as directive and that the timing of his speech affected both psychological safety and discussion. Ku began to "speak last." Under the extraordinary pressure of Covid-19, his team transitioned from thinking like executors to acting like innovators, helping complete vaccine trials in just 266 days. The Architect expressed it through something surprisingly small: when the leader chooses to speak.

Ajay Banga, then CEO of Mastercard, takes the Architect to organisational scale. His vision of "World Beyond Cash" reframed the business narrative, while his 50-25-25 model put resources behind this future. But Banga's story also intersects with Gary Lyons, one of the book's "Bridgers," who connected people, ideas and opportunities across boundaries. The relationship is revealing. Scaling innovation is rarely the work of one leadership archetype.

Then there is Kathy Fish, then Chief Research, Development and



Title: *Genius at Scale*
Authors: Emily Tedars, Jason Wild, Linda A Hill
Publisher: Harvard Business Review Press

Innovation Officer at Procter & Gamble, who talks how coaching became part of how experimentation happened. Coaches tracked executives' statement to question ratio. It exposed how leaders could encourage experimentation while inadvertently shutting it down by judging or supplying answers too quickly. Generative questions such as "What did you learn? How do you need to learn next? How can I help?" shifted leaders from answer-givers to environment-creators.

The pattern appears again at Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi. Dr Rakesh Suri, then CEO, used biweekly group coaching with an executive team that often held back opinions. They became trusted sparring partners, reconsidering assumptions, acknowledging what they did not know and eliminating their "silent thought bubbles." As that behaviour travelled through the hospital, teams began co-creating their own experiments and solutions.

The ABC framework is memorable, although real leadership is unlikely to stay within three tidy boxes. A CEO may read it as a book about building systems. Recognising the Bridger's world of influence without authority might be the takeaway for the manager, while entrepreneurs and social-impact leaders may gravitate towards the Catalyst. When AI is expanding what individuals can do, the book offers a useful counterpoint. Technology can amplify individual genius. Scaling it is still a truly human endeavour. Hence the question for a future-ready leader is "What conditions can I create for the genius of others to emerge and scale?"

The reviewer is an Executive & Leadership Coach and Commonwealth Scholar

A chronicle of a divided discipline

An even-handed and exceptionally well-researched work on how India's history has been interpreted in the last 150 years

BOOK REVIEW.

Uday Balakrishnan

Shaan Kashyap's book is an account of how India's history has been interpreted first by the British and later by Indian historians over the last 150 years. Over time, and particularly since Independence in 1947, these interpretations have hardened into two broad camps: Left-secular and Hindu-nationalist, each accusing the other of bending history to ideological ends.

Taking up historian Sumit Sarkar's observation that Indian historians rarely examined their own positions in society, Kashyap has produced a social history of historians themselves, the institutions they controlled, their interventions in public life, and the ideologies driving their craft.

Kashyap's book stands out for its even-handedness, which has unsurprisingly attracted praise across ideological divides. It is an exceptionally well-researched work, distinguished as much by the engaging lucidity of its prose as by the courage required to write it in the present milieu.

Kashyap begins his story in 1872, when Sir Syed Ahmad Khan objected to 'Itihaas-e-Timur-Nasahi', a history textbook by Shiv Prasad, for what he considered was its unfair treatment of Muslims. India's textbook was evidently began long before today's ideological camps acquired recognisable form. Kashyap follows colonial attempts to interpret India's past in ways favourable to British rule as well as the evolution of Indian historical consciousness that developed against them during the freedom movement.

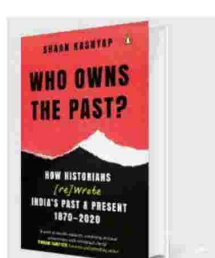
The secular rendering of Indian history took root around the time of Partition and Independence, backed

strongly by India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. This narrative sought to foster a national identity aligned with the Nehruvian ideal of 'unity in diversity'. Backed by internationally renowned historians such as Romila Thapar and Irfan Habib, this interpretation also enjoyed considerable institutional influence for much of the post-Independence period. It however faced constant challenges from Hindutva groups, which conceptualised India not primarily as a secular nation but as a Hindu civilisation. This alternative perspective acquired considerably greater institutional traction after the Modi led government came to power in 2014.

TEXTBOOK STRUGGLES
The post-Independence textbook struggles began early. Kashyap locates their origins in Communist Kerala in 1957, when the EMS Namboodiripad government became embroiled in disputes over lessons involving the Bolshevik Revolution and Maoist China.

The Congress-led central government, which remained in power for much of the post-Independence period, took steps to advance its secular, national-integration agenda. One early instance was the displacement of historian RC Majumdar from the writing of the official history of the freedom movement in favour of the state endorsed Tara Chand. More remarkable was a 1970 National Council of Educational Research and Training publication, the *Screening Record Booklet*, intended to help identify and excise from textbooks content considered detrimental to national integration. Laudable as that objective was, it raises a question running through Kashyap's book: when do the state's interventions of this kind become outright censorship?

The nationalist counter-offensive produced excesses of its own. Kashyap records how *Sanskriti* Gyan booklets



Title: *Who Owns the Past?*
Author: Shaan Kashyap
Publisher: Vintage Books
Price: ₹799

associated with the RSS-linked Vidya Bharati school network renamed the Arabian Sea *Sindhu Sagor* and imagined a civilisational India extending beyond the country's present borders. He also examines the interventions of Murlidhar Manohar Joshi, Education Minister in the Vajpayee government, to promote a Hindutva interpretation of history.

Kashyap also challenges the fiction of a unified secular Left. During the Ayodhya controversy, JNU historian Majid Hayat Siddiqi refused to sign the historians' 1989 pamphlet *The Political Abuse of History*. He warned that professional historians risked compromising their scholarly authority when they entered active political and judicial disputes as historians rather than simply as citizens.

For Kashyap historians are neither neutral custodians of facts nor helpless victims of governments. They are public actors who sit on committees, author

textbooks, control institutions and sometimes even become political actors themselves. The struggles within bodies like the Indian Council of Historical Research, the Indian History Congress, the National Council of Educational Research and Training among several others are well brought out by Kashyap. Kashyap's book covers in depth how, with each change of government, yesterday's dominant interpretation is today's target for correction. The conflict intensified as the BJP emerged nationally, culminating in the battles over "safranisation" during the Vajpayee government and their reversal after the CPA took office in 2004.

INDEPENDENT WRITING
History-writing in nineteenth-century India often originated outside universities, and Kashyap sees it returning to the public sphere through independent writers, many of whom are not professional historians. What matters most is historical thinking, which enables readers to distinguish evidence and interpretation from unsubstantiated assertion and misinformation. Anyone reading Kashyap will agree with that.

India is unlikely ever to arrive at a single, permanently accepted account of its past, and Kashyap's book tells us why. The greatest value of the book therefore lies beyond the evolving interpretations of India's past. It is a valuable primer for history teachers, helping them appreciate that what they convey to students reflects a current historical interpretation, itself liable to change. A summary of the book's major arguments would serve students and general readers well too, as a reliable guide to evaluate differing accounts of India's past and to understand why they are so frequently revised.

The reviewer taught public policy and contemporary history at IISc Bengaluru and elsewhere

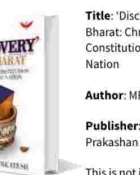
NEW READS.



Title: *Xi Jinping's New-Era China: The Inside Story*
Author: Robert Lawrence Kuhn
Publisher: Pentagon Press LLP
The insights are enlightening and revealing for those who need or want to know the real China



Title: *The Carnatic Wars*
Author: Venkatesh Parthasarathy
Publisher: HarperCollins India
The author reintroduces a forgotten episode in Indian history. Vividly narrated and deeply engaging, this is a must-read for history buffs



Title: *'Discovery' and Bharat: Christian Constitution in a Hindu Nation*
Author: MR Venkatesh
Publisher: Garuda Prakashan Pvt Ltd
This is not just a book about law. It is about power, identity, faith, society, state and the unfinished debate over Bharat's future

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

September 14, 2006

Nissan to decide soon on India factory

Nissan Motor, Japan's second-largest carmaker, said it will decide within two months on whether to build a new factory with Suzuki Motor in India. Nissan and Suzuki are working together in emerging markets including India.

Accord with Brazil on deep water oil exploration tech

Brazil and India have agreed to share technology for deep-water oil exploration and developing alternative energy sources. ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL), the overseas exploration unit of ONGC, will invest about \$400 million to buy a stake in an offshore block in Brazil, said the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh.

Tutorial help for school kids on call now

For parents, this may prove to be a lucky break. No longer would they have to struggle with their kids' tutorials. The Gurugao-based Total Learning Sources Ltd (TLSL) is soon opening a call centre where school children can phone in for tutorial help, irrespective of which board of education their school pursues. And this anytime, anywhere help would be available to kids across the globe, not just in the country.

Short take

Prathap C Reddy

India has strengthened health infrastructure, expanded medical education and used technology to take care beyond the walls of institutions. Yet healthcare remains truly inaccessible if it is not available when people need it.

Somewhere in urban India, a factory worker is postponing his annual health check for the third consecutive year. The clinic may be close to his home and the consultation affordable. But it closes before his shift ends and opens after it begins. This may appear to be a scheduling inconvenience. Multiplied across millions of working lives, it becomes a national health challenge and an economic problem hiding in plain

sight. Preventive healthcare is not merely a clinical priority. It is national infrastructure. Its returns are measured in healthier working years, fewer avoidable hospitalisations, greater productivity and families protected from the emotional and financial trauma of illnesses that could have been detected earlier.

There is encouraging evidence of what becomes possible when healthcare is designed around people's lives. In 2020, women accounted for 59.8 per cent of consultations on eSanjeevani, India's national telemedicine platform. This is particularly significant because women globally spend approximately 25 per cent more of their lives in poor health than men.

Similarly, decentralised hypertension programmes that moved treatment

closer to patients increased blood-pressure control from 20 per cent to 58 per cent, while reducing missed follow-up visits from 61 per cent to 26 per cent. The lesson is clear: when care becomes easier to reach and simpler to continue, people are more likely to remain connected to it. This is why India must now expand its definition of healthcare access.

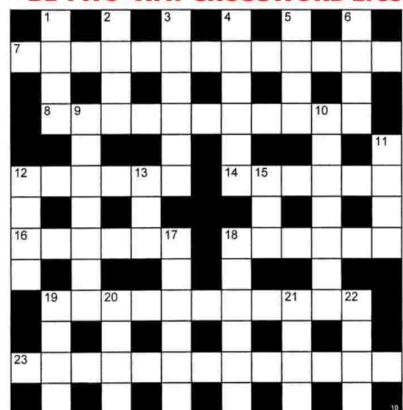
Affordability matters. Distance matters. Quality matters. Distance matters too. For a daily-wage earner, a medical consultation during working hours can mean lost income. For a working mother, a preventive screening may compete with both professional and family responsibilities. For an older person, every appointment may require the time and assistance of a caregiver.

India should, therefore, move towards

a seven-day model of planned healthcare — one in which consultations, diagnostics, preventive health checks, follow-ups and appropriate planned procedures are available throughout the week. This does not mean asking our doctors, nurses or technicians to work without rest. A seven-day healthcare system requires intelligent rostering, appropriate staffing, digital support and more efficient use of existing infrastructure. The principle is simple: institutions should organise themselves around the needs of patients rather than continually asking patients to reorganise their lives around institutions. The significance lies not in adding one more working day. It lies in removing one more reason for a patient to delay care.

The writer is Founder and Chairman, Apollo Hospitals

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2735



EASY

ACROSS

7. Vanishing of something from sight (13)
8. Was sensible of the good qualities (11)
12. Shaped (6)
14. Take place (6)
16. Seduce, attract (6)
18. Wine of Bordeaux (6)
19. A test of knowledge (11)
23. Betting odds at the off (8,5)

DOWN

1. Prima donna (4)
2. Inclined surface across road (4)
3. Become wider (6)
4. To starve (6)
5. Quick (4)
6. Sweep along, drive before wind (4)
9. To bewilder (7)
10. Tough kind of grass (7)
11. An entanglement (4)
12. To get in a panic (4)
13. Lug (3)
15. The lot (3)
17. Evoke, draw forth (6)
18. Make one pay a fee (6)
19. Consumes (4)
20. Well-ventilated (4)
21. Traditional Japanese small box (4)
22. Notch; to steal (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

7. Vanishing from dance, a paper is written about it (13)
8. Was fully sensible of how it increased in value (11)
12. Fashioned as it was for me, in a river crossing (6)
14. How in a hen it may very quietly come to pass (6)
16. Attraction of everything certain not to have begun (6)
18. Bordeaux produces no end of treacle (6)
19. Close inspection of what a student sits (11)
23. Beginning quietly with Patna, this is what winning punter may get (8,5)

DOWN

1. Leading soprano will help one up if quintet is involved (4)
2. Academician and politician get together in this racket (4)
3. Become wider (6)
4. Possibly his half of the family is first to starve (6)
5. Don't eat so quickly! (4)
6. A missile that will sweep along with the clouds (4)
9. It will confuse one with prep about the law in Latin (7)
10. Grass papermaker uses, or paste made from it (7)
11. One may tie it to a mark in the wood (4)
12. So doodle nonsense in a bit of a panic (4)
13. It listens to part of the argument (3)
15. Everything that remains unpaid is permitted (3)
17. To draw information from the East is legal (6)
18. Put juice in the battery, for a fee (6)
19. Grub provided in a café at sunset (4)
20. A sprightly tune at the end of a roundelay (4)
21. Japanese box that turned up in the morning (4)
22. A small cut may be made in prison (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2734

ACROSS 1. Nondescript 7. Besides 9. Grim 11. Cause 12. Expert 14. Sensational 18. Refuge 20. Enter 22. Peel 23. Outrage 24. Cheer-leader
DOWN 2. Obscure 3. Sash 4. Purge 5. Aback 6. Smite 8. Dressage 10. Exponent 13. Ute 15. Actuate 16. Crepe 17. Creek 19. Fresh 21. Wool

New Delhi Scripts a Post-US Worldview

BRICS bring out a fresh rules-based order

The New Delhi Declaration, adopted by BRICS after bridging Gulf divisions, is a manifesto for a world no longer scripted in Washington. Yes, there's no mention of Russia's war in Ukraine. Instead, it speaks generally of 'ongoing conflicts' and 'polarisation,' and plants a red pin on West Asia, Palestine especially highlighted no longer just 'in spirit'. This omission and admission aren't accidental. It's the 'global south's' way of signalling that it also can cherry-pick its moral crusades. By opposing unilateral sanctions — those that bite hardest at Russia and Iran but makes countries like India collateral — BRICS has cast doubt on the legitimacy of the West's favourite weapon. Sold as the hallmark of 'rules-based order,' sanctions are now re-framed as what they really are: coercion. In effect, BRICS has declared that 'rules-based order' isn't confined to a US-led western wallpaper design.

India's diplomats called this 'engagement at various levels'. In truth, it's strategic autonomy in practice: consensus without capitulation, response to a growing vacuum. Each member retains its position, yet the collective voice is one of sovereignty and dialogue. Narendra Modi's call for UNSC reform and financial institutions that reflect 'current economic realities' dovetails neatly with this posture. The 'global south' is tired of being in the front row of crises, but the back row of decision-making.

This is the architecture of a post-US worldview. Not anti-West, but post-West. As Sun Tzu observed, 'The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.' By refusing to fight the US' rhetorical battles by discounting them, BRICS has subdued the narrative itself. Critics may call this denial a refusal to confront. Yet, exclusion itself is power. By having India and China, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE in one tent, BRICS has shown a world order outside the creaking post-1945/1947 framing. The West may still have the tech, weaponry and economic clout. But BRICS has found the words to register and act upon the West's wobble.

Tighter US Visa Isn't All That Bad for India

Tighter visa requirements for Indians studying or working abroad will intensify competition in the domestic market for white-collar employees. It will also bridge some of the skill gap Indian recruiters confront in local higher education. Western economies are raising the salary threshold for work visas, which tend to favour specific industries where demand props up wages. This has led to a concentration of foreign college degrees sought by immigrant Indian students, and the overall volume of students applying to universities overseas has declined. The supply response is being shaped by the adverse economics of acquiring a degree overseas.

The debt incurred to live and study abroad has become unworkable for many students. Rising student indebtedness affects immigrants more than locals, whom they cross-subsidise. It works so long as the job market is competitive. Since western economies are erecting entry barriers to jobs, they will have to find alternative means of funding higher education. Some of the effects of stricter visa conditions will be felt in excess college capacity these countries had built under an easier regime. This could encourage universities to become more proactive about overseas campuses.

As a relatively faster-growing emerging economy, India can absorb a reverse brain drain. The process will be aided by the growth of GCCs. Jobs are moving to where the workers are for a wide swathe of MNCs. Immigration controls will speed up the trend. Governments seeking to distort global higher education and employment markets risk exporting both colleges and offices to countries like India that export manpower. This should lower the cost of acquiring skills in India and have second-order effects on productivity when the prodigals return home.

JUST IN JEST
Khumb galouti, paneer lababdar, millet pulao, shahtoort phirni... anyone?

The BRIC-a-Brac Khana Xi Missed

Xi Jinping came to the BRICS party. But he — and crown prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Khalid bin Mohamed, — skipped the dinner on Saturday, leaving khantvli mille-feuille to roll solo and khumb galouti to grill in quiet protest. The starters alone were a metaphor for multilateralism: gram flour tempered with mustard (India's spice), coconut (Brazil's tropical nod) and yoghurt (Russia's dairy diplomacy). Paneer lababdar promised soft power in tomato gravy while gucchi marmik — Himalayan morels simmered with saffron and manna almas — was practically a UN resolution in a bowl.

Carrot bean poriyol teased South Indian federalism in virgin coconut oil and millet pulao was a sustainable development goal disguised as comfort food. Even beetroot raita looked like a peacekeeping mission — cool, pink and trying to calm everyone down. Dessert was pure theatre. Old Delhi fruit cream with jalebi was nearly NAM-nostalgic while shahtoort phirni, topped with gold leaf, was India's way of saying 'This is the kind of dessert we can be having after every meal if we become permanent member of the UN Security Council.' Xi's absence became the evening's unintended garnish. But no matter. Perhaps, what the Chinese president needed after a long day was some hot chicken Schezwan soup for the soul, that delectable, spicy and tangy Indo-Chinese dish, in his hot room.

At BRICS, Modi and India provided an adroit demonstration of tactically gathering a motley crew

A Weekend in New Delhi



Ashok Malik

Hosting 20 countries — members and partners — at BRICS summit represented New Delhi's biggest diplomatic gathering since the 2023 G20 meeting. Expectedly, the event has generated much debate. The 45-page joint statement, too, has been read and interpreted widely. In the end, what does this amount to? Three points are worth noting.

There is the familiar, but boring, question about the coherence of BRICS. This is not a trading bloc (Asian), or strategically aligned political collective (G7, at least in its good days). In some senses, it's a grouping constantly searching for a glue and making up for it by sharing economic, social and developmental, and occasionally technological experiences among a cohort of emerging economies.

While this is true, it is also a fact that more and more countries — middle powers if you will, developing countries if you prefer — are intrigued by BRICS. They are unsure about the gains, but don't see a real loss. They are willing to test its utility. This year, at the current summit, despite its internal diversity, India and China are in a complicated relationship. Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE might as well occupy separate universes as BRICS found something to agree on. It became a forum of protest against a BRICS, but more than that as part of a series of diplomatic boxes he is tick-

Putting some back into BRICS economy

An impetuous conflict in the Persian Gulf that has now gone out of control and threatens an unending energy and food shock.

Crippling of a multilateral institutional system that was far from perfect but, still, was the only one we had. While individual grievances against Europeans and others might have been suggested, thrust of the BRICS message was not anti-West, or even aimed at the US. It was reflective of deep-seated frustration with specifically Trumpism. If anything, many of the countries would welcome a more active and involved America as a balance to China, ironically even as China is in the room.

It is a paradox that the US president has given BRICS some sort of a connective tissue — in terms of what it disdains with, even if not what it agrees upon. This is a response to the moment and to immediate challenges, including reinvigorating of the Gulf conflict on summit eve. Absent this context, the optics and language could take home, Modi and Indian diplomacy did themselves proud.

BRICS is an unusual organisation in the sum of its parts is greater than the whole. Cumulative bilateral and, where available, sub-regional affinities surpass any overarching identity. Consider India's guest list — 10 co-members, 10 partner countries. Each of them de-

ing before his visit to the US later this month. There he will meet an embattled host, boxed in by foreign policy and electoral conundrums. To whatever extent, the New Delhi stop has added to Xi Jinping's cards.

For Narendra Modi, the BRICS weekend became an occasion to demonstrate India's appeal. For all its problems, this country remains a pillar of stability standing steady amid ferocious geopolitical and economic winds in a year from hell. This explains why invited countries wanted to come and stay engaged with India. (Bangladesh was the one exception, but that is another story.) That aside, in convening even Persian Gulf rival states and drafting a statement that while admittedly a compromise, which 45-page document isn't — offered language that everyone could take home, Modi and Indian diplomacy did themselves proud.

BRICS is an unusual organisation in the sum of its parts is greater than the whole. Cumulative bilateral and, where available, sub-regional affinities surpass any overarching identity. Consider India's guest list — 10 co-members, 10 partner countries. Each of them de-

This point is often underappreciated by those who insist New Delhi must walk away from BRICS and limit its solidarity to the West, where India's biggest markets, its tech and capital sources, and its upcoming trade agreements lie. The contention about the West is correct. Trade pacts with, say, the EU and Canada, Britain and the US, open up markets for Indian manufacture, whether engineering and electronics goods, refined petro products or food items.

Nevertheless, crucial supply chains and commodities and ingredients linkages that 'enable' such exports run through BRICS family countries. These range from crude oil (UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Russia) to gas (Nigeria, metals (Bolivia), uranium (Kazakhstan), fertilisers (Egypt, Russia, Uzbekistan, Saudi Arabia), specialised coal (Indonesia, South Africa, Russia) and industrial equipment, electronics components and pharma APIs (China).

From the semiconductor ecosystem (Malaysia) to aerospace (Brazil), there are other incoming and capacity-building opportunities. One is not even going into the expanding export basket (including defence exports) with many of these countries, admittedly with the exception of China.

What is the big message? It is that in today's world, for one's world order, India's well-being and economic security cannot be met by offering humbug arguments about how India is a western-aligned country, or by suggesting it can at all ignore the West. Reality and realism are much too complex.

The author is partner, The Asia Group, and chair of its India practice

Trawl on the China Front



Harsh V Pant

Xi Jinping's visit to New Delhi for the BRICS summit — his first visit in 7 years — marked an important, if carefully calibrated, moment in India-China relations. The important point is that neither side has abandoned its assessment of the other. Rather, both are attempting to establish mechanisms through which competition can be managed without escalating into crisis.

The language surrounding the Modi-Xi meeting in Delhi is revealing. Both argued that India and China should regard each other as partners, not rivals. The central proposition: differences should not become disputes.

For Xi, this reflects Beijing's interest in stabilising its external environment amid trade and supply-chain uncertainty tensions with the US and regional instability. So, he stressed calibrating perceptions, leveraging each country's strengths, supporting each other's BRICS presidencies and coordinating in institutions such as the UN, SCO and G20. His call for India and China to remain 'good neighbours and friends' signals Beijing's preference for managing differences while preserving space for cooperation.

Modi, however, framed the relationship around India's established principles of mutual respect, sensitivity and interest. His call for a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable boundary settlement underscored that economic and multilateral cooperation cannot indefinitely substitute for progress on LAC. India's reaffirmation of positions on Taiwan and Tibet, along with its assurance that its territory would not be used for anti-China activities, signalled reassurance. New Delhi appears willing to acknowledge China's sensitivities but expects reciprocal restraint and stability from Beijing.

The visit offers reasons for cautious optimism. **► Diplomatic normalisation** Xi's return to India, the ceremonial welcome and renewed leader-level dialogue represent evidence that, since Galwan, the two sides are moving away from diplomatic paralysis. Regular political contact can create channels for managing future crises. **► Economic opportunity** India cannot insulate its growth trajectory from China. Greater trade, investment and people-to-people contacts could ease some of the frictions. But progress will depend on Beijing addressing Indian concerns over market access, investment restrictions and the trade imbalance.

► Selective cooperation Uncertainty surrounding US trade policy, tensions in West Asia and vulnerabilities in global supply chains provide reasons where Indian and Chinese interests may overlap. Such cooperation reflects pragmatic alignment where interests coincide.

The BRICS framework gives India and China a space for engagement without requiring alignment on the broader international order. India wants BRICS to remain a broad 'global south' platform while China is more willing to use it to challenge the West. Their approaches differ, but BRICS engagement serves both. Limits to rapprochement are critical. **► The core boundary** unresolved, military deployments and infra development continue, and strategic mistrust has not disappeared. India and China compete across the Indo-Pacific, tech, the global south and the neighbourhood. **► India remains** concerned over excessive dependence on Chinese supply chains and tech. Security considerations will continue to shape economic policy.

Differences over Taiwan and Tibet reflect a larger strategic divergence. India seeks a multi-polar order that allows it to work simultaneously with the US, Russia, China and other partners. China seeks an international environment less dominated by the US. These competing visions will constrain the depth of cooperation.

The thaw should be understood as managed competition rather than reconciliation. Both have recognised that uncontrolled deterioration carries high costs, but neither has altered its strategic posture. Xi's visit is best seen as a milestone in the post-Galwan stabilisation process, not a reset of ties. For durability, factors will be key: sustained peace along LAC, progress on economic and people-to-people ties and continued political engagement.

India and China are unlikely to become close strategic partners very soon. New Delhi's objective should be to eliminate competition with Beijing but to ensure that competition remains bounded, predictable and manageable. The present moment is best described as stabilisation without strategic trust, engagement without reconciliation and cooperation without convergence.

The writer is professor of international relations, King's College London

A Declaration, No Roadmap



Saibal Dasgupta

BRICS put India's diplomatic heft on display on Saturday, as New Delhi cobble together a consensus that led to the New Delhi Declaration (NDD), despite conflicts of interest among member countries.

The key question now is what happens next as the grouping prepares for its next breath. China, to address this question, one must recognise that each member views BRICS differently, shaped by its own compulsions. For instance, India got the grouping to decry the Pahalgaon terror attack of 2025 while Iran lobbied to ensure NDD condemned military strikes on it.

Though NDD reiterated the group's earlier resolution to support India and Brazil as permanent BRICS members, it set no timeline. There's clearly a Chinese hand in this. China, 1 of the 5 veto-wielding UNSC members, is unlikely to willingly share power with new members. It has repeatedly blocked Indian efforts to move UN resolutions against Pakistan's terror activities.

This is significant because Narendra Modi demanded a time-bound plan to make it happen. Speaking at the BRICS Summit, Modi said UNSC reform 'can no longer be postponed' and called for negotiations to have a definite timeframe and clear outcomes.

Though BRICS stresses partnership among member-states, China is pushing for leadership of the 'global south'. Its strength rests partly on being the world's biggest trader, running the trade surplus with most BRICS members. India, the world's biggest democracy and fastest-growing major economy, is unlikely to accept unilateral BRICS leadership in Asia when BRICS itself calls for a multipolar world. Xi Jinping presides over a competition by inviting BRICS members to join World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organization, launched in July to compete with the US in AI rule-setting. China has a similar strategy before, positioning itself as a hub of international activity by launching SCO and persuading BRICS to locate its New Development Bank in Shanghai. India's approach is different: it

wants developing countries to jointly shape rules for high-tech sectors, rather than remain 'rule-takers'. 'We must strive to transform the global south from a rule-taker to a rule-shaper,' Modi said.

China, which usually pushes BRICS towards a confrontational posture with the US, appears to have mellowed. Xi's speech stopped short of sharp criticism of the US, possibly because he does not want to foul things up ahead of his meeting with Donald Trump in Washington on September 24.

Modi has made it clear that he does not want BRICS to become an anti-West playing group. Brazil and South Africa are also inclined to adopt an aggressive posture towards the US, Russia and Iran, the biggest victims of economic sanctions. They want the group to challenge US policies more forcefully. At least 3 members — UAE, Saudi Arabia and Indonesia — would also like to challenge the US.

Without BRICS, Russia would be gravely isolated as western countries have distanced themselves from it since the start of the Ukraine war in 2022. The group of BRICS, led by Vladimir Putin with a platform to enhance relations with leaders of different countries that buy Russian oil. Nearly 90% of Russian oil and 60% of its weapons are bought by China and India.

Iran persuaded the group to include a reference to protecting people's nuclear facilities, led by western-led institutions. It regards BRICS as a key forum to air its grievances and enjoys strong backing from Russia, South Africa sees BRICS as central to its foreign-policy identity beyond the African continent. Under Lula da Silva, Brazil used BRICS to push hard for reforms in IMF and WTO. But he skipped the meeting as Brazil heads into an election year.

It is difficult to spot many deliverables in the carefully hedged joint declaration, peppered with boilerplate phrases such as 'reaffirm', 'encourage' and 'welcome'. A few actionable decisions stand out: disaster management, anti-drug operations, a solar photovoltaic roadmap and credit assessment for export-oriented MSMEs. But there is no sign of a united resolve to tackle major political and economic issues such as US tariffs and non-trade barriers, imbalanced trade between BRICS members, or the exchange of high-end technologies. The declaration reiterates the earlier resolution to settle trade in local currencies rather than relying on the dollar but offers no emphasis on energy security and trade corridors addressed shared vulnerabilities. A firm stance against unilateral tariffs and sanctions aligned with Global South priorities. The declaration reflects a balanced compromise, strengthening India's influence in shaping collective outcomes.

With no timelines for implementation and most plans lacking in detail, the declaration is more of an aspiration than a blueprint to execute them. It is difficult to say if or when many of these decisions and resolutions will take shape.

The writer is former Tel Telong correspondent



Destroy Old Files Totally

OSHO

I have heard that in the White House a president was very worried because many files had accumulated. He told his secretary to destroy all those files which were useless and to only keep those which were of any use. The secretary ordered many people to first make copies of the files in case something was needed some time, and then to destroy the files. This is how bureaucracy works. Now, this is unnecessary work: you are destroying the file but keeping a copy!

We go on accumulating useless memories, imaginations, desires that we know are unfulfillable, still we carry on. Hence our emphasis has been on how to empty the inside of our being. There is no need to keep any copies because the more spacious we are, the more conscious we become, and that consciousness is enough to respond to any situation.

As an empties oneself, one becomes aware that the burden, more efficient one is. There is not carrying ready-made answers, so one can see reality and respond. Otherwise, the mind always reacts, it never responds. It uses the ready-made answer that may not fit at all, and then you fail.

A man of absolute emptiness always has the right response. He never fails, he never regrets, he never feels guilty, he never looks back. Each act is finished so totally that there is no question of thinking about it repeatedly. He simply moves ahead, unburdened of the past.

Abridged from Meeting with Individuals/ Courtesy Osho International Foundation/ www.osho.com



Velouria The Pixies

The Pixies' 'Velouria', from their 1990's album Bossanova, is a love song picked up by a radio telescope. Its guitars sparkle and glitter. Kim Deal's bass gives the melody a pulse. Somewhere behind them, a theremin seems to announce that ordinary gravity has been suspended. Yet, for all its glorious stardom, the song is tender. Black Francis sings as though he has found someone miraculous and is slightly astonished she might just stay.

The line, 'We will waste in the shine of the ever' has planetary vibes to it while having the contours of the human heart. A small promise between two people is turned into a vast, cosmic love.

for a brief stretch of a bar into a place they might enter together. The words feel less written than discovered as if Francis briefly remembered a dream and then goes into the chorus of 'My Velouria, my Velouria'. Even I'll adore you, my Velouria — with its brazenly childish rhythm — to go find it again.

'Velouria' has the force of a rock song and the delicacy of a half-remembered summer. The song leaves you longing for some distant future nostalgia.

Chat Room

Forging Unity In Division

Appropriates the report 'BRICS Adopts New Delhi Declaration' by Consensus, Navigates Iran-UAE Divide (Sept 13). The New Delhi Declaration is a triumph for Indian diplomacy. By mediating consensus among divergent nations, India reinforced its role as bridge-builder. The call for "dialogue and diplomacy" navigated the tensions between Global South priorities. The declaration reflects a balanced compromise, strengthening India's influence in shaping collective outcomes. Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

Regulatory clarity

RBI has cleared the decks for the listing of Tata Sons

The long-awaited regulatory clarity on the issue of stock-exchange listing of Tata Sons must be welcomed. By rejecting its March 2024 application to be deregistered as a core investment company (CIC), the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has mandated the holding company of the salt-to-software conglomerate to go for immediate listing. Tata Sons' application two years ago for voluntarily surrendering its "certificate of registration" sought RBI approval to retain its privately-held status. The subject of listing Tata Sons gained ground in September 2022, when the RBI classified it, among many others, as an upper-layer non-banking financial company (NBFC). All such upper-layer NBFCs were given three years to comply with mandatory listing. Tata Sons became a debt-free company and applied to the central bank for deregistration as CIC in 2024, continuing to remain unlisted.

In a letter dated September 11, 2026, the RBI informed Tata Sons that the deregistration application had been rejected after the regulator had examined several aspects. With this, the long-drawn confusion over Tata Sons' future status as the holding company of a leading business group will be put to rest. The RBI direction has come at a time when the Tata group is battling leadership and control issues. Listing will help draw the lines more clearly between the two principal entities — Tata Trusts and Tata Sons. During the listing process, the Articles of Association (AoA) of Tata Sons will need to be recast. As a result, Tata Trusts, the largest shareholder of Tata Sons with a 66 per cent stake, is bound to lose much of its veto powers linked to appointments, dismissals and other key decisions. This will be a break from the past legacy structure of more than 100 years, but it will bring transparency, oversight and greater stability in governance, which is a must for a major group like the Tatas.

Tata Sons, with assets of over ₹2 trillion, has 26 listed entities in businesses ranging from steel to automobiles, software to power and hospitality. In addition, its unlisted businesses traverse a plethora of futuristic areas such as electronics manufacturing, semiconductors, and e-commerce. Most of these are long-generation and capital-intensive businesses. It also owns Air India, which it acquired from the government in 2022. Air India and its low-cost subsidiary Air India Express posted a record combined loss of ₹22,238 crore in the financial year ended March 2026, leading to requests to owners — Tata Sons and Singapore Airlines — for immediate funds. Against this backdrop of a large business empire across diverse areas, listing Tata Sons will provide an avenue for liquidity.

While Tata Trusts has opposed listing Tata Sons, citing an adverse impact on its philanthropic objectives, the outcome may actually be different. A more focused and efficient allocation of capital among Tata businesses could improve profitability and increase dividend flows, ensuring that the group's long-standing commitment to philanthropy is not diluted. For the second-biggest shareholder of Tata Sons, the Shapoorji Pallonji group, listing will enable fund infusion into a debt-ridden business following a partial sale of its stake. Now that the RBI's missive has lifted the regulatory uncertainty that shrouded the path forward for Tata Sons, Tata Trusts must embrace the new reality and prepare in earnest to help the group's holdco to comply with the listing norm, and thrive in an environment of greater transparency.

Showy summitry

Outcomes of the Brics summit exceeded expectations

The pomp and circumstances around the 18th Brics summit in New Delhi surpassed the modest expectations from the meet, which India hosted for the fourth time. The adoption of the declaration itself must be regarded as the key diplomatic accomplishment, with Iran and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), on opposite sides of the United States-led war in West Asia, backing down from their disagreements. This enabled the group to unanimously adopt the New Delhi Declaration. By framing the final text in neutral language, which refrained from mentioning the United States (US) and Israeli attacks on Iran or Tehran's attacks on Gulf neighbours — and also Russia's invasion of Ukraine — the statement adroitly navigated dire diplomatic straits. It spoke instead in relatively anodyne terms of the need for "exercising maximum restraint and avoiding action that could further aggravate the situation". Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address to leaders emphasising the "coming of age" of this group of emerging economies played its part in avoiding any anti-West connotations. Coming just weeks after the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meeting in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, this message was critical to those economies, India included, that are in the throes of tricky trade or bilateral talks with the US or Europe.

The fact that Chinese President Xi Jinping attended — in contrast to his conspicuous absence from the G20 meet that India hosted in 2023 — must also be viewed as a great leap forward in cooperative diplomacy between the two largest economies of Brics. Coming soon after critical flag meetings between corps commanders of both countries in Arunachal Pradesh, the visibly conciliatory language the two leaders deployed strengthened hopes of a reset. Mr Xi spoke of "complementing each other's strengths" despite many differences. Mr Modi underlined the need for both sides to observe "existing agreements and understandings on border-related issues". Brics and forums like it certainly serve as enablers for such meetings. Nevertheless, expectations from this high-profile summit need to be tempered by the past experience of China's actions on the ground. Although both leaders spoke in general terms of enhancing cultural exchanges and business links, the real test of this meet will depend on how far Beijing and New Delhi are prepared to accommodate meaningful cooperation in trade and investment.

Despite an exhaustive listing of cooperative initiatives in the New Delhi Declaration — from technology to climate change, health, education and culture — the hopes for what the grouping can achieve over the medium to long run should be restrained. This is as much the result of the widely varying sizes of the member-nations' economies as it is of the nature of their political systems and geopolitical goals. Beyond representing the Global South — with 11 full members and 10 partner countries from Asia, Africa and Latin America — discernible gains from the grouping are hard to identify. The New Development Bank, the most visible institution of cooperation, remains small in scale and dependent on the western financial system; ironically, it had to suspend loans to founding member Russia after sanctions were imposed in 2022. Efforts to develop an alternative currency to the dollar have also foundered, both because of US President Donald Trump's threats and the growing traction of alternative China-led payment systems. All told, Brics remains a benign grouping in search of an objective.

Fiscal roots of national power

Liberal democracies win conflicts through superior public finance

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



Liberal democracies meander but ultimately win. The 20th century taught us that free societies out-innovate authoritarian regimes. We tell a story of technological superiority and scientific progress. This is an incomplete picture. The outcome of geopolitical conflict is not preordained. We must understand the institutional foundations of state power.

The resolution of conflict depends on money. Cold wars and hot wars are shaped by the capability of the state to command financial resources. From the Napoleonic wars to the two World Wars and the Cold War, liberal democracies brought more resources to the table. This superiority rested on two pillars. The first was higher economic growth. The second was the capability to borrow. Populist states extract resources through coercion. This mechanism has limitations. Successful liberal democracies borrow from a deep financial system on a voluntary basis. This mechanism scales up to staggering magnitudes.

The scale of borrowing wielded by liberal democracies to win the 20th century was large. In 1914, the United Kingdom's (UK's) public debt was 25 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). By 1919, the UK state had borrowed to push this to 35 per cent. The United States' (US') debt rose from 3 per cent to 33 per cent of GDP over the same period. Between 1937 and 1945, the UK borrowed heavily, taking its debt from 154 per cent to 250 per cent of GDP. The US pushed its debt from 40 per cent to 119

per cent. The populists failed to match this staggering scale of resourcing. Populist regimes force weak financial systems. They lack the institutional machinery to channel private savings into state power.

This phenomenon has older roots. Napoleon Bonaparte was derisive of the UK, calling it a nation of shopkeepers. When his armies conquered Amsterdam, they dismantled its financial centre. The French state lost the capability to borrow. Across the English Channel, William Pitt the Younger built a financial architecture that leveraged the London bond market. Utilising this machinery, the UK borrowed heavily, pushing its debt to 260 per cent of GDP by 1815. Lenders across continental Europe overwhelmingly preferred to buy British government bonds rather than lend to the French state during the Napoleonic Wars. This capital funded the military coalitions that ultimately defeated France. The shopkeepers backed by a bond market bested the pride, machismo and revolutionary zeal.

The capability to borrow constitutes the strategic depth of the state. A capable state runs a tight ship in normal times. It runs primary surpluses, which lower the debt-to-GDP ratio. This creates the fiscal space to act when exceptional events occur. When a crisis arises, the state steps up borrowing. During the pandemic in 2020, the US government expanded its borrowing by 21 per cent of GDP in a single year to finance the state response. This flexibil-

ity is the essence of national power.

How does a state achieve this strategic depth? Two conditions are required. First, the baseline level of indebtedness must be low. A state cannot increase borrowing if it is already operating at the limits of its fiscal capacity. Second, the state requires the trust of voluntary lenders worldwide. This trust is not easily acquired. It requires centuries of experience with fair play. Lenders must believe the government will respect property rights, avoid inflationary default, and uphold the rule of law.

In the West today, this mechanism is impaired. We have entered a new Cold War and the geopolitical challenges posed by Russia and China demand a robust response. But the developed world has limited fiscal space. Debt stands at 121 per cent of GDP in the US, 237 per cent in Japan, 101 per cent in the UK, and 99 per cent in the euro area. The West possesses a large GDP, but it is weighed down by debt. It is harder to mount the muscular fiscal expansion seen in the 20th century when faced with hostile populist regimes.

In India, the project of state building is at an early stage. The Indian state lacks both elements required for strategic depth.

We do not have a large pool of voluntary lenders. The state relies on financial repression. When we step away captive buyers, voluntary lenders supply perhaps 5 per cent of the borrowing of the Indian state (<https://bit.ly/wholends>). The financial system is a mechanism for coercive state funding rather than an allocator of capital.

Private capital worries about the Indian state. Managing public debt is organised in a crude and coercive way. In modern India it's unthinkable for the Indian state to grab steel from the warehouses of steel companies, but we don't raise an eyebrow when public debt management behaves analogously every day. The state frequently engages in actions that damage trust. Voluntary lenders demand a predictable legal system where the sovereign can be sued and held to account. They demand norms of behaviour by policymakers, independent courts, and regulatory certainty.

The second failure lies in chronic fiscal indiscipline. The Indian state runs primary deficits in normal times. There is no effort to generate a primary surplus of ₹100 in each Budget. Consequently, there is a chronic and large debt-to-GDP ratio, which stands at 84.4 per cent. The state operates near the edge of its fiscal constraints during peacetime.

Through these structural failures, the Indian state lacks the strategic depth of having access to vast resources if faced with a special moment. When faced with a crisis such as the pandemic, the Indian state is down to hand wringing. An economic response like that seen in the US is inconceivable. A state that cannot borrow massively when faced with a crisis is a state that cannot defend the nation. Reforming public finance and earning the respect of private lenders are not merely matters of economic efficiency. They are requirements for the nation building. A capable state requires low based debt and deep institutional trust so that it can have the strategic depth of borrowing on a massive scale a few times per century.

The writer is a researcher at XKDR Forum



SNAKES & LADDERS
AJAY SHAH

Plastic regime needs transparency

India has recycled 17 million tonnes of plastic packaging waste since 2022 when the "Extended Producer Responsibility" ("EPR") regime came into force, shows the latest Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data. The estimated value of this plastic recycling trade comes to a whopping ₹2,500 crore — enough to fund four Chandrayaan-3 missions. Considering that India annually produces 3.8 million tonnes of plastic waste, going by CPCB estimates, we have been successful in getting rid of at least four-fifths of plastic waste generated. If this is the case, and it clearly is, based on official documents of June 2026, then why do we still see mountains of plastic waste in our cities, villages and riversides?

Clearly, something is not quite right. EPR is an instrument used universally to manage waste. It puts the onus of collecting and recycling plastic on its manufacturers — producers, importers or brand owners (PBOs). From 2023-24, in India, PBOs are mandated to collect 100 per cent of the plastic waste they generate. As of last year, PBOs had the target to recycle 40-60 per cent of this collected packaging material. For 2026-27, the target is up to 50-70 per cent, depending on the category of plastic. For instance, PBOs of category 2 plastic, which includes everything from single to multilayered packaging, used for wrapping items ranging from chips to shampoo sachets, are mandated to collect 100 per cent of their plastic packaging and recycle 50 per cent of it, as of this year.

For recycling, PBOs contract with plastic waste processors (PWP), units required to be registered with the CPCB. There are over 1,000 registered PWPs, according to the official data. These units are paid in

accordance with CPCB-mandated rates — ₹870 per tonne for category 1 (pet bottles and the like); ₹1,500 per tonne for flexible plastic (packaged food and other household items); and ₹2,500 per tonne for compostable material. Each tonne of plastic recycled is equal to one EPR certificate. Taking an average rate of ₹1,500 per tonne, the value of 17 million tonnes of plastic waste recycled by India since 2022 comes to ₹2,500 crore.

If PBOs do not meet their targets for recycling, they are charged a hefty environmental compensation. This cost of non-compliance is 2.5 times the cost of compliance. The CPCB estimates that the cost of plastic waste recycling is ₹4,000 per tonne, which it then distributes equally between municipalities and producer companies, averaging ₹2,000 per tonne. If PBOs fail, they are slapped with an environmental compensation of ₹5,000 per tonne for category 2 plastic, for instance.

This sounds great. In fact, it sounds so great that the government is said to be considering taking this system to the stock market to allow trading of EPR certificates. But then, I ask again, if this system is working so well, why do we see so much plastic everywhere? My colleagues audited plastic in the drains of Agra city and found that branded plastic packaging made up 70 per cent of the waste. Then how can companies claim 100 per cent collection? You will find the same if you look at any garbage dump in your vicinity. Let's look at what can go wrong.

First, does the PBO target underestimate the waste generated? In 2024, my colleagues analysed the official EPR portal and found that 41,544 PBOs had registered and were assigned recycling targets based on self-reported data. How this quantity was

validated is not clear.

Second, how does the CPCB verify the volume of waste processed and recycled? The CPCB says it does this through audits and ground-checks. On June 26, the CPCB directed different states to take action against non-compliant PWPs. The audit (not available publicly) seems to suggest that many PWPs were generating certificates more than their registered capacity and other violations. The problem is compounded because it is difficult to trust or verify in this business. The CPCB says PWPs must upload GST (goods and services tax) invoice as proof of sale of the finished recycled product. The problem is most cases are plastic pellets, which are then used mostly by industries in the informal sector. Worse, the high rate of GST, at 18 per cent, makes "open" business unviable.

The third issue is even more fundamental. If costs PBOs 2.5 times more to pay for non-compliance, they should want to pay for recycling at PWPs. But this cost also creates a perverse incentive to "arrange" for certificates and not for recycling. It is also because in many cases, recycling is not feasible at the agreed rate. Our research finds that the real cost of recycling the same category 2 plastic would be ₹4,000 to ₹6,000 per tonne — much higher than the set rate of ₹1,500 per tonne.

That said, we need more ways to improve the learning for scrutiny and compliance. But the opposite is happening. As on June 28, 2026, the EPR portal is available only to a closed group of users. It can be argued that this has been done because EPR is a lucrative business and private information must be kept confidential. But this lack of transparency will only make things worse. This is not governance for tomorrow, nor even of yesterday.

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DOWN TO EARTH
SUNITA NARAIN

The rise and fall of an Epstein financier



JONATHAN MAHLER

The financier Leon Black may be entitled to his own wall in the regues' gallery of Jeffrey Epstein's enablers. Between 2012 and 2017, Black gave Epstein a staggering \$158 million — or more than \$170 million if you count a big loan that Epstein had not made good on when he hanged himself in his jail cell in 2023. Not only did the revelations of these payments put a premature end to Black's Wall Street career, they ensured that he would be remembered not as one of the great dealmakers of his time but as Epstein's most generous client.

In *Money to Burn*, the journalist William D Cohan offers a detailed account

of Black's rise and fall. A former investment banker himself, Cohan is nothing if not thorough, and this book is a coup of reporting, based on extensive interviews with Black, his business partners and many others who are often quoted at great, and at times trying, length. Cohan is telling two stories, really. One is about Black. The other is about the private equity firm he built, Apollo Global Management, which has been at the centre of Wall Street's ongoing transformation from a place dominated by relatively staid banks and brokerage houses to a more shadowy realm ruled by "alternative asset managers" who raise and lend their own capital.

Black's arc makes for an almost perfect parable for the corrupting influence of money. His father, Eli, was selling into life as a Long Island rabbi when he pivoted in the mid-1940s. Eli Black became enormously successful, the architect and chief executive of an international conglomerate called the United Brands Company. But his life ended tragically: In early 1975, with the com-

pany facing mounting financial problems and a bribery scandal, he leaped out the window of his 44th-floor office in Manhattan's Pan Am Building.

None of this deterred Leon from going into finance. Armed with a pair of Ivy League degrees (Dartmouth College, Harvard Business School), he started his career in 1977 at Drexel Burnham Lambert, the junk-bond powerhouse where men of virtue were in distinctly short supply.

When Drexel was forced into bankruptcy in 1990, following a protracted federal investigation into illegal trading, Black launched Apollo. He and his new team raised hundreds of millions of dollars to get started. Their plan was to leverage this money to gain control of distressed companies and then have their way with them.

As Cohan makes clear, Black and his partners fared a lot better in these ventures than the employees or customers of the entities they bought. A series of sexual assaults at an Apollo-owned acute-care facility in Iowa helped

prompt a Senate report, whose title — Profits Over Patients: The Harmful Effects of Private Equity on the U.S. Health Care System — speaks volumes and yet may still underestimate the matter.

I guess everyone needs a hobby. Black's was art. In 2012, he spent nearly \$120 million for Edward Munch's 1895 drawing of *The Scream*. By then, Black had long been friendly with Epstein, whom he had met at a wedding in 1996. Black spoke at length to Cohan about his interactions with Epstein, presumably believing that this book might help him clear his name. And Cohan gives Black plenty of room to mount his defence: Black claims that he paid Epstein these exorbitant sums solely for his tax- and estate-planning advice.

Cohan seems sceptical, but neither does he fully endorse the seemingly credible alternative: That Epstein was less financial adviser than personal funder for Black, helping him manage his illicit relationships with numerous women.

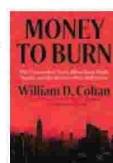
The news of Black's entanglement with Epstein first broke in 2019. Then, in

March 2021, Guzel Ganieva, a young Russian woman to whom Black had paid millions of dollars in hush money, wrote on X that she'd been sexually abused by him.

Days later, Black stepped down from Apollo. A few months after that, Black filed a suit against cofounder Josh Harris and Ganieva, accusing them of conspiring to make her sexual-abuse claims public in an effort to push him out. The lawsuit was dismissed by a federal judge in Manhattan in 2022. A year later, though, Black prevailed in a civil suit that Ganieva had filed against him, accusing him of defamation and sexual assault.

In laying out this sordid saga, Cohan offers a lot of conflicting claims. It's my one gripe with this book: Cohan also focused on allowing his subjects to have their say that he delegates too much of the storytelling to them rather than forcefully shaping the narrative himself.

In *Money to Burn*, Cohan doesn't reach his own conclusion about the mystery at the heart of Black's story:



Money to Burn: The Unvarnished Truth About Leon Black, Apollo, and the Rise of a New Wall Street
By William D Cohan
Published by Portfolio
667 pages \$40

What, exactly, was he paying Epstein for?

Setting this issue aside, *Money to Burn* is an engaging and valuable work, a portrait of a man and a milieu whose terrible devastation to the accumulation of personal wealth may test your faith in capitalism. What's more, if Black's hope was that Cohan would help redeem his character, he may be disappointed with the final product, which closely chronicles his tawdry descent into infamy.

And yet since Black's departure, Apollo has moved more aggressively into the private-credit markets. Business

is booming. Black has been thoroughly disgraced in the court of public opinion, but he remains a powerful individual shareholder. With an estimated personal fortune of around \$15 billion, he is surely richer than ever.

The reviewer is a staff writer for *The New York Times Magazine*. ©2026 The New York Times News Service



CONTRAPUNTO

People understanding more clearly what's going on, on net, generally tends to be a force for good

—AJEYA COTRA, METR

Don't Spin Us, Guys

AI bosses say the tech they're spending billions on, can kill us. What's, really, up?

Here we go again. Spinning however the AI overlords spin us. They say the end of jobs is nigh. Then they say, oh wait, no, the apocalypse is postponed. They are supposed to be rivals. But somehow, in sending the world down this wormhole or that, they act in tandem. Their song of the week is that ooooh, "we" must slow down development of AI capabilities, because of an imminent risk of recursive self-improvement, or RSI, where it escapes "our" control, and does very bad things. Anthropic put out a 154-page report, OpenAI's chief scientist a 3,000-word essay, A model another 3,800-word one, to which Altman and Musk said, yeah dude. But between all these words, like the worst of chain-of-thought chatbot blather, what's to be done remains unknown and passive-voiced.

The most solid proposal on the table is "widely mandated safety bars for continued development", to be enforced by a network of third-party auditors, govt agencies, international bodies. But you have heard many a Miss Universe ask for world peace in exactly this slippery fashion. A big red flag is that the same gentlemen have said the same things earlier too, and only picked up the pace in AI development since. In the first half of 2026, OpenAI, Anthropic, xAI, and Prometheus gobbled three-fourths of the \$372bn raised across 336 deals of the US growth equity sector. And large chunks of this money is going, not to hire researchers, but to colossally raise computing capacity. Translation: there is no pause on monitoring AI by AI. Quite the opposite.

There are also theories that CEO alarmism is actually about wicked plans to cement their market leadership, or sell new cybersecurity products, or deal with private fundraising hitting a ceiling. It's not just the overlords though. The researchers can also sing in tandem. Jacob Coxon, who left OpenAI for Anthropic, has now left Anthropic saying both companies are "racing straight to self-improving superintelligence and gambling with our lives". That post got 100m views in 24 hours. With an ex-colleague, who's still on the job, pitching in his agreement that the risk of AI killing us all "is >10% within the next decade". At a layperson level, this makes no sense. If one is really worried about this kind of thing, how does one keep at it? And if the risk is real, why aren't groups jumping in? Serious people, much earlier, had said AI can be destructive. Maybe we should re-read that stuff. Because those guys weren't spending billions on a thing they were also warning about.



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Let Cities Breathe

Urban development must not be at the cost of green, open spaces. Mumbai & Bengaluru reminded us

At the just-concluded BRICS Summit in New Delhi, leaders of member countries joined Modi in a symbolic tree planting ceremony. That was a nice touch. Officials across India, who authorise cutting down thousands of trees in cities, should take note. It's nobody's case that cities don't need projects. But must it always be at the cost of a few, precious open spaces? Recently, hundreds protested at Mumbai's 8,450 sqm Neville D'Souza Football Ground, to oppose a proposal to convert it into an exhibition-and-convention centre. Bombay HC has already directed authorities to take no further action on the proposal till Sept 18.

Similar stories are playing out across cities. In Bengaluru, citizens successfully opposed a proposed amendment to the Govt Parks (Preservation) Act, which would have allowed up to 5% of govt park and garden land to be used for public utilities. Need we say again that green, open spaces are crucial for cities, most of which are choking. Such areas are needed for recreation, for improving quality of life, to serve as heat sinks, to recharge groundwater, and act as the lungs of a city. India's own development guidelines recommend 10-12 sqm of open space per person. But most cities fall way short of that benchmark.

There are two approaches to this. First, govt and govt bodies like the Railways are the largest owners of land in the country, a lot of it lying unused. There needs to be a thorough audit of such land, allowing for conversion and utilisation for urban public utilities. Second, there needs to be a new approach to urban development that marries placemaking with urban green spaces. Essentially, development of urban infra must happen with participation of locals, a process that takes into account people's needs and aspirations, and preserves open spaces, unless the project can't be shifted. Urbanisation is expanding in India. Our cities must be both functional and liveable.

Eighties Meet Prompt

And a family squabbles over its retro avatars

Anil Abraham



I was very excited about the new trend. Everyone is prompting AI to transform them, so they can see what they would have looked like in the 80s, I informed Kamala enthusiastically. "If you just wait a few more years, you will see what you look like in your eighties for real," she replied. As usual, she had completely misinterpreted the trend. I pulled out my phone and showed her Neighbour Narsimha looking like Rajesh Khanna. High-waisted trousers, suspiciously wavy hair, vividly coloured jacket, oversized sunglasses. Retro chic at its best — with vintage backdrop and large dollies of nostalgia. Politicians, celebrities, and every content creator aspiring to go viral have jumped onto this bandwagon.

Kamala, on the other hand, has joined the caucus that complains about everything. "Every AI-generated image is using electricity and generating heat," she informed me strictly, like Greta Thunberg squinting at Trump. "Do you know that every AI image uses 0.29 kWh of electricity?" I was certain that I had saved more than that, by switching off the fan in my son's room every morning, so that he woke up to a global warning.

Kamala's TED talk was not done. She next informed me that every AI image also uses up precious water. I tried assuring her that it was just a few tablespoons per image and that I would drink my whiskey neat to compensate. Kamala gave me a withering look, and a long lecture on trivialising important issues.

My son jumped into the fray with his concerns about images being used for facial recognition and data mining. To prevent him from becoming a *naraz* fufu, I decided to share a glimpse of the actual eighties. To borrow Dickens' words, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." Movies ranged from profound to profane, *Arth Satya* to *Himmatwala*. Maruti 800 ruled the middle class to buy a car, and colour finally reached Indian television. We won the World Cup in cricket and Michael Jackson gave us *Thriller*. Computers opened their Windows to the world, which set the scene for AI to one day work in tandem with natural stupidity. I opened an old album to show my son real photos of us from the period. These had faded, but the 80s trend my given us a peep into the past, and a leap into the future.

India Plants Good Ideas In BRICS

The host's astute diplomacy demonstrated (a) nations with deep differences can work together (b) New Delhi offers a safe space for such talks (c) West Asian solution to Hormuz is possible

Syed Akbaruddin



India has no interest in exchanging excessive dependence on the West for dependence on another power. The 18th BRICS Summit helped preserve space for countries outside the West to cooperate, without turning opposition to the West into their common purpose. India's achievement was to keep countries divided over friends and adversaries working together where their interests met.

BRICS members, drawn largely from the Global South, want a greater say in world affairs. They neither share a foreign policy, nor agree how far to challenge the existing order. India helped keep those differences from overwhelming the grouping's work. Remaining engaged gives New Delhi a say in what BRICS becomes. Leaving would give others more room to do so.

The breadth of participation mattered too. India's presidency extended the engagement across 30 cities, through more than 400 meetings and events involving experts, business leaders. Alongside members and partners, India invited the UN Secretary General and representatives of Asean, African Union, and other regional bodies. ABRICS attentive to that wider constituency offers India more scope to build support around development, trade, and public services. Breadth alone does not guarantee influence. It, nevertheless, expands the circle of partners with whom India can shape the agenda, and resist domination by any single power.

The West Asia negotiations showed why this approach matters. Differences between Iran and UAE had prevented a joint ministerial statement in May. In Delhi, BRICS members called for maximum restraint and dialogue, protection of civilians and civilian infra, and uninterrupted trade and energy flows. They reaffirmed support for Palestinian statehood, while acknowledging their different national positions on the region's conflicts. Those conflicts remained unresolved. They did not, however, prevent agreement on economic and development priorities. Countries should not have to forfeit cooperation simply because they cannot settle every conflict.

India had shown this skill during its G20 presidency in 2023, securing a common declaration despite deep differences over Ukraine. The two summits strengthened Delhi's claim to a useful role in a divided world.

The declaration also retained Rio's explicit condemnation of the April 2025 terrorist attack in Jammu and Kashmir. That kept an India security priority visible in the text.

The summit may matter most where it was least dramatic. Leaders agreed to establish an agricultural cooperation network, welcomed a startup incubator network, and noted proposed digital public infra projects. These openings give India a chance to share expertise and build commercial ties. Helping a partner improve farm productivity, or deliver public services reliably, can build trust long after a summit is forgotten. Encouraging the New Development Bank to expand financing in local currencies could also widen funding options.

Summit promises often fade quickly. Modi's proposed troika would bring previous, current and incoming chairs together to carry agreed projects forward. Recording responsibilities, deadlines, and progress would make it easier to track what gets done. Useful projects should not have to start again with each presidency.

The declaration's call for larger IMF voting shares for emerging and developing economies, gives India useful backing to seek a greater say in the Fund's decisions. Modi also urged members to develop 10 proposals for global governance reform,

aiming for a roadmap by the next summit. This could turn the demand for a greater voice into a practical agenda. But calls for reform are easy. Sharing privilege will be harder.

The declaration supported further work on national currency settlements and easier payments, while respecting national priorities. It amounted neither a common currency, nor a commitment to replace the dollar. India has little to gain from a symbolic confrontation over the dollar, whose political costs could exceed its economic benefits.

These choices showed a distinctly Indian approach to BRICS: useful cooperation without strategic capture. Western markets, capital, and tech remain vital to India's growth. That strengthens the case for closer ties with America and Europe, but offers no reason to give up on BRICS. No single grouping meets all the goals of India's foreign policy. BRICS is evasive on Security Council reform. Quad did not offer a collective endorsement of Operation Sindoor. Neither limitation warrants withdrawal. India should judge partnerships by what they deliver, and remain engaged where they serve its interests.

The conclusion of trade negotiations with EU in Jan fits this approach.

Indrani Bagchi



If you followed Indian social media over the last few days, BRICS Summit was either a rant about vegetarian food or a debate over national priorities. The grouping, both fundamentally misread international relations, and Indian foreign policy in particular.

BRICS is the only grouping that countries still want to join. Not because it's efficient, or because it can change the world. India provided a safe space for countries to mingle without Western whining or American sabre-rattling, and quietly hunt for their own solutions.

That benign convening power will vanish at China's BRICS Summit in 2027, but it's a continuing feature of Indian foreign policy — reflected in the most verbose joint statement you'll find anywhere, something like an Indian thali, but one that works for a Global South simultaneously looking for leadership while protecting its own agency.

The defining feature of current global geopolitics is hedging, balancing, and engagement — BRICS ticks every box. In a couple of months, India will be hobnobbing with G20 in Florida, another round of

as both India and China are targets of American tariff wars.

But are sidestepping irreducible disputes and building normalisation around them, rather than resolving anything. Border disputes remain despite promises of an "early harvest", if either Arunachal Pradesh or Ladakh flares up again, the pushback will be huge.

Market access was a talking point, less a resolution point. India runs a \$100bn trade deficit with China that Beijing has weaponised before, and could again. Tibet is a genuine Indian leverage point that unsettles China, while Chinese export controls and Indian investment restrictions shift on a 24-hour news cycle. This relationship needs constant vigilance and management, not a settlement.

Both sides understand, acutely, that the Iran war needs to end, and soon. That featured in the Modi-Xi conversation, because continued escalation serves neither. Both economies are struggling in different ways — India on energy costs, China on manufacturing, struck partly by poor capacity utilisation and a govt "anti-involution" campaign against inflation. Both sides, separately, offered to help end the war. It remains to be seen who takes them up on it.

Which is why the most useful thing to come out of BRICS Summit was the UAE's invitation to the sidelines. Coming just before the GCC-Iran meet in Oman on Monday, it may have unlocked a local resolution on the Strait of Hormuz — not to mention the Houthis' win over Saudi Arabia, which has choked off Bab el-Mandeb. UAE holds the upper hand here, and India is playing a quiet supporting role.

Far more than Russia-Ukraine war, Iran conflict has the power to wreck the global economy. If there's one thing India and China can genuinely work on together, it's this — and there's an unwritten deadline: US midterms. High crude prices, choked shipping lanes, and bit prices will force them all feed into American voting patterns. But afterwards? Resolution or escalation, that's a big question.

India and US appear to have arrested the free fall in their relationship — though less through repair than indifference. India is losing interest in the trade pact itself, even as US plods through Section 301 investigations against Indian goods. Instead, India has embraced "diversification" like no one else.

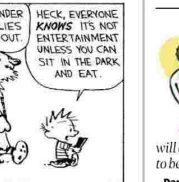
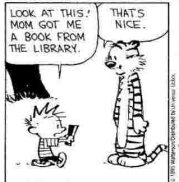
While the US-India BTA hangs fire, the India-EU PTA has moved up several notches and is still on track for a signing in Brussels in mid-Dec. India and Canada are closing their own gaps and may seal a deal in Ottawa in early Dec — just before Modi heads to Washington to meet Trump, then on to Florida for the G20 and a Quad summit.

BRICS barely touched the one issue that could reshape the US-China relationship, global politics, and arguably the future of humanity: AI. Restricted access to models and chips is one problem; Dario Gil's warnings about AI slipping the leash and turning into a humanity-killer are another. It's a race for dominance in frontier capability and safety, and while US and China dance around the idea of a joint AI safety working group, neither side will give an inch, for fear of losing the wider race for global dominance.

Neither Europe, Africa, nor South America will have much of a view on this, but India will, and should. India will be the largest "use case" for AI; its governance is therefore very much an Indian concern. India is setting up its own AI safety infra in partnership with US, both institutions unusually close to the US system. That future seems to be a conundrum of bad choices, and India and China will certainly sit on opposing sides. India and US? That will test multi-alignment, or multipolarity, like it or not.

The writer is CEO, Ananta Aspen Centre

Calvin & Hobbes



The Secret Sauce For Success

Jaya Row

What makes a person truly successful? Is it talent? Hard work? Intelligence? It is all of these. And more. The first step is to discover your passion, your core interest. For Bismillah Khan, it was the shehnai. For Nadal, it was tennis. For Raja Ravi Varma, it was art. Success in any field demands hard work, discipline and perseverance. If you are not passionate about what you do, you will give up sooner or later. Successful people go through the drudgery because they love what they do.

The next step is to set an unselfish goal — one beyond your narrow, self-centred interests. The higher the goal, the greater energy, creativity and commitment. Thought of self is the greatest obstacle that stands between you and success. Rise above it and the brilliance and perfection that is already

in you starts flowing. All successful people in the world worked for something beyond their personal ends.

Consider the Indian cricket team during 1983 World Cup. What changed after Kapil Dev's magnificent 175 against Zimbabwe? The players were the same, their skills were the same. Their fitness levels were the same. Yet the team that emerged after that match seemed transformed. What had changed? Their attitude. Their mindset. Their goal. Earlier, they may have been casual. Now they were focused. They shared a common goal — to win the World Cup for India.

Nothing can be achieved without love. When a musician is infused with love, he moves his audience. A sports person makes thousands rise in exultation when love inspires him. Bathe your

work in love and something magical happens. Drudgery becomes revelry. Doredom transforms into excitement. And mediocrity ceases to exist.

Be free from attachment and ego. Much of the stress and irritation we experience does not come from having too much work. It comes from the ego.

Look at nature. No peacock gets bored of dancing. No nightingale is stressed singing. The earth does not complain about producing vegetation. Only human beings are stressed, agitated and dissatisfied.

Do what you have to do happily, gracefully and humbly. Everyone has a role to play. Perform your wholeheartedly without the burden of 'I am the doer'. Then you create harmony. Stick out like a sore thumb, and you create cacophony. Everything in the world passes.

Wealth comes — and goes. Name, fame and reputation are wonderful to have and enjoy, but they are so temporary. They are like waves in the ocean. A wave rises, sparkles for a moment, and then disappears back into the water. But beneath these changing, transient factors, there is something that does not change — the one permanent Reality within you. As Adi Shankaracharya said: *Atma tu satatam prapya* — Atman is the ever-present Reality.

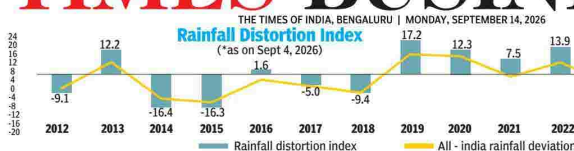
This brings us to the deepest secret of success. The greatest illusion that prevents us from fulfilling our desires is the belief that we are incomplete without them. You chase abundance because you believe you are lacking. You pursue success because you believe you are not enough. But obtaining more does not make you whole. You do not become complete by acquiring the world. You attract the world from the fullness that you already are.

Sacred space



Dante Alighieri, The Divine Comedy

Uneven Rains Make 2026 Monsoon Most Distorted In A Decade
The latest Rainfall Distortion Index (RDI) by Crisil flags 2026 as the most spatially uneven monsoon in a decade, raising concerns for kharif output. With the current shortfall resembling 2014-15 levels, uneven rains could pose risks to agricultural yields



Source: Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, Govt

Cos hunt for margin, pricing balance

Amid Festivities, Business Houses Look To Overcome Multiple Challenges

Asmita.Dey@timesofindia.com

Mumbai: Localisation, using alternatives wherever feasible and removing non-essential product features to cut cost of production. These are some measures brands are undertaking as they prepare for the festival season. CEOs are clear that measured price increases have to be taken amid persistent commodity inflation but margins also have to be sacrificed to an extent to boost volume growth in the crucial business period. Festive sales targets have not been slashed and they are hopeful that a longer festive window (Diwali is in Nov this year against Oct last year) alongside premonition support demand.

The biggest challenge for companies is that they cannot afford to pass on the full price increases to consumers at a time when the mass market is already under stress. Some executives also said that rural demand is a bit uneven amid deficient monsoons. "The problem is that

FESTIVAL PLANNING IN DISARRAY

- **Commodity cost volatility and intermittent disruption in supplies of items have thrown things into disarray this season**
- **To top it all, crude is back to over \$100 per barrel while copper has hit new all-time highs amid the flare up in West Asia**
- **Companies say measured price increases have to be taken amid persistent commodity inflation**
- **However, they are willing to sacrifice margins to an extent in order to boost volume growth during the season**
- **Brands are trying to source products when prices are low but many times, availability in itself is a challenge**

"The problem is that there is no end to this situation (volatility). We have to go for product innovation to improve margins. One way is to remove unnecessary features to bring down the input cost of products"

— B Thiagarajan, MD, Blue Star

all-time high. Prices are moving on sentiment as much as on fundamentals. A rate of increase this fortnight looks different the next," said Unmesh Kumar Agarwal, director, Haldimar Marketing.

While prices are possible, brands are considering alternatives for instance using aluminium instead of copper, said an executive with a consumer durables firm. Our focus will be on localisation, productivity, sourcing and operational efficiencies before passing the entire cost increase to consumers, said Sanjay Kulkarni, director and co-CEO at LG India. Kishan Jain, director at Goldmed Electricals said that the company will look to absorb further increase in commodity costs rather than pass on to consumers.

Brands are trying to source products when prices are low but many times, product availability in itself is a challenge, said Kumar Rajagopalan, executive director & CEO at Retailers Association of India (RAI). "Getting (ship-

ping)/containers has often been an issue," said Rajagopalan. A rate of increase for retailers across segments have risen by about 20% since the start of the war; that of, only half has been passed on to consumers, hurting margins, Rajagopalan said.

Godrej Appliances is banking on premiumisation and consumer desire for product upgrades to support festive demand, targeting over 40% growth for the season. "Festivals continue to be an important purchase window for appliance categories," said Kamesh Nandi, business head at appliances business, Godrej Enterprises Group, adding that pricing will be calibrated to protect consumers.

Although HyFun Foods is popular among the retail elite, it expects the market to remain fairly value-conscious. "The entry-level consumer is naturally more sensitive to price movements, particularly after the cost increases seen across the ecosystem," said MD & group CEO Hareesh Ramchandani.

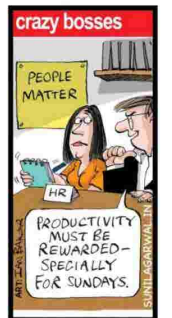
FPs withdraw ₹13.1k cr from equities in 2 weeks

New Delhi: Foreign investors pulled out Rs 13,188 crore from Indian equities in the first half of Sept, as heightened global uncertainty pushed crude oil prices higher, while rising US bond yields and a firmer dollar weighed on risk appetite.

The latest outflow comes after Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) turned net buyers in July and Aug, infusing Rs 20,200 crore and Rs 29,630 crore, respectively, according to data from the Central Depository Services (India) Ltd (CDSL). Prior to that, FPIs remained net sellers for four consecutive months from March to June.

With the latest withdrawal, the total outflow from Indian equities by FPIs has climbed to Rs 2.4 lakh crore since July.

New Delhi: The US Fed interest rate decision, domestic inflation data, crude oil prices and development in West Asia will be the major drivers for stock market movement in a holiday-shortened week ahead, analysts said. Equity markets would remain closed on Monday for Ganesh Chaturthi. On the domestic front, Aug WPI and CPI inflation data, followed by unemployment and balance of trade data, will remain in focus. AGENCIES



Manipal Health looks to expand in several states

New Delhi: Manipal Health Enterprises is setting its sights on expansion in various states, including Telangana, Kerala, and Delhi-NCR, while pivoting towards a "physical plus digital" healthcare model driven by AI. The healthcare major is actively evaluating strategic opportunities in Telangana, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh to selectively deepen its presence in identified markets, Manipal Health Enterprises said in its annual report for FY26. Manipal Hospitals continues to evaluate inorganic growth opportunities across states, it said. AGENCIES

Plan to enter life cover biz on track: Indian Bk

Chennai: Indian Bank's plans to enter the life insurance and asset management segments are progressing as planned, and it would soon approach the board for approval, the bank's MD and CEO Binod Kumar said. The lender is in the process of seeking approval from its board for the proposed subsidiaries or JVs, following which other processes will be initiated, Kumar said. He said identifying right partner would be a key part of the exercise. AGENCIES

RBI: Only disputed amt can be frozen under new norms

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: RBI has proposed a new framework under which banks will temporarily freeze only the disputed transaction amount, rather than the entire account, when unusual transfers of Rs 1,000 or more are flagged as potentially linked to mule accounts or cyber fraud.

MULE ACCOUNTS

Banks will be required to use AI-based transaction monitoring systems to identify transfers that, suddenly, disproportionate to a customer's declared profile or linked to known cyber-fraud networks.

The draft directions are scheduled to take effect on April 1, 2027, although banks can adopt them earlier. According to RBI, the framework follows Supreme Court's Aug 4, 2026, order directing it to prescribe and circulate an SOP for temporary debit holds on amounts or accounts linked to money-mule activity and cyber-enabled fraud. RBI's proposed rules for suspected money-mule accounts

will replace the drastic approach of freezing an entire account with a more targeted approach. The draft amendment directions, issued for public comments, amend existing instructions on bank account operations and money mules under KYC Directions, 2025.

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Petrol powers half of new cars if hybrids not counted

Aabhas.Sharma@timesofindia.com

New Delhi: Alternative-fuel vehicles may have overtaken petrol cars in India—but only if hybrids are counted as alternatives. FADA's Aug registration data showed petrol's share of new registrations fell to 40.8%, while CNG, electric and hybrid vehicles together reached 41.9%.

The crossover appeared to mark a significant change in India's fuel mix, with alternatives moving ahead of petrol for the first time.

A more granular analysis by JATO Dynamics, however, provides an important caveat. Mild and strong hybrids continue to carry petrol engines and require petrol to operate. Once these models are added back to conventional petrol vehicles, petrol-powered cars still account for approximately half the market.

JATO's fuel-wise dataset covered 3,62,763 passenger-vehicle registrations in Aug. Conventional petrol models accounted for 1,49,484 units, or 41.2%. Another 25,070 vehicles, representing 6.9%, were classified as petrol hybrids, while strong hybrids contributed 6,966 units, or 1.9%.

Taken together, these three categories accounted for 1,81,520 registrations—or 50% of the market covered by JATO's fuel-mix data.

"Mild and strong hybrids use electric assistance differently, but both remain fundamentally petrol cars," said Ravi Bhatia, president and CEO of JATO Dynamics India. "They may reduce overall consumption, but they should not be confused with vehicles that have moved away from petrol." The broader shift remains clear: Conventional petrol-only cars are losing shares to CNG, EVs and hybrids, expand.

emerging, "it is a journey," he said. Legacy technology adds to the challenge. Mainframes and COBOL-based databases were designed for uneven consent and data-lifecycle requirements.

For Allcare Group global CTO Kapil Mahajan, AI has changed the privacy question itself. AI can combine multiple legitimate data points to infer information a customer never explicitly provided.

The whole privacy question was, who can access this data? That, one, shifted," Mahajan said. "The new question is: what are we permitted to infer from it? The architecture now has to evolve around protecting data to governing intelligence," he said. "Just because technology can know something doesn't mean an enterprise should know it."

But what is very scarce is engineering. "The challenge becomes clear when companies try to implement requirements that require customers to withdraw consent."

"You have built these networks for the last 15 or 20 years and there is a system of data flow happening. There is no consent mechanism built into that data," Srivinas said. Making consent withdrawal and data erasure work across production systems can require companies to rebuild complex data flows.

Companies are also struggling to demonstrate that privacy controls work across their systems. "If tomorrow I ask whether you have deleted the data, you need to show the evidence," Sallian said. While tools for consent, cookie management and data mapping are

US should have the world's lowest interest rate: Trump

Doonbeg (Ireland): No country in the world should have lower interest rates than US, President Donald Trump said on Sunday, days before Federal Reserve's next policy meeting.

Speaking to reporters at the Irish Open golf tournament, Trump said he did not know whether Fed policymakers will raise interest rates at their meeting this week. But he argued that US "should be paying the lowest interest rate in the world," no matter what Federal Reserve's data indicates about inflation and the economy.

The Fed meeting will take place less than a week after

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The Fed's approval ratings have fallen as inflation has persisted. He has argued that Fed's interest rate levels have helped other countries at the expense of the US. "I know more about formulas than anybody and with the best credit in the world, we make other countries rich," Trump said on Sunday. Reuters

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Should Investors Pour Money Into New Fund Offers?

TOI IN THE CLASSROOM

New fund offers (NFOs) often attract investors through aggressive marketing and the appeal of entering a new scheme at launch. Investors should look beyond the hype and assess whether the NFO is fit for them

Invesco Mutual Fund

An investor education and awareness initiative

For Know Your Customer (KYC) guidelines along with the documentary requirements and procedure for change of address, phone number, bank details, etc., please visit the Education and Guidance section on www.invescoindia.com. Investor should deal with only SEBI Registered Mutual Funds, details of which can be verified under 'Intermediaries/Market Infrastructure Institutions' on <https://www.sebi.gov.in/index.html>. For any grievance / complaint, please call us on 1800-209-0007 or write to us at investor@invescoindia.com. Alternatively, complaints can be registered on the SEBI SCORES Portal at <https://scores.sebi.gov.in>

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

When And Why Does A Mutual Fund Come Out With An NFO?

A mutual fund house launches a New Fund Offer (NFO) when it wants to introduce a new scheme and raise money from investors to build its portfolio. New fund houses typically use NFOs to build their product basket, while established funds launch them to fill gaps or expand their range of schemes. For instance, an AMC that does not have a large & midcap or multicap fund may launch an NFO in that category. Fund houses also launch passive and thematic NFOs to offer investors exposure to specific investment themes or opportunities. There have also been concerns that some NFOs are aggressively pushed as they allow fund houses to offer higher incentives to distributors and mobilise assets, rather than fill a genuine gap in an investor's portfolio.

How Are NFOs Different From Equity IPOs?

An IPO (Initial Public Offering) involves a company offering its shares to the public for the first time, either to raise fresh capital or allow existing shareholders to sell their stakes. Investors in an IPO, therefore, become shareholders of the company. An NFO, on the other hand, is the launch of a new mutual fund scheme. The money collected from investors is used to build a portfolio of stocks, bonds or other securities based on the scheme's investment strategy. Investors in an NFO own units of the mutual fund scheme rather than shares of a company. The two should not be confused because NFOs are sometimes marketed like IPOs, creating an impression that investors are getting a chance to buy into a fund at a low or attractive price of ₹10 per unit.

Tata Sons IPO could provide bonanza for Tata Chemicals

► Continued from page 1

Former Tata Director Nusli Wadia had argued that the cross-holdings served only the purpose of bolstering Tata Trusts' voting power in Tata Sons. Tata Chemicals stands out with a sizeable Tata Sons stake. Spark Capital estimated in March 2024 that Tata Chemicals' Tata Sons stake was worth about 80% of the company's own market cap—Rs 15,594 crore as of Friday. Some analysts now put Tata Chemicals' own market cap, making it the clearest listed proxy for any value unlocked by an IPO. Shares of the listed companies are expected to gain when trading opens Tuesday.

Shriram Subramanian, founder of InGovest Research Services, which publishes research on Tata Chemicals' own market cap, said it would give more than 1.2 crore public shareholders in listed Tata companies a long-awaited avenue for value unlocking, and give the seven listed companies liquidity.

In 2020, during its legal battle with its former group chief Cyrus Mistry, Tata Sons cited an assessment by chartered accountant Y H Malegam valuing Tata Sons at Rs 3.8-4.3 lakh crore. Mistry disputed, saying valuation by his calculations was more than double. That figure would double Tata Sons' listing value, which has changed markedly since 2020. Tata Electronics has emerged as a bright spot, Air India remains loss-making, and mar-

Current inflation shock will last longer: ECB

Continuing. We expect the volatility and pressure on energy prices to continue, even though the increase in prices also poses a risk of lower growth." The ECB raised interest rates this week for the second time since the Iran war

From policy to code: DPDP creates new privacy roles

Akhil.George@timesofindia.com

Bengaluru: India's data privacy push is creating demand for a new breed of technology professionals who can translate regulations into working systems, as companies grapple with increasingly complex data environments and rapid adoption of artificial intelligence (AI).

Privacy has traditionally been handled by legal, compliance and cybersecurity teams. But as the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act moves towards implementation, companies are finding that having policies on paper is very different from making technology comply with them.

"The challenge is that organisations are moving from legal and advisory work to putting structured policies and

THE NEW PRIVACY-TECH JOBS

ROLE	WHAT THEY DO
Data Protection Officer (DPO)	Leads an organisation's data-protection governance, compliance and regulatory engagement
Privacy Engineer	Builds technical controls for consent, access, retention, deletion and privacy-by-design
AI Data Protection Engineer	Uses AI/ML to discover, classify and protect sensitive and personal data
AI Governance Engineer	Builds technical guardrails, monitoring and controls around AI systems and agents
Data Privacy Architect	Designs enterprise systems and data platforms with privacy and data-protection requirements built in

controls in place. It is moving from regulatory compliance to more of a technical compliance. There is definitely a supply gap," said Srivinas L, joint CEO and joint MD of S&SATS Cybertech. "Most people are offering advisory services—gap assessments, creating policy documents and telling you how ready you are for DPDP."

But what is very scarce is engineering. "The challenge becomes clear when companies try to implement requirements that require customers to withdraw consent."

"You have built these networks for the last 15 or 20 years and there is a system of data flow happening. There is no consent mechanism built into that data," Srivinas said. Making consent withdrawal and data erasure work across production systems can require companies to rebuild complex data flows.

Companies are also struggling to demonstrate that privacy controls work across their systems. "If tomorrow I ask whether you have deleted the data, you need to show the evidence," Sallian said. While tools for consent, cookie management and data mapping are

[OUR TAKE]

Post Iran war, oil is the new oil

While the Trump regime could continue with its bravado, some West Asian countries are showing signs of looking for some sort of détente

When the West Asia war started in February and Iran subsequently shut traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, analysts described it as the biggest ever oil shock in the history of capitalism. Oil prices did not support the doomsday predictions. Even in nominal terms, oil barely touched \$120 per barrel (it had been higher when the Russia-Ukraine war broke out in 2022) and, in real terms, prices were well below the historic peaks.

In hindsight, we know why this happened. China curtailed its oil purchases and drew down from its strategic reserves. That buffer is unlikely to cushion energy markets today. And the supply-side shock has increased significantly with Iran-backed rebels in Yemen taking control of the Red Sea Corridor and allegedly destroying the East-West pipeline in Saudi Arabia, both of which are crucial networks to ship Saudi oil if Hormuz remains shut. Oil prices have surged significantly in the last two weeks and could go even higher if these chokes are not eased.

Unless there is a meaningful resolution of the situation in West Asia, the oil shock to global markets is here to stay and will only accentuate. Countries, rich and poor, oil-importing or exporting, contrary to what Donald Trump believes, will pay the price. Fuel prices have gone to a record high in the US ahead of the crucial mid-term elections. India is yet to hike fuel prices, but the buffer against not doing so might wear out soon.

What will it take to solve the problem? Right now, what is happening is a war of attrition between the global energy markets and Iran's ability to survive the costs of war, sanctions, and its squeezed oil revenues, thanks to the US naval blockade. While the Trump administration could continue with its bravado — there hardly seems to be a strategy here — countries in West Asia are beginning to show signs of looking for some sort of détente on their own.

The discussions between Iran's president and UAE's leadership on the sidelines of the BRICS summit and a proposed meeting of West Asian countries at Oman's initiative are some such signs. Such efforts have been catalysed by otherwise absurd fallout as Qatar having to buy gas from the US to fulfil its supply obligations. Any such solution, if it were to emerge, will be a welcome development for energy markets, and an ominous sign for the US in the region.

BRICS uses a unity-in-diversity template

Concordia res parvae crescent, discordia maxime dilabuntur, said Sallust, the renowned Latin historian and one of the political partisans of Julius Caesar. What was achieved in New Delhi on an overcast September afternoon manifests the quote appropriately: Through harmony, small things grow; through discord, the greatest fall. The BRICS declaration adopted on September 12 by the member nations, often seen as a motley group without common goals, has hushed critics for the time being. Despite internal differences, BRICS+ nations have reached consensus on various substantive issues, expressing an earnest wish to uphold the status quo. By jointly condemning acts of terror, unilateral tax and tariff decisions and ongoing military conflicts; advocating for ease of trade relations among member States; and, most importantly, unequivocally supporting the rights of Palestinians, BRICS has shown that it has, indeed, understood that differences can be set aside to rally behind common causes. The bilateral meeting between the UAE and Iran, despite the two exchanging fire across borders, should be seen as an unexpected bonus.

All eyes were on China's President Xi Jinping as he visited India after seven years, the first time since the Ladakh standoff between the Indian and Chinese armies. In both the bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his address, Xi belied the perception in some quarters that China merely sees the grouping as a platform for challenging American hegemony. Whether BRICS will be successful in leveraging this growing concord to achieve conflict resolution through dialogue within the grouping, and advocate for the same globally, remains to be seen. For now, let this grouping have its cake and eat it, too: Stay diverse yet united.

OPINION

The West cannot go on criticising BRICS

Whether BRICS can become a "threat" to the order defined by the West is a question that the Global South should refuse to engage with on the grounds of the continuing condescension of the West

BRICS has come of age. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in his address at the 18th summit of the grouping, hosted in New Delhi over the weekend. It is indeed time for the 20-year-old multilateral platform to be evaluated in terms of how its aspirations have translated into outcomes, and, at a larger level, what the grouping represents and what it has achieved as a cohort.

With a grouping as fractured as BRICS, it is naïve to expect a comprehensive consensus on all things, either in letter or in spirit. Then, why have a grouping at all, or bother with summits, goes the argument. The short answer is: In an era of forever wars and interconnectedness of global supply chains, any consensus is better than no consensus, and any summit or meeting is better than no dialogue. The detailed answer must first examine what the present holds

for the Global South, represented by BRICS member countries.

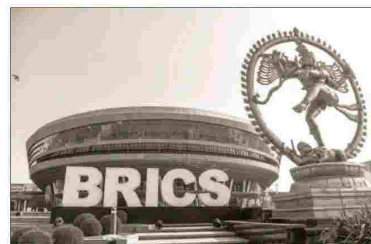
As Modi observed in his address, the Global South has long been in the back row of decision-making while occupying the front row of consequences. Whether BRICS can change that isn't as important as the question about the West's ability to continue to hold the reins of the global rules-based order. With the ever-growing inconsistency of the US foreign policy, exacerbated by the second Trump presidency's interventions in Latin America and West Asia, there is a palpable sense of impending doom among the votaries of the 1945 consensus. A diminished United Nations stands as an exhibit of toothless institutional internationalism. What avenue does the Global South, after all, have for concerns to not only be heard but also mitigated?

It is easy for the West to now undermind globalisation and pivot to more inward-focused domestic and foreign policies, and, consequently, its multilateralism, once all the gains have been reaped. There is something deeply hypocritical about anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies, speeches on carbon emissions, and even economic sanctions from the West, while the Global South continues to reel under the impact of the former's actions from a few decades ago. Nepal continues to get belittled, as seen in the recent flash floods, for the global environmental changes. India has controlled its carbon emissions despite growing needs, and its solar generation capacity,

at 180 terawatt-hours (TWh), is already more than half of that of the US. China's solar power generation is at nearly 1,175 TWh, double the generation in all the G7 countries taken together. The West, in short, must see the limits of its pontifications on peace, sustainability, and development.

BRICS, on the other hand, ought to persist in setting bigger and more ambitious agendas for the Global South. The main summit and the parallel sessions have been allowing space to the member-nations to align their common goals. Beyond the big ticket bilateral meets, it is these negotiations between the public and the private players that confer substance to a grouping such as BRICS. During the 2026 summit, for example, Russia's State-run nuclear energy corporation Rosatom offered Indian firms cutting edge nuclear solutions, bolstering the Russia-India nuclear energy agreement dating back to 1988. This was how cooperation manifests itself materially in the summits.

While the 1988 agreement resulted in the Kudankulam project, a continued partnership allows it to be sustained meaningfully for both countries. It now has become fashionable to dismiss BRICS owing to the C-word (conflict). It is true that some member-nations such as India-China and Iran-UAE have engaged in military conflict along international borders. In conflict resolution served better by a common table where disagreements have at least a chance to be discussed, or by condemning the very table as not



As long as the Global South continues to define "order" and "rules" using a Western vocabulary, no grouping is likely to be deemed satisfactory.

being architecturally perfect? Today, NATO has wider internal fault lines than ever, and the dismissiveness of the US, the chief contributor, has reversed the disarmament trend in Europe. The NATO example has two important lessons for BRICS. First, any one member's untrammelled dominance is bound to result in regional complications in the long run. Second, the confidence with which even a fractured NATO operates is something BRICS ought to emulate. In the last decade, BRICS was seen as a security challenge to the EU on account of its improving coherence and institutionalisation. The setting up of the New Development Bank and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement in 2015 showed how military blocs are not the only way to exert geopolitical influence. The BRICS membership should encourage countries to strive towards achieving common goals and overcome differences. The series of high-level meetings between India and China to resolve their boundary differences in the run-up to this year's summit are clearly not coincidental.

Internal differences may or may not get resolved, but the jointness of BRICS certainly allows member-States

to flag issues that can be collectively worked upon. For example, Modi proposed the need for seafarers' emergency support network as one of the key elements in the BRICS road map in the presence of a powerful group of maritime actors sitting astride crucial global trade choke-points. As observed during the ongoing West Asia conflict, Indian seafarers are disproportionately impacted, primarily owing to their great numbers, and mechanisms ought to be in place to maximise their safety.

It is essential to analyse BRICS pragmatically, but a West-influenced lens cannot do that job either effectively or honestly. As long as the Global South continues to define "order" and "rules" using a Western vocabulary, no grouping is likely to be deemed satisfactory even within the region.

At the same time, whether a more consolidated and cohesive BRICS can become an effective "threat" or "alternative" to the order defined by the West is a question that the Global South should refuse to engage with on the grounds of the continuing condescension of the West.

The views expressed are personal

[GRAND STRATEGY]
Happyman Jacob

Don't mistake the noise around BRICS for impact

The 2026 Delhi summit of BRICS has been under a spotlight this weekend, and things under a spotlight tend to look bigger and brighter than they actually are. Eleven members, a dozen invitees, Chinese President Xi Jinping visiting India after seven years, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian sharing a table with crown prince of Abu Dhabi — this assembly of heavy weights in a world in turmoil has once again generated speculation that it could emerge as a counter pole to the US. The media commentary has generally tended to portray the summit as a moment of great geopolitical consequence. In reality, the summit is far more modest, and the Indian agenda, quite realistically, reflects that.

What does BRICS do? Mostly, it is a signalling platform. Countries use it to signal affinity to the US and the West. Where a member can negotiate with Washington, it negotiates, bilaterally and quietly. Where it does not agree, cannot agree, or will not agree, it comes to a forum like BRICS and makes a polemical statement.

They do have rhetorical value. But, they do not have much material value, because such statements, of which we find plenty in BRICS declarations over the years, are not backed by rules, force, or any consequence for the country it is aimed at.

The grouping gives leaders who do not otherwise meet much, a place to talk about the world, in the main forum and on the sidelines. Views get exchanged and, sometimes, conflicts get managed, and hard security conversations take place. But on the margins, and they are helpful.

But that doesn't make it an alternative pole that will recast global governance, push back against the US-led order, or produce a currency to rival the dollar. A grouping whose foreign ministers could not manage a joint statement on the Iran war is unlikely to emerge as a pole.

Do they actually, together, want to create a counter pole to the US? India wants to work with the US, with US President Donald Trump or without him. China wants a mutually beneficial economic relationship, and Xi will be in the US for a summit with Trump later this month. While Russia has the most reason to break with the US-led order, Moscow spent this month hosting Trump's envoys, and may have a China-led order as much as it hates the US-led order.

BRICS, at best, is a pressure group. Its members are inside the US-led order, despite their varying degrees of disagreements with it, and they use the grouping to put pressure on the US for their individual gains — a rhetoric in public and negotiations in private. It does not qualify to be a lobby. A lobby agency for its members, BRICS members do not argue for one another; they argue for themselves.

It doesn't address the security concerns of its members either. The reason behind its non-security identity is because of the grouping came about. NATO, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Quad were set up with security being a part of their purpose, albeit in differing degrees. BRICS, on the other

hand, began as an investment bank's acronym for four large emerging economies, and the four governments picked it up, meeting first over lunch on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in 2006 and holding a first summit in 2009 in the wake of the financial crisis. Economic growth, not security, was the table for membership. The grouping has a political and security pillar on paper, but there is no security architecture, no commitment of one member to another and no mechanism that would let one member count on the rest. Had it ever developed a security dimension, it might have carried more weight.

While it is true that Trump believes BRICS is a challenge to American power, that challenge exists more in his fantasies than anywhere else. But, Trump's fantasies have done more to shape the context of this summit than any leader who attended it. Because of the tariff it has held over the grouping, India kept de-dollarisation debate off the table, describing local currency settlement as mere diversification. Can a grouping that softens its own communicate to avoid a tariff be a pole? It is a group of countries that know when to power still and use the forum to negotiate with that power. BRICS can bring focus back on things that great power rivalry distracts from the global agenda: supply chains, food and energy security, development, digital infrastructure, climate, health. Indeed, India's chairmanship has been built around these questions, and rightly so.

So, what does India want BRICS to be? Who does it benefit if it hypothetically, BRICS becomes a pole against the US-led order, would that be in Delhi's interest?

A strong BRICS would put India on the adversarial side of the US and its allies, at a time when India's most important relationships are with them.

A strong BRICS would also carry higher stakes within the grouping, and higher stakes produce more interests, factions, and politics inside the grouping. India is not the most influential State in BRICS today, and it would not be in a stronger BRICS either. And a strong BRICS, in the end, could potentially contain India free to pursue its ambitions elsewhere.

The theory of BRICS as a grand counter pole lives only in the commentary around it. Not in reality.

Happyman Jacob is founder and director, Council for Strategic and Defense Research, and editor, INDIA'S WORLD magazine. The views expressed are personal

[CYRIL RAMAPHOSA] PRESIDENT, SOUTH AFRICA

When a host convenes a summit, they take the reins of leadership. They direct the discussions, and... cajole everyone towards a decision. So that's what India has done extremely well

Praising India's presidency of 18th BRICS summit



[STRAIGHTFORWARD]
Shashi Shekhar

Growing reach of Hindi and regional languages

Last week, while addressing India's Gen Z and Alpha, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi chose to speak in Hindi. He could have chosen Gujarati, as the event was being organised in Vadodra. However, Modi wanted to reach a larger audience. Hindi, thus, was the right choice.

This is the reason he chose Varanasi along with Vadodra as a perfect option from where to contest the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. After winning both seats, he chose Varanasi. The corridors of power believe all roads to New Delhi pass through Uttar Pradesh — before Modi, Uttar Pradesh has given seven PMs to the country.

The importance of Hindi and the Hindi belt is acutely articulated by politicians from the non-Hindi-speaking parts of the country. After PM Jawaharlal Nehru's demise in 1964, a powerful faction within the Congress Party requested party president Kumaraswami Kamaraj to become the PM. He declined, insisting he didn't know Hindi, which was necessary to become PM to the country. On Hindi Day (September 14), I can say with pride that Hindi is acquiring a global footprint. According to data from the international database, Ethnologue, the total number of speakers of Hindi is over 600 million. It includes people listing it as their mother tongue as well as those who mention it as their second or third language of preference. Ninety percent of them live in India. The remaining 10% live outside the country and act as its brand ambassador.

The majority of Hindi-speaking population outside India is concentrated in Nepal, the UAE, the US, Mauritius, Fiji, Guyana, Trinidad, the UK, and Canada.

I am mentioning this for a reason. The GDP of all these countries will total around \$100 billion. The 10 to 40 million NRIs regularly contribute financially to their relatives, religious institutions, saints, etc. Remittances are key to our foreign exchange reserves.

However, this isn't the only source of foreign capital. Our artists and films earn millions in foreign markets. If you want to have influence in a country, you must send your people even before opening an embassy.

This is the reason we see politicians in the UK, the US, and Canada celebrating Hindu and Sikh festivals. These countries have seen large Indian immigrant influx since the 19th century.

In India, Independence, when Mahatma Gandhi along with his close associates tried to establish Hindi as the national language, some Congress leaders from the non-Hindi speaking states voiced concerns. After a lot of deliberations, it was decided that for the initial 15 years every state will use English for official work and then a decision on the language would be taken considering the prevailing conditions in the future.

If we are proud of our language, then we should also respect the regional languages as well. Rasool Gamzatar, the legendary writer of *My Dagestan*, once wrote that if the Avar language was his mother, then Russian and other languages would be his aunts. Whatever politics or politicians might say, languages can act as bridges between people. Indians have proved this. Had it not been the case, the large-scale movements of the 1960s and 1970s would have ripped India apart.

However, the AI age offers us a unique chance to correct our past mistakes. Today, anyone can easily watch films starting from Shashank Singh, Mahesh Babu, Mohanlal, Vijay and Alia Arjun dubbed in Hindi. Let me share its positive impact. In November 2024, during the release of *Pushpa 2: trailer*, South Indian star Alia Arjun visited Patna. A crowd of 1.5-2 lakh people gathered to welcome him. Most of them were from Gen Z or Gen Alpha.

This is the reason the 80-100 million Hindi-speaking people living in the non-Hindi speaking states face no social or economic issues. Social media too is playing its part in bridging the gap. It's creating new idioms that feature amalgamation of words and terms from different local and foreign languages. The internet age could very well achieve what our forefathers only hoped for fondly.

As far as Hindi is concerned, I am as confident and optimistic about its future, and proud of its glorious past. Best wishes to all on Hindi Day!

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



Editor's TAKE

BRICS comes of age in New Delhi

BRICS summit demonstrated that the grouping's growing relevance lies not in a challenge to the West, but in its ability to bridge deep differences

When eleven leaders gathered at Bharat Mandapam on September 12-13 and unanimously adopted the New Delhi Declaration, the achievement lay less in what was said than in the fact that anything was agreed at all. Twenty years after BRICS foreign ministers first met in 2006, the grouping now runs from Brazil to Indonesia, accounting for roughly 40 per cent of world GDP and over a quarter of global trade. Getting Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE to sign one sentence on West Asia – agreeing only to voice regret over unprovoked hostility in general terms – took Sherpas working through the night. That the declaration survived intact rather than being watered down is itself evidence that BRICS is maturing.

The substance backs this up more than sceptics expected. Gone is talk of a single BRICS currency; in its place sits a narrower, more workable agenda – greater use of national currencies in intra-BRICS trade, interoperable cross-border payment systems, and early conversation on linking central bank digital currencies. This is de-dollarisation by increment rather than by declaration, and it is more credible for it. Alongside sits a familiar BRICS wishlist, now with more institutional backing: reform of the IMF, World Bank and UN Security Council to reflect where economic weight actually sits; a Partnership on the New Industrial Revolution pushing Industry 4.0 cooperation; a digital public infrastructure repository; and a shared, if vague, push for trustworthy AI governance that keeps rule-making out of Western hands alone. Counter-terrorism language – an India priority since the Pahalgaon attack – was reinforced, alongside Delhi's own proposal for a Seafarers' Emergency Support Network; modest, but genuinely useful rather than symbolic.

The subplot mattered as much as the text. Xi Jinping's arrival – his first visit to India in seven years, with a delegation reportedly twice the size of his 2019 trip – turned the summit into cover for an India-China reset neither side could easily stage alone. That Modi and Xi could meet, agree their differences must not be allowed to harden into disputes, and still sit under one declaration alongside Washington's rivals and partners, is precisely the kind of ambiguity BRICS exists to hold.

Yet the caveats are real. BRICS still cannot agree on Ukraine, still has no enforcement mechanism for its own declarations, and still leans on studied vagueness to keep eleven governments with barely reconcilable worldviews inside one tent. China's economy still dwarfs the rest of the grouping combined, keeping alive the old question of whose bloc this really is. A single currency remains, sensibly, off the table.

What New Delhi has shown is not that BRICS has arrived as a rival to the G7, but that it has learned to do something more useful: hold together its own contradictions long enough to get practical work done. That is not dominance. It is maturity of a limited but real kind – and for now, it may be the only kind on offer.

NEP 2020: From promise to classroom reality

Six years after the National Education Policy 2020 was unveiled, India needs to look beyond enrolment numbers and infrastructure to ask a more fundamental question: has education actually become more equitable, creative and learner-centred? The answer will determine whether NEP's ambitious vision can translate into meaningful change in the classroom



JS RAJPUT

Practically every learned deliberation on education today makes reference to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, its well-articulated mission, vision, objectives, and goals. In its second paragraph, the Policy refers to its being in total sync with the UN's global education development agenda, reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which seeks to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030. The NEP 2020 also expects education to move towards "less content" and greater emphasis on learning how to think critically and solve problems. It asserts that learning must primarily focus on nurturing critical thinking and sharpening analytical skills. It then goes on to list several related expectations, taking note of the swift changes taking place all around us, particularly in areas such as data science and creativity, while emphasizing multidisciplinary, integrated, learner-centred, discussion-based, discovery-oriented, flexible, and enjoyable learning. Having been associated with education policy formulation and implementation for over five decades, one invariably recalls both the achievements and the persistent drags that have impeded the realization of stated goals in several areas.

Six years after the NEP 2020, an extensive yet swift national-level review would therefore be in order. Such a review could bring forth the corrections and strategic changes that are needed and, where necessary, even provide the basis for a fresh formulation of certain aspects of the Policy.

The positives have indeed been overwhelming. Beginning with a literacy rate of barely 12 per cent and extending educational access to more than 80 per cent in the face of a population increase of more than a billion, India's educational expansion is an unmatched achievement in the post-independence era. India successfully envisioned the future national needs and aspirations of its people and created institutions of higher learning. Yet, whenever large-scale and inevitable expansion takes place in any system-particularly in education-quality can suffer, as can work culture. This is one of the fundamental issues before the Indian education system and its policies today. The rise in enrolment in schools and universities, as well as the increase in the numbers of teachers required, deserves appreciation. But does this expansion necessarily indicate an enhancement of quality? It remains the constitutional responsibility of the State to ensure that everyone is included in education. Increased numbers are, therefore, fully justified



THE MEDIA FREQUENTLY REPORT THE PERSISTENT LACK OF BASIC AMENITIES IN GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS. SUCH REPORTS, HOWEVER, HAVE INCREASINGLY BECOME ROUTINE AND RARELY STIR THE CONSCIENCE OF THOSE WHO HAVE THE AUTHORITY AND CAPACITY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE. EVEN MINOR POSITIVE CHANGES ARE WELCOMED BY THE PUBLIC

The author is an educationist, a Padma Shri awardee, and works in religious and social cohesion

as evidence of India's onward march towards becoming a fully literate nation. They also indicate that India is conscious of its rising population and the consequent responsibility to prepare it and ensure the benefits of the demographic dividend. Things are to be examined in light of the fact that a wide gap exists in the Indian education system that impedes the education of a large number of young persons because of their economic positioning. The challenge before the nation can therefore be understood through a fundamental question: Is India providing every learner with adequate opportunities to nourish and nurture talent, refine skills, and prepare to make creative contributions to society in every relevant area, including emerging sectors?

In an age when cognitive capital is increasingly taking precedence over fiscal capital, nurturing talent becomes one of the most valuable fundamental entitlements of every child. It is, obviously, a prime responsibility of a welfare state. Unfortunately, the condition of government schools, even after six years of NEP 2020 implementation, remains far from encouraging. These schools are often the only alternative available to those who stand last in the line.

The media frequently report the persistent lack of basic amenities in government schools. Such reports, however, have increasingly become routine and rarely stir the conscience of those who have the authority and capacity to make a difference. Even minor positive changes are welcomed by the public. Teachers, for instance, have appreciated reports indicating that the proportion of schools with computer facilities rose from 57.2 per cent to 69.9 per cent, while those with internet facilities increased from 53.9 per cent to 67.4 per cent. Surely, these are commendable achievements, and only hope, however, that the computers are functional, that trained teachers are available to use them effectively, and, most importantly, that the facilities are genuinely accessible to every learner. Could schools also be authorized to extend the use of such facilities to children in the neighbourhood who may not be

enrolled in that particular school? Such an arrangement could become a small but highly meaningful step towards reducing the digital divide. The major concern before the nation is quality enhancement. One is reminded of what Albert Einstein observed more than a century ago: "To me the worst thing seems to be for a school principal to work (chiefly) with methods of fear, force and artificial authority. Such treatment destroys the sound sentiments, the sincerity and self-confidence of the pupil. It produces the submissive subject." Having seen and observed educational processes closely, one could argue that the visible change in this regard remains, at best, minimal. Einstein had something more to say about the purpose of education: "Personally, I never clutter up my memory with facts I can easily find in an encyclopedia. One should never cram young minds with facts, names, formulae... Education should be used only to teach young people to think and to give them this training, which no textbook can replace." The NEP 2020 is, in essence, reiterating the same fundamental principle when it calls for a shift towards critical thinking and analytical skills. The challenge is not in restating this principle on unimpeachable occasions, but in translating it into everyday classroom practice.

The availability of essential financial and professional resources in government schools can provide children from weaker sections with opportunities that might otherwise remain beyond their reach. But resources alone cannot transform education. The teacher matters most. India has unimpeachable examples of committed and competent teachers who have transformed their schools, often with little more than professional commitment, communal goodwill, and local support, taking them to levels of achievement that were previously considered impossible.

From schools to higher education institutions, teachers are, at one stage or another, subjected to excessive bureaucratic control. For more than five decades, the creation of a much-needed professional cadre of educational administrators has remained a neglected requirement. The absence of professionally prepared educational administrators has serious consequences for educational governance, institutional autonomy, academic leadership, and accountability. The education system cannot be transformed merely through policy declarations. Nor can the objectives of NEP 2020 be realized simply by expanding enrolment, constructing infrastructure, dispersing devices, or introducing new curricular frameworks.

Education policy implementation must ultimately translate into pragmatic practices in classrooms, outside the classrooms, in the shape of better institutional cultures, visible emphasis on values, empowered teachers, and improved learning outcomes.

Daiv Vani

WISDOM FOR A MEANINGFUL LIFE

The Obstacle He Broke With His Own Hand

Today is Ganesha Chaturthi. Ganesha, the remover of obstacles, receives the first puja, invoked before any undertaking begins, so that the path ahead is cleared before the first step is even taken.

Yet the most striking story about him is not one where he clears an obstacle from someone else's path, but one where he becomes the obstacle-breaker in his own. When sage Vyasa sought a scribe to record the Mahabharata as it poured from him without pause, only Ganesha agreed, and on one condition: Vyasa must recite without ever stopping. Midway through the epic, Ganesha's pen broke. Rather than halting the sacred work, he snapped off his own tusk and continued writing, unwilling to let a personal loss interrupt something larger than himself. The obstacle that day was not external.

It was his own broken tool, his own incompleteness, easy to be embarrassed by, easy to pause over. Ganesha simply used what remained of himself, without hesitation, and kept writing. We often wait for obstacles to be cleared before we begin, wanting the right resources, the right conditions, our own limitations resolved first. Ganesha's example asks something braver of us, to keep moving with whatever we have, even if it means offering a broken, imperfect part of ourselves. This Ganesha Chaturthi, don't wait for every obstacle to disappear before you begin. Pick up your own broken tusk, whatever incomplete resource or ability you have, and start anyway.



BHAVESH PANDEY

2ND OPINION

Akhilesh Yadav now speaks of protecting a journalist's right to ask questions. If a reporter cannot put a question, he says, a press conference should not be called. A press conference at all; it should be called a "press monologue." The line is agreeable to the ear. The question it cannot evade is what the condition of journalists was when Akhilesh Yadav was Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. Did reporters then enjoy the full freedom to ask?

Were there who put the government to an uncomfortable question safe? Did the conduct of the government and the party organisation towards the press, under the SP regime, resemble the speeches Akhilesh Yadav now delivers? One need not travel far back for an answer. Shahjahanpur in 2015, and the journalist Jagendra Singh, remain before Akhilesh Yadav

The question Akhilesh Yadav must answer



a question that no oration on press freedom can discharge.

The Burning Alive of Jagendra Singh and the Defence of the Accused Minister

In June 2015, Jagendra Singh, a journalist from Shahjahanpur, was burned alive in his home. His offence was that he had written persistently about allegations of illegal mining, land seizure and corruption linked to Ram Murli Singh Verma, then a minister in the SP government. The minister did not take the reporting kindly. The matter did not end there. While Jagendra Singh lay in hospital fighting for his life, the minister's influence was again used to have him attacked in the hospital itself. Jagendra Singh later died. Thereafter Ram Gopal Yadav, the Samajwadi Party's national general secretary, went so far as to argue against the minister's removal from the Cabinet. It was not, he said, a matter large enough to require that a min-

ister be stripped of office.

Reporters Beaten at the Press Conference Called in Their Name

In Moradabad, Akhilesh Yadav held a press conference. Journalists attended. One of them put a question that was not to his liking. Akhilesh's supporters then began beating the reporters. Several were seriously injured. Stories of his anger towards journalists are not one but many. At times he brands them agents of another party; at times he asks their caste in order to humiliate them. At times he says openly that he will have them thrown out; that he will administer another kind of treatment; that he will have a throat cut with a sword.

A Lecture on Liberty Must First Answer a Record of Intimidation

If Akhilesh Yadav wishes today to speak of journalism, he must also attend to his own bearing. He must recall how he issued direct threats to reporters and levelled direct charges against them. What followed, in his government, when a question was asked is a question that must now be put to him, pointing a finger at others will not absolve him of his own acts. If the values of journalism are to be invoked, the further question will arise: what, in fact, did you do to defend them?

The author is an advocate at the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court. He writes on political and social issues

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MP's liquor tragedy demands accountability

The deaths of 18 people after suspected consumption of illicit liquor in Sagar district have raised serious questions about the functioning of the administrative machinery in Madhya Pradesh. More than 80 people have reportedly been affected, while several arrests have been made and the State Government has suspended officials and ordered a judicial inquiry. But the larger question is how such a trade was allowed to continue despite allegations that the authorities were aware of its scale.

If illicit liquor was being sold openly and extensively, why were licences not cancelled and why was timely action not taken? The tragedy cannot be dismissed as merely a failure of law and order. The nexus between illicit liquor, administrative lapses and political influence must be examined impartially. Questions have also been raised about whether revenue considerations may have weakened enforcement. If officials or political actors knowingly facilitated the trade, they must be held accountable. A judicial inquiry should establish the facts without fear or favour. Families who have lost loved ones deserve justice, while those responsible must face the full force of the law.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

BRICS must turn consensus into actions

The adoption of the BRICS declaration despite differences among member countries over the West Asian conflict is a significant diplomatic achievement. It demonstrates that nations with divergent political and strategic interests can still find common ground on issues affecting global peace and stability.

The continuing violence in West Asia remains a matter of grave concern. Prolonged conflict can disrupt energy markets, international trade and supply chains while imposing an enormous humanitarian cost on civilians. The immediate priority must be to prevent further escalation and create conditions for meaningful dialogue and negotiations. India's policy of strategic autonomy, coupled with its consistent advocacy of dialogue and peaceful solutions, can make a constructive contribution to BRICS deliberations. New Delhi should continue to encourage restraint, respect for sovereignty and diplomatic engagement among the parties to the conflict. The declaration translates into meaningful action. BRICS has growing economic and political influence and can use its collective weight to promote dialogue, humanitarian cooperation and a more balanced international order. At a time of widening geopolitical divisions, the world needs diplomatic bridges rather than deeper confrontation.

RUKMA SHARMA | JALANDHAR

Ganesh Chaturthi: Protect the eEnvironment

Ganesh Chaturthi is among India's most cherished festivals, bringing together families and communities in devotion and celebration. Homes are decorated, modaks are prepared and Lord Ganesha is welcomed with joy. Yet, as the festivities begin, we must also ensure that our celebrations do not harm the environment. Many idols are made from Plaster of Paris, plastic and thermocol, which do not dissolve easily and can pollute rivers, lakes and other water bodies during immersion. Artificial colours and chemicals can also damage aquatic ecosystems and affect fish and plants. Fortunately, celebrating responsibly does not require giving up tradition. Devotees can choose natural clay idols and decorate homes with flowers, leaves, clay and reusable lights instead of plastic and thermocol.

Puja offerings can rely on natural materials such as fruits, coconuts, mango leaves, tulsi and flowers. Reusable bags can further reduce plastic waste. Home immersion in a bucket or suitable container is another practical alternative to immersing idols in natural water bodies. Every small step matters. By adopting eco-friendly practices, we can honour Lord Ganesha while protecting the rivers, lakes and natural world that future generations will inherit.

JUREL D'CRUZ | MUMBAI



Women hold eco-friendly idols of Lord Ganesha ahead of Ganesh Chaturthi festival, in Bengaluru, Karnataka PHOTO: PTI

Land justice cannot run on a 1908 clock

Land disputes are among India's most enduring legal battles, often stretching across generations. The problem is not merely judicial delay. A land-justice system built around the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, is increasingly out of step with today's digitised records, modern surveying technologies and the need for faster, more precise adjudication.



VIVEK KUMAR SINGH

India does not merely need faster courts for land disputes. It needs a different procedure for deciding them. Land and property disputes account for roughly two-thirds of all civil litigation in India. Behind these numbers lie disputes over boundaries, inheritance, sale deeds and possession that can become a family's engagement with the courts for a generation. Land remains locked, investment is postponed and relationships deteriorate. By the time a decree arrives, possession may have changed, physical features may look different and original witnesses may no longer be available.

Judicial vacancies and heavy dockets are part of the explanation. But there is a deeper structural problem. The Code of Civil Procedure, 1908 still supplies the basic architecture for land litigation. The question is whether a general procedure devised more than a century ago should govern land disputes in substantially the same way when both landholding and the State's capacity to identify land have changed dramatically.

The CPC came into force in a world without digitised Records of Rights, geo-referenced cadastral maps, satellite imagery, electronic registration databases or interoperable government records. Even where surveys and settlement records existed, establishing the identity, boundary, possession and history of a parcel could require painstaking reconstruction through paper registers, field measurement, local knowledge and oral testimony.

A procedure allowing commissioners, witnesses and substantial judicial discretion was therefore understandable. Facts that can now often be tested and verified then had to be laboriously proved. There was yet another fundamental difference. The legal relationship between people and land in 1908 was not the same as it is today. British India did not have a uniform conception of individual, parcel-based ownership. Agricultural land in different provinces was governed by distinct revenue and tenancy regimes. From the Bengal Tenancy Act, 1885 and the Punjab Tenancy Act, 1887 to the tenancy regimes of Odisha, Agra and Chhota Nagpur, the legal landscape in which rights could be distributed among zamindars or other intermediaries, tenure-holders, occupancy raiyats, tenants and actual cultivators.

Proprietary interest, possession, cultivation, rent liability and rights of transfer or succession did not necessarily vest in the same person. The CPC was therefore not designed as the procedural arm of a modern, integrated, parcel-based land-title system. Courts often had to reconstruct layered rights from old records, revenue rolls, possession, custom and oral evidence. A slower and more elaborate fact-finding process had a historical logic.

Post-independence zamindari and many intermediary interests were abolished. Tenants and cultivators acquired stronger or more direct rights under different State laws. The relationship between the State, the recorded holder and the parcel became more direct. Land administration consequently became increasingly concerned with identifying the current legally sustainable claim to a defined parcel, rather than merely recording layered tenurial relationships. The information environment has been transformed. Computerised Records of Rights, digitised and increasingly georeferenced cadastral maps, computerised registration and digital survey technologies have changed what a court can know before oral evidence begins. But still, the procedural architecture through which such claims are adjudicated remains substantially rooted in 1908. Civil procedure can therefore be seen where the old procedure often ended, i.e., with identification of the land. Every land suit may be accompanied at filing by a parcel dossier, the parcel identifier, current and historical Records of Rights, cadastral and, where available, georeferenced maps. Registered instruments can be relied upon, along with mutation history, relevant survey or settlement entries, and a concise statement of actual possession. At the first substantive hearing, the court ought to know what land is in dispute and whether the controversy principally concerns title, record, map, possession, inheritance, transaction or encroachment. That change could narrow litigation enormously. Today the true dispute may emerge only after pleadings, local inspections and cross-examination. A parcel-first procedure would require the controversy to be defined before it expands. The written statement should then have a real outer limit. In ordinary civil litigation, procedural deadlines have proved elastic.



REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGE

POST-INDEPENDENCE LAND REFORMS ALTERED THAT LANDSCAPE PROFOUNDLY. ZAMINDARI AND MANY INTERMEDIARY INTERESTS WERE ABOLISHED. TENANTS AND CULTIVATORS ACQUIRED STRONGER OR MORE DIRECT RIGHTS UNDER DIFFERENT STATE LAWS. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE, THE RECORDED HOLDER AND THE PARCEL BECAME MORE DIRECT. LAND ADMINISTRATION CONSEQUENTLY BECAME INCREASINGLY CONCERNED WITH IDENTIFYING THE CURRENT LEGALLY SUSTAINABLE CLAIM TO A DEFINED PARCEL, RATHER THAN MERELY RECORDING LAYERED TENURIAL RELATIONSHIPS.

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

This is the first article in a three-part series on land reforms. The subsequent articles will be published over the coming week in this space.

Parliament has already accepted firmer discipline for commercial disputes. A citizen litigating over a home, farm or inherited plot has no lesser claim to timely justice.

Interim injunctions also require redesign. They are sometimes indispensable to prevent construction, alienation or destruction of the subject matter. But an interim order that survives for years becomes the practical allocation of property without adjudication. Land injunctions may therefore carry a review date and automatically trigger an accelerated schedule for deciding the core dispute.

The same logic applies to evidence. Oral testimony remains necessary where fraud, intention, oral partition, family arrangement or personal conduct is genuinely in issue. But objective facts can ordinarily be proved objectively. Boundaries ought to come primarily from authenticated maps and coordinates, registration history from official records, and physical change, where relevant, from reliable geospatial or time-stamped material.

The local commission could likewise become a technical exercise rather than a second trial. Neutral, trained survey personnel using prescribed reference points, modern equipment and digitally reproducible measurements can replace ad hoc reconstruction through conflicting private maps and oral identification. A court need not ask a commissioner to rediscover information the State has already surveyed and stored. Adjudgments must carry consequences. In land litigation, delay itself can have economic value, and a party enjoying possession may benefit from elapsed time. Nominal costs do little to change behaviour.

Most importantly, a land decree must end the dispute. Under the present architecture, a successful litigant may spend years proving title and then begin another struggle to obtain possession. Record correction, map correction and delivery of possession can generate further proceedings before different authorities. A decree declaring ownership but leaving the successful litigant to separately fight for the land, the map and the record, is justice only on paper. A new land procedure should strive to integrate adjudication and execution. Once a decree becomes executable, consequential mutation, map correction and delivery of possession should flow from it through an electronic interface between the civil court and land administration.

This also requires a firmer jurisdictional line between civil courts and revenue authorities. Mutation and fiscal records should not provide parallel forums for re-litigating questions already decided by competent courts. Equally, routine record correction, survey discrepancies or map errors should not require a full civil trial where an effective revenue court can resolve them. Jurisdiction needs to follow the nature of the dispute.

None of this means replacing fairness with speed. Notice, hearing, cross-examination where necessary, appeal and judicial review remain essential. The reform required is for better-structured justice, fewer procedural stages, where facts can be objectively verified and stricter consequences built-in where delay is intentional. India has spent decades modernising its land records, while leaving the procedure for resolving land disputes anchored to an earlier informational age. That mismatch now needs correction. The case is, therefore, for more than just mere amendment to the CPC. Land disputes justify a specialised civil procedure. It must have parcel identification at its core and documentary evidence as the default.

Case-management timeliness, limited interlocutory decrees, clear civil-revenue jurisdiction and execution built into the decree itself, could further tighten the procedure. The test of a procedural law is not how long it survives, but how effectively it delivers justice under the conditions in which it operates. The CPC of 1908 responded to the land relations, records and technology of its time. India in 2026 has different land relations, vastly better land information and entirely different technological capacity. Its land justice system should finally reflect that change.

Modernise EV rules, preserve physical guardrails



RK MISRA

Years ago, India's decision to carve out a special, exempted category for low-speed electric two-wheelers (E2Ws) in the Central Motor Vehicles Rules (CMVR) gave rise to a quiet miracle. It unlocked an affordable way to commute and enabled lakhs of first-time earners and gig workers, including women, to use light E2Ws to deliver goods and build livelihoods without needing a driver's licence. It is a policy success story worth protecting.

This is why a small but consequential change in the proposed amendment to Rule 2(u) of the CMVR needs to be reexamined.

The draft notification retains key conditions for exemption, including motor power, maximum speed, braking, reflective fittings and motor cut-off behaviour. However, it drops another significant condition: unladen weight, previously capped at 60 kg for exempt vehicles. On the surface, this looks like a simplification. In practice, it removes a safeguard that matters.

The problem with power and speed alone

Defining low-speed EVs through motor power and top speed may seem logical. However, both of these are governed by software. An unscrupulous company or operator can tamper with a controller, bypass a speed limiter and unlock a motor's power output without changing the vehicle's physical components. Until now, India's policy framework has anchored the exemption to a physical, difficult-to-manipulate specification: weight. Removing the weight ceiling eliminates a reliable enforcement proxy that regulators and traffic officials can use to distinguish compliant vehicles from illegal or tampered ones.

Heavier E2Ws with more powerful motors increasingly resemble motorbikes rather than bicycles. Allowing unlicensed, unregistered riders to operate such vehicles could create safety challenges rather than solve them. In a country already facing a significant road-safety burden, removing a physical weight limit - whether 60 kg or another appropriate threshold - deserves careful consideration.



A weight limit cannot substitute for testing, certification and enforcement. But it can provide an additional, tamper-resistant layer of regulatory clarity.

Protecting inclusive mobility

The original intent of the low-speed EV exemption was to widen mobility access and enable people to pursue livelihood opportunities, particularly those who may not be able to afford conventional EVs or easily obtain a driver's licence. This includes women and younger people entering mobility work for the first time. Without a weight ceiling, heavier vehicles with larger frames and dual-seat capacity could qualify for the same licence-free, registration-free exemption. That risks moving the category away from the specific use case it was designed to support. Feedback from women riders, in particular, highlights a practical advantage of lightweight vehicles: they are easier to manoeuvre, park and control in Indian traffic conditions.

Heavier vehicles have an important role in the mobility ecosystem, but they serve a different purpose and use base. Regulation should, therefore, define exemptions around the vehicle type and the specific need they are intended to address.

The 60 kg limit is not a design constraint

Would retaining a 60 kg ceiling constrain innovation? Our experience suggests otherwise. Yulu's fleet, designed in-house and manufactured with Bajaj Auto, is built within this exact limit and operates at scale across Indian cities today. It demonstrates that a well-engineered, world-class electric two-wheeler is possible within a 60 kg unladen weight ceiling. The 60 kg limit has not been an obstacle. Instead, it has encouraged manufacturers to engineer vehicles more intelligently while providing a clear physical boundary for the category.

A workable way forward

The real question is not whether 60 kg is sacred. It is: What physical safeguard should define the boundary of licence- and registration-exempt E2Ws? Regulators are considering other guardrails, including single-seat or no-pillion restrictions and physical verification at the point of sale. These are good ideas. But if the objective is to establish clear, objective and enforceable boundaries, they should complement a weight limit rather than replace it. As India's EV sector grows, regulation must evolve with technology and new use cases. But modernising the rules should not mean discarding the guardrails that make them practical to implement. The goal should be a framework that gives innovation room to grow while keeping the boundaries of licence-exempt mobility clear, objective and enforceable.

The writer is co-founder of Yulu

Extradition: How India is closing the escape route for fugitives



SANJAY KUMAR JHA

For a long time, leaving India putting the law on hold. Once an accused person crossed an international border, the case could disappear into diplomatic delays. India's extradition framework remained limited, with treaties covering only 37 countries. Between 2004 and 2013, the country extradited an average of just four fugitives a year while over a hundred requests remained pending. Crossing a border was therefore not simply a means of escape. It could become a way of buying time. Over the past decade, that equation has begun to change. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the pursuit of fugitives has steadily moved from the margins of criminal justice to the centre of national security policy. Once that political direction was established, the challenge shifted from intent to execution. It needed institutions that can sustain it, agencies that can work together and legal frameworks that can withstand scrutiny in foreign courts. It is here that Union Home Minister Amit Shah's role deserves closer attention. Less as the face of individual extraditions and more as the chief architect of a

framework intended to make India's pursuit of fugitives more systematic and credible. The return of 274 fugitives from 36 countries between 2019 and July 2026 has understandably attracted public attention. But the number only tells part of the story. Every successful repatriation depends on a chain of institutions, police forces, intelligence agencies, courts and foreign governments working in sequence. If even one link weakens, the process stalls. The more meaningful question, therefore, is not how many fugitives have returned, but why India is now able to pursue them more consistently than before.

The answer lies in the Union Home Minister's institution building. For years, India's extradition system struggled with limited treaty networks, inconsistent documentation and poor inter-agency coordination. There was also no dedicated law to deal with economic fugitives and their assets. The Fugitive Economic Offenders Act of 2018 changed that, while from 2020 onwards, efforts to bring fugitives back was pursued in "mission mode." The problem was structural and the architecture to address it did not emerge through one sweeping reform. It was assembled piece by piece. BHARATPOL, launched in January 2025, created a national platform for coordination and information-sharing with INTERPOL, connecting more than 1,400 units of central and state agen-



REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGE

cies. Information sought by the CBI is now generally shared within 10 to 20 days, and in some cases within just 3 to 10 days. Operation Trishul added a technology-driven layer to fugitive tracking, using satellite inputs, surveillance and digital footprints to locate individuals who had changed their names or identities abroad. Neither change would have transformed India's record on its own. Together, however, they altered the way the system functions. INTERPOL Red Corner Notices have risen sharply with 401 notices issued against fugitive criminals over the last three years. Extradition requests are now prepared in a more professional and standardized manner, with written assurances tailored to the documentary requirements and legal expectations of indi-

vidual countries. A Standing Focus Group within the Intelligence Bureau's Multi-Agency Centre was constituted in January 2026 to prioritise fugitive cases, standardize dossiers and maintain follow-up with foreign partners. Legislative reforms, including provisions for trial in absentia under Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, mean that remaining outside India need not automatically bring judicial proceedings to a halt. Individually, these may look like administrative or legal measures. Collectively, they represent a significant re-engineering of how India pursues fugitives beyond its borders. It is worth remembering that extradition is among the most demanding forms of international cooperation. Foreign courts are not obliged to accept India's case because New Delhi considers someone guilty. Every request must satisfy the legal standards of another sovereign jurisdiction. Every document is scrutinized. Every procedural lapse can become grounds for delay. This is why institutional capacity matters so much. It is also why Shah's emphasis on professionalising extradition requests, improving coordination and deepening engagement with INTERPOL matters beyond the politics of any individual case. The implications extend beyond the return of

individual criminals. Whether the accused are terrorists, organized crime figures or economic offenders, every successful extradition strengthens the credibility of the Indian state. The financial dimension matters too. Between 2019 and 2026, assets worth ₹17,874 crore belonging to fugitive criminals were attached, while ₹18,762 crore was restituted in cases involving fugitive economic offenders. It tells financial offenders that geographical distance is no longer the insurance policy it once appeared to be.

Cases such as the extradition of Tahawwur Hussain Rana are important not only because of the individual involved, but because they demonstrate the patience, diplomatic engagement and legal persistence that modern extradition demands. The 274 returns include fugitives wanted in cases ranging from murder and organized crime to terrorism, narcotics, sexual offences and financial crimes. Under Prime Minister Modi, extradition acquired political priority and under Union Home Minister Amit Shah, it acquired institutional shape. The achievement, therefore, is not merely that more fugitives have returned to India. It is that the Indian state has begun building the capacity to ensure that crossing an international border is no longer seen as the easiest way to outrun Indian law.

The author is a former Special Director General of Police, Madhya Pradesh.

“The 100% equity NPS schemes have attracted younger investors”

The multiple-scheme framework introduced last year, the lower mandatory annuitisation requirement, and the growing focus on non-government subscribers and gig workers are broadening NPS's appeal, Sriram Iyer, MD & CEO, HDFC Pension Fund, tells **Preeti Kulkarni**.



National Pension System (NPS) has seen a host of changes in the past 12 months. While some, such as lowering the mandatory annuitisation limit, were long-awaited, others appear to have made what was meant to be a simple retirement scheme for lay investors, more complex...

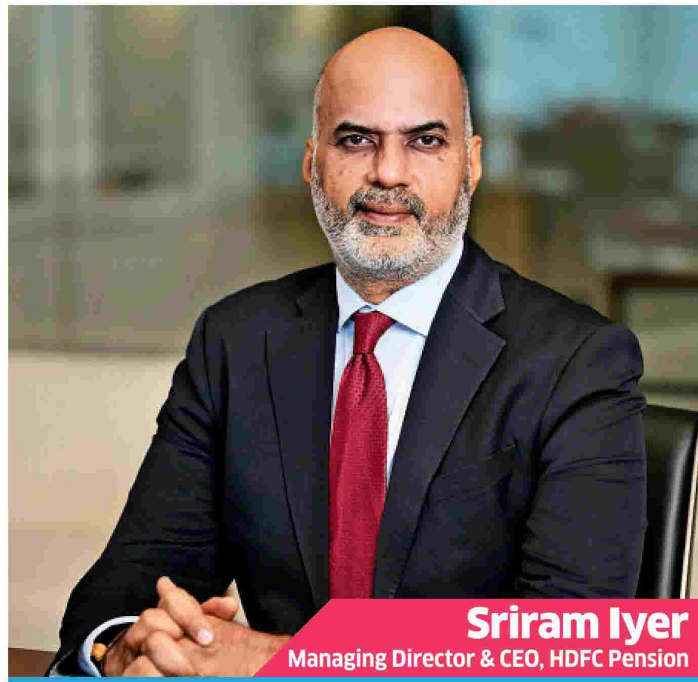
By and large, the changes announced have been positive for the industry. It has been over a year since the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) Chairman Sivasubramanian Ramann took charge, and several of these changes are basis feedback from stakeholders across the NPS ecosystem, including subscribers. A key change is the reduction in compulsory annuitisation at retirement from 40% to 20% of the corpus. He has been encouraging the industry to shift focus from the government sector to the non-government sector. A lot of what he has done has resulted in expansion of the target segment of customers. If you had asked me a year-and-a-half ago if we could onboard two lakh Zomato delivery partners, my answer would have been, it's difficult. Today, that's happened. This entire gig economy, which employs around a crore people, is now looked at by the industry as an opportunity. The segment has taken off. At Zomato, there are a number of delivery agents who contribute ₹2,000 a month or ₹100 a week; amongst some of the other platform workers that we have onboarded, there are service professionals who contribute ₹20,000 a month. We've been very focused on reaching out to every single platform company. Also in the works now is our outreach to Urban Company's network for gig workers.

The corporate segment's subscriber base has shown a sharp growth for the industry. What role has the tax benefit (where employers' contribution up to 14% of the basic is tax-exempt) played in driving corporate NPS adoption?

It has always been there, but now that many people have switched to the new regime, they realise this is the only benefit available. And it makes a substantial difference. NPS is a very big beneficiary of all these developments that we have seen.

Mutual fund investors have Sebi-registered independent advisors (RIAs) who offer unbiased advice. But in the case of NPS, who can subscribers turn to for advice on investment strategies, especially in light of the changes in the last one year?

The entity that is supposed to be doing this task of educating customers is the Point of Presence (POP) – it is the responsibility of the POP/distributor community. That's where we (HDFC Pension Fund) also has a POP licence) are using a lot of technology to make sure that we are able to reach out to these customers. For a distributor of other financial instruments, there is a lot more complexity, compared to what we offer. You could



Sriram Iyer
Managing Director & CEO, HDFC Pension

argue that compared to the auto choice the end user had earlier, the increased number of choices has made it more confusing. But I don't agree with that entirely. One of the things that we, as domain specialists, have to do is to ensure that people understand what it really means. Simplification is necessary, subscribers should not lose their way trying to figure out terminologies.

What patterns have you observed over the years in terms of subscribers' investment behaviour and preferences?

Clearly, the new schemes (multi scheme framework) have sparked interest among people. Savvy investors are the first to latch on to the new investment bandwagon. And as you would expect, the 100% equity schemes have attracted a lot more interest among the younger crowd. You will see that people in the 25 to 35 age group are pretty much dominating the 100% equity schemes. Across pension fund managers, I would say 60-70% of all the money has gone to these funds.

How does the approach to NPS differ between government and private-sector employees?

In the case of government employees, given

the fact that the choice has been made for them beforehand, everybody gets into the default scheme to begin with. The non-government sector is very different because it is voluntary. There are many companies where money was going to the superannuation scheme earlier, but is now getting redirected to NPS. We ourselves have, in the last two years, migrated around ₹10,000 crore of AUM (assets under management) from superannuation to NPS.

Also, the age profile is very different. The new-age companies, especially the global capability centres (GCCs), have an average age of around 28-29 years. So how do you communicate the importance of retirement planning to somebody who is 25? For them, retirement is 35 years away. So how do I change the narrative with them? I feel this is where tech and AI-led communication can help us convey our message around the importance of starting early and investing consistently over the long-term.

How have NPS subscribers reacted to the subdued stock market performance in recent months, given that the equity component in NPS remains the key attraction?

That's the beauty of this product. For

example, corporate NPS contribution happens pre-salary (since the employer deducts the contribution before crediting the salary), just like employees' provident fund (EPF). So, the likelihood of somebody stopping contributions is almost zero. We've not seen contributions being stopped – unlike SIPs (systematic investment plans) in mutual funds – despite all that's happened in the last few months. These are all huge positives for this product. Put simply, there's been no major shakeout.

There is a view that commissions for NPS intermediaries are still on the lower side despite revisions, especially when compared to other financial products. Do you feel the need for any changes in the policy?

There will always be a view that mutual funds and insurance, which are the other two big competing products, pay a lot more to a distributor than NPS. But one of the big objectives that NPS has is to help build a meaningful corpus over a long period of time, and cost leakages can significantly hamper this objective. So, 20 basis points (fee to intermediaries) is decent, in my opinion.

Beyond the 0.2% distribution fee, there are other ancillary benefits too. You will see that many banks, PSU as well as private sector banks have become a lot more aggressive on NPS because they all realise that as a product it is very sticky.

How do you look at the prospect of offering NPS through the GIFT City route?

It's a great opportunity. We're still at the early stages of evaluating it. HDFC International Life and Re, HDFC Life's subsidiary, headquartered in Dubai International Financial Centre (UAE) has a branch office presence in GIFT City, and they've had a very good experience thus far. We have been discussing with them about their processes and experience. Potentially, it can be a great product for non-residents who live and work abroad but might choose to come back to India later. That cohort, will find it very attractive. We are looking at it very closely, but no decisions have been made yet.

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Realising the full potential of employer-funded life insurance

Additions to group term plans can offer support to employees' dependants and continuity of employer operations.



ABHISHEK BONDIA
MANAGING DIRECTOR, SECURENOW

The base GTL is where most organisations start. Voluntary enhancement provides affordable cover without underwriting hurdles. Riders extend protection to disability and critical illness. Employer-employee plans provide continuity despite transitions, and keyman insurance protects the organisation itself.

Ask most employees what their group term life (GTL) cover includes, and they will give you one number—sum assured. Ask them if they have enhanced this cover voluntarily, which riders are attached, or whether they have a plan independent of their employer, and the answer is almost always the same: a pause, followed by, “I didn’t know that was possible.” GTL can serve as a differentiated employee benefit, as well as a genuine business protection tool, if it is properly designed and deployed.

Bigger cover without underwriting

A few employers offer employees the option to voluntarily raise their GTL sum assured beyond the employer-funded base. The process is simple: the employee pays the incremental premium, typically deducted from salary, and the insurer provides the enhanced cover at group rates. The cost advantage is passed on to employees. GTL premiums are substantially lower than retail individual term plans, often by 30-50%. The more important advantage is underwriting. Voluntary enhancement within the free cover limit (FCL), that is, the threshold below which no medical check-up is required, means the employee does not need to go through health screening.

This reduces the administrative burden of buying and maintaining a separate cover. Employees must understand two caveats clearly—voluntarily enhanced GTL cover, like the base cover, lapses the day employment ends. Also, the group plan still attracts GST, which the individual plan does not.

The riders most never ask for

GTL plans can include riders that substantially broaden the scope of coverage. A critical illness rider pays a lump sum on diagnosis of specified illnesses, typically 10-20, including heart attack, cancer, kidney failure, and stroke. This is distinct from health insurance, which reimburses treatment costs. The critical illness rider provides capital the family can deploy as needed, be it for treatment costs not covered by health insurance, for living expenses during recovery, or to repay debt. Other riders include terminal illness, accidental death benefit, and permanent disability (both accidental and natural).

Most plans do not include riders. The ones that do, generally opt for a low limit. In one case, the base cover was two times the annual cost to company, while the critical illness rider was set at a flat sum assured of ₹10 lakh. A C-suite officer, that is, CXO of the company, subsequently suffered a brain stroke and had to leave his job. In such a scenario, the critical illness sum assured is grossly insufficient relative to the income disruption the family faces.

Employees should request a full schedule of riders from their human resources team.



Many are surprised to find riders already included in the base policy. Adding these at the next renewal is relatively straightforward.

Cover that outlasts employment

Employer-linked GTL has one structural limitation: it ends when employment ends. A lesser known alternative is the employer-employee option for term life insurance.

These are individual term life plans paid for by the employer and assigned to the employee. As these are individual plans, they become employer-independent and renewable on the member’s own terms. Such plans provide continuity for employees who move across geographies, departments, or group companies. During such transitions, the benefits structure can vary significantly, thus affecting the employee adversely. This option is generally used for senior executives, where consistent life cover is important regardless of the organisational transitions the individual goes through. A term plan, under the employer-employee ambit, provides the employee with coverage that is entirely independent of whichever entity they happen to be employed with at any given time.

When employer is the beneficiary

While GTL is an employee benefit, that is, a cover whose value flows to the employee’s family, there is a parallel life insurance instrument that matters for business continuity: keyman insurance. This is relevant for CXOs, founders, and critical employees. Under a keyman policy, the employer purchases a life insurance policy for a key employee, whose absence would materially impact the business. The employer pays the premium and is named the beneficiary. If the policy is triggered, the payout goes to the organisation, not to the employee’s family.

The sum assured is set to reflect the estimated financial impact of losing that indi-

vidual—revenue at risk, cost of finding and training a replacement, disruption to ongoing projects, or the value of client relationships that may not survive the transition. For a startup, where two founders drive all business development, or a mid-sized firm, where one person holds critical technical knowledge, keyman cover can mean the difference between an orderly transition and a financial crisis.

Though keyman insurance is not an employee benefit in the conventional sense, it can have an indirect benefit if the employee holds significant equity or shares in a company. If the keyman passes away, the payout can enable the company to buy back those shares from the estate, providing the family with liquidity at a difficult time. For organisations serious about business continuity, keyman insurance deserves as much attention as any other item in the insurance portfolio.

The base GTL is where most organisations start. The best ones don’t stop there. Voluntary enhancement provides affordable cover without underwriting hurdles. Riders extend protection to disability and critical illness, events that ruin families without triggering a death claim. Employer-employee plans provide continuity despite transitions, and keyman insurance protects the organisation itself. Individually, each of these instruments addresses a specific gap. Together, they represent a more complete approach to life and business continuity risk. For HR teams that have treated GTL as a line item, the question worth asking at the next renewal is simple: Are we providing a safety net, or just the appearance of one?

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THE ASIAN AGE

14 SEPTEMBER 2026

Many more Brics in Global South wall

India played the perfect host to the summit of Brics that is assuming rising relevance in the current scenario of a world of conflicted geopolitics. All the internal contradictions in a grouping of nations that has in its ranks a victim as well as perpetrator of one of two major wars which are on today, were smoothed over in another show of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's personalised style of diplomacy.

The signing of the joint declaration of 11 nations and 10 partner countries is to be viewed as a triumph of diplomacy even as Brics has matured after 20 years into a forum that commands a fair share of economic and political clout and has learnt how to use it without having necessarily to step on the toes of any super economic or military power.

The document may not have gone far enough to condemn unequivocally the wars that are impacting the world economy, particularly nations that are dependent on a free flow of oil and gas and goods and commodities through the regular sea routes to the east. But that could be because Russia is one of the key members and Mr Vladimir Putin was attending his first Brics summit since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022.

With China, India and Russia in the grouping, the forum could let out what may appear to be a rant against the world order still dominated by the West in most decision-making processes, besides the whimsical and unilateral ordering of tariffs, sanctions and other tools used to dominate the global order as the occupant of the White House is attempting to do.

Mr Donald Trump was very much the elephant in the room as the two-day summit brought out a declaration that said so much about what is wrong with the world order today and why the Global South should not embody the diverse flavours of And yet the world needs the US, too, if only for its economic clout, if not for its military prowess that seems to have had some doubts clouding it after its war with Iran in which it seems to have had no compunction about bombing sites containing material for nuclear fuel.

Given the trappings of drama in a summit of so many world leaders, including the Secretary-General of the United Nations in the open session, and a grand dinner whose menu did not embody the diverse flavours of a truly international cuisine, India may still have managed it well enough. It may not, however, have done enough to sort its own relationship with China where a fundamental difference of opinion still exists on whether advancing all round ties should get precedence over peace and tranquility at the LAC.

The other major point over which India may not have progressed as much as it would have liked to is the trade deficit with various members of the bloc which are still in negative territory. The nation may have to pay the price for playing host to Brics at a particularly fraught time globally, which might have come at the cost of looking after its own trade interests. Balancing the import-export books is going to be a challenging task which will have to be tackled progressively by following up on what may be promised in bilateral meetings. The fact is India has emerged with its image enhanced in a world that is getting more multipolar by the day but so much remains to be done internally for the strength of the economy to be reflected in welfare and jobs for many more people when the pop and fizzle of grand summits fade.

Should Tata Sons go public?

The Reserve Bank of India's decision to reject Tata Sons' proposal to surrender its RBI licence and obtain a waiver from the public listing requirement upholds the principle of equality in the country and strengthens the central bank's image of professionalism and impartiality. Tata Sons is a private limited company in which an 81.6 per cent stake is owned by charitable trusts collectively called 'Tata Trusts', while the remaining 18.4 per cent is held by the Shapoorji Pallonji Group. Despite being guided by charitable principles, Tata Sons is the country's largest business conglomerate, as it is the promoter of over 100 companies, including 26 publicly listed entities.

Tata Sons is divided over the listing, with the heavily indebted SP Group backing the proposal and Tata Trusts opposing it. The principal opponent of the proposal is Noel Tata, the chairman of Tata Trusts, who believes that a listing would subject Tata Sons to market pressure to prioritise profits and valuation, contrary to the foundational principles of Tata Trusts. The RBI's stand is entirely fair, as large groups such as Tata Sons, with assets worth ₹2 lakh crore and an estimated valuation of around ₹10 lakh crore, must open themselves to public scrutiny. Similarly, Noel Tata's argument is also plausible. Tata Trusts has an impeccable record of supporting India's scientific community, while Tata Sons, under Ratan Tata, took long-term and risky bets — neither of these approaches is likely to find favour with the markets.

If Tata Sons accepts the RBI's order, it will have to comply with Sebi's listing rules. The rules make it mandatory to dilute at least 2.5 per cent stake worth ₹25,000 crore, immediately. It must dilute a 15 per cent stake within five years and a 25 per cent stake within 10 years. Tata Sons, therefore, has only two options — either comply with the RBI's regulations or challenge its order in court.

THE ASIAN AGE

KANSIDH MITTAR

Editor

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Subhani



How Trump has fuelled the resurgence of Brics



Sanjaya Baru

Sanjayovacha

This column is being written even as the New Delhi Brics Summit is still in progress. The likely language of the joint statement to be issued by Summit leaders has been revealed in the joint statement issued by Brics finance ministers at their meeting in Mumbai on September 10. Under the theme "Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability", the statement categorically stated, "We continue to have serious concerns with the unilateral imposition of trade and finance-related actions, including the raising of tariffs and non-tariff measures, which distort trade and are inconsistent with World Trade Organization rules." Reterating support for an open, transparent, inclusive, non-discriminatory and rules-based multilateral trading system, the Brics finance ministers decided to explore the potential for cross-border payments in local currencies. President Donald Trump has breathed new life into Brics.

Brics began as Brics — Brazil, Russia, India and China — a group of 'emerging economies' as they were dubbed by the American firm Goldman Sachs, that coined the term. Russian President Vladimir Putin immediately picked up the formation and took the first step. A meeting of Brics finance ministers met on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in 2006. There was no proximate reason that year for such a gathering, India was in the midst of a lovefest with the United States, Russia was in fact a member of the Group of Eight (G-8) and China and Brazil were coasting along without any serious concerns. The US itself was still focused on a

war in West Asia.

Then came the trans-Atlantic financial crisis of 2008-09. The United States took the initiative to convene a meeting of the Group of Twenty (G-20), an informal grouping of the finance ministers of 20 key economies formed in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98, at the heads of government level. The initiative for a G-20 Summit meeting was taken by President Nicolas Sarkozy of France who convinced President George Bush that US convene a meeting to deal with the financial crisis.

The US toyed with the idea of expanding G-8 to G-9 by inviting China to the high table, recognising China's potential role to help it steer out of the financial crisis. Both Presidents Bush and Sarkozy felt the creation of a G-9 may upset other developing economies, especially India, and so decided to leave the G-20 finance ministers' group into a heads-of-government group. While Brazil, China and India welcomed the idea they soon realised that the G-9 remained in place even as a G-20 was formed. Russia was invited to join G-7 in 1997 in the western hope that it would remain a suppliant. It was evicted in 2014 when it invaded Crimea.

It was President Putin who took the initiative to convene a Brics leaders' summit on the sidelines of a G20 meeting he was to host in 2014. South Africa was invited to join at the second Brics summit in China and thus Brics became Brics. It was still a talk shop articulating the concerns of emerging economies in the context of the financial and trans-Atlantic financial crisis. The US and the European Union were focused almost

While he has openly targeted China and Russia, the US President has bad-mouthed the leaderships of Brazil, India and South Africa and targeted each one of the Brics economies

entirely on graduating out of the crisis and discovered that they would not be able to do so without China's help.

China's global relevance came to the fore when it became key to the resolution of the 2008-09 financial crisis. US treasury secretary Frank Paulson desperately reached out to his Chinese counterpart to make sure that China would not dump the large stock of US treasuries it was holding. China decided to play ball and help stabilise the dollar even as the euro was going through convulsions. The 2008-09 financial crisis marked the beginning of the decline of Europe and the rise of China in the global economy.

When Brics met in New Delhi in March 2012, the finance ministry, which remained the convening ministry for the group and was then headed by Pranab Mukherjee, came up with the idea of setting up a Brics bank that was named as the Brics New Development Bank (NDB). As soon as the idea of a fund-based institution was created the group realised that the national income of one member was more than the combined national income of the other four. China happily welcomed an Indian initiative proposing that NDB be located in China but offered to make its first chairman an Indian.

Those who today draw attention to China's so-called 'dominance' within Brics forget that in most such plurilateral groupings there has always been a 'dominant' member. The US has always dominated Brics' group. China's G-7 imposing its will on other six member economies. It dominates interna-

tional financial institutions with its dollar power. When the US found Japan emerging as the second biggest economy and Japanese exports into the US market threatened American firms it forced Japan, and along with it, Germany and others, to accept a depreciation of the US dollar against their currencies through what was called the Plaza Accord and signed at Hotel Plaza in New York in 1985.

In international relations money and weapons define power. Indeed, US is the dominant member of Nato, with a defence budget that exceeds the combined defence budget of all other Nato member countries. The US has used its money and muscle to assert its global dominance in the post-war era. When American allies like Japan and Germany were beginning to pose an economic challenge, the US used its power to keep them in line. Even today they remain occupied nations.

Quite understandably, therefore, China has come to dominate Brics. For this reason, India's interest in Brics began to flag until Donald Trump came along. Trump's unilateral economic sanctions and escalating trade war against all emerging economies has united Brics. While he has openly targeted China and Russia, he has bad-mouthed the leaderships of Brazil, India and South Africa and targeted each one of the Brics economies. In the newly expanded Brics he has been waging war against Iran. He has not spared other new members including Indonesia, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia.

The 18th Brics summit was convened in New Delhi against this background. A grouping that seemed to be lost momentum has suddenly found new life being breathed into it by the shared concerns of member nations in the face of the latest bullying by an ageing super power.

Sanjaya Baru is a Distinguished Fellow, United Service Institution of India and Takshashila Institution

LETTERS

RITABRATA WRONG

Mamata Banerjee's Trinamul Congress and its rebel faction led by Ritabrata Banerjee have each met the EC. I do not find any reasonable ground as to why the Ritabrata camp has been demanding that the ownership of the twin flower symbol be vested with itself. Indeed, its claim lacks a solid legal foundation. While the Ritabrata camp may command a majority within the party's organisational base, this internal support does not legally erase the rights of the party's founder. From a legal standpoint, Ritabrata and his followers must follow the directives of Ms Banerjee, the rightful owner of the symbol. If they wish to separate, their legal alternative is to establish a new political party under a different symbol.

Arun Gupta

Kolkata

RANK OPPORTUNISTS

THE UPCOMING byelections for the Jangrapuram and Kharaknagar constituencies in Tamil Nadu are a blatant mockery of the democratic process. These polls are absolutely unnecessary, forced upon the public solely because elected representatives chose to abandon the AAPDM mandate they won and shamelessly defied to the TVK. Winning an election on one ticket only to resign and defect shortly after is a profound betrayal of public trust. It treats the electorate's mandate like a disposable commodity. Furthermore, it forces an unfair and expensive financial burden on the tax-paying public to fund byelections that should never have happened. It is time for citizens to demand strict accountability from politicians.

R. Sivakumar Chennai

HILSA VICTORY

TALK ABOUT an incredible twist of culinary fate! Over the past two months, India has sent nearly 500 tonnes of premium Hilsa across the border into Bangladesh, marking the first time the country has ever exported the delicacy to its neighbour. Who could have seen this reversal coming? We might soon witness Bangladesh fish-lovers eagerly waiting on shipments of *Gangar ilish*, matching the legendary passion Bengalis have always held for *Padma ilish*.

Sourish Misra Kolkata



Anita Anand

Gen Z questioning elders, and not just tradition... So is it a new era for India?

Recently, there has been increased pushback against accepted norms and customs in India. An example is the birth and growth of the Cuckooch Janta Party (CJP). During the June-July protests in New Delhi this year, young people demanded accountability from the central government for curbing the medical entrance exams following a leak of the question papers.

One of the fallouts of these protests has been the extensive mainstream and social media coverage focused on women's behaviour, including bad language, usually the prerogative of men. In a widely circulated social media video, a 15-year-old girl used expletives that shocked the Prime Minister, prompting harassment and relentless trolling. She was forced to go on social media to apologise for calling the Prime Minister such names. He forgave her, saying she was a child and that it was the elders' responsibility to guide their children and show them the "right path".

For weeks, Prime Minister Modi and his ministers remained silent, particularly on the protesters' demand that the education minister resign over the leaked papers. The government responded with force beating and water-spraying the protesters, and then followed up by harassing and trolling them.

The youth movement, spearheaded by the CJP, is also a pushback against decades of social norms and traditions in which young people are patronised by older adults across almost every sphere of life, beginning with the family. Age-old sayings such as "elders, such as parents and grandparents, teachers and those in authority, know best" have been questioned by

individuals and groups. But at this point in history, it's a moral imperative.

Young people, minorities, women and those who are disenfranchised are fed up with being told they don't know better. And it's not only in urban areas. Recently, a Haryana khap panchayat decreed that young women's phones should be smashed (note: not men's), that live-in and same-sex relationships are not right, and that if people do not abide by these, they will be barred from living in their villages.

Khap panchayats are community councils formed on the basis of shared lineage (gotra) or geographic proximity. They lack legal legitimacy but operate with implicit support from political figures and local law enforcement. They focus on preserving "community honour" by rigidly enforcing social norms, particularly regarding marriage, inter-caste relationships, and women's roles in society. The khap panchayats have been criticised for their archaic, anti-women, anti-caste and reactionary stance.

But this time, the challenge to their dictates has come from within the villages, from Gen Z on social media, who strongly object, stating that the personal choices of consenting adults trump community custom. The khap panchayat defended its dictate, saying it was a suggestion that parents should control their children and show them the right path. But children, who are technically and otherwise adults, don't want to be controlled anymore.

Protests and questioning of social conventions and politics are not new in India. However, with the advent of social media and technological advances that enable faster information sharing, protest and

critique have taken on a new dimension. They are also more strategic, as the CJP movement has shown, in targeting incompetence in education and government.

Social norms are essential to the functioning of a society, providing individuals with unwritten rules of conduct that guide behaviour across varied institutions, such as the family, workplace, religious and political contexts. But these norms are not static; they evolve over time, shaped by new economic, cultural and technological realities, and the old norms have to be challenged.

Challenging age-old norms is essential to achieving greater inclusivity, equality and acceptance of diverse identities and realities. Pushing boundaries and initiating discussions that lead to positive social change are vital.

The evolution of social norms is evident, particularly in the widening intergenerational gap, which has deepened over the past few decades. India's developmental path, marked by colonial legacies, post-Independence nation-building, the 1991 liberalisation reforms, and the digital revolution, has produced stark generational contrasts.

Those born before the 1980s grew up in a society dominated by joint families, caste hierarchies, and patriarchal traditions. Those who came after, especially Millennials and Gen Z, were raised amid traditional media, urban mobility, and neoliberal reforms, making them more receptive to individual choice, gender equality and alternative family structures. And more inclined to question traditional norms. This comes from critical thinking. Critical thinking, essential in education, is unfortunately

not a dominant factor in Indian school and college education because it isn't emphasised in government-designed curricula. The primary aim has been and remains to obtain a degree, at whatever cost, to ensure job security and its accompanying benefits.

Questioning traditional norms is discouraged and frowned upon, seen as disloyalty to the institution to which the individual belongs. It begins with the family, which withdraws financial and emotional support. Without a sufficient safety net, young people can either break out on their own or return to the family, at the cost of individual growth.

And now, any challenge to authority, particularly the government's policies and practices, is considered anti-national and unpatriotic. However, Gen Z is different. They have questioned traditional norms, prompting pushback within and beyond institutions. With the birth of the CJP movement, judges, bureaucrats and heads of institutions who had previously deferred to the current government's dictates are now speaking out. Minorities have grown more vocal.

In families, young people are challenging their parents to question the activities and beliefs of the BJP, which many of them voted for. Because the idea of education as a major liberator for many Indian families is too important to them, many parents who would have opposed protests and accusations against the government seem to be more open to reason.

Pushback is here to stay.

The writer is a development and communications consultant

quick
BITES

INDICATORS

		%
Sensex	74,781.76	-0.16
Nifty 50*	23,398.10	-0.34
S&P 500*	7,656.98	0.86
Dollar (₹)	95.55	0.10
Pound Sterling (₹)	129.08	-0.21
Euro (₹)	110.81	-0.21
Gold (10gm) (₹)	151,549*1,212	-0.79
Brent crude (\$bbl)	104.32	-0.28
10-Yr bond yield	7.021	0.57
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.971	-0.004

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Patent Office
proposes new
guidelines

The Indian Patent Office (IPO) has proposed drafting guidelines for examination of pharmaceutical patent applications to improve the quality, consistency and uniformity of scrutiny, taking into account the evolving interpretation of laws by courts. It has issued draft guidelines for examination of pharmaceutical applications for patent. Good patents are essential for promoting innovation and development.

ITC eyes new
segments like
frozen snacks

ITC is expanding Aashirvaad beyond its core atta business into newer food categories, including ready-to-cook foods and frozen snacks, as it seeks to strengthen the brand's growth, a senior company official said. Aashirvaad, which began as a whole wheat atta brand, now has more than 200 SKUs across staples, spices, fresh foods and frozen products, with consumer spending on brand hitting ₹10,000 cr.

CSIE-IMMT to
lead ₹207-crore
pilot project

CSIR-IMMT will lead a ₹207-cr national pilot project to develop India's first direct reduced iron (DRI) plant operating entirely on hydrogen, aimed at cutting emissions from steel making. The 20-tonne-per-day facility has received in-principle approval from the steel ministry and MHR, with ₹113 cr in government support under the National Green Hydrogen Mission. The rest will be funded by consortium partners.

Manipal Health
plans expansion
in select states

Manipal Health Enterprises is evaluating expansion opportunities in Telangana, Kerala, AP, and Chhattisgarh as it seeks to deepen its presence in select markets, according to its FY26 annual report. The healthcare group is also pursuing inorganic growth across Karnataka, Maharashtra and Goa, including the Mumbai-Pune corridor, as well as eastern India. The Group's greenfield Jhu hospital project in Mumbai is another key infrastructure initiative.

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RB move puts Tata Sons
stakeholders in spotlight

Listing could offer SP group an avenue to monetise part of its holding

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, SEPT. 13

The Reserve Bank of India's rejection of Tata Sons' request to tender its certificate of registration as a non-bank financial company and its direction to comply with rules applicable to an NBFC in the upper layer could pave the way for a potential listing of the holding company, creating a significant value-unlocking opportunity for its minority shareholders, including several listed Tata Group companies and the Shapoorji Pallonji Group.

The Tata Sons board meeting scheduled for Sept. 17 assumes significance as the group weighs its response to the RBI's directive for immediate compliance, including listing-related requirements. Seven listed Tata Group companies collectively hold about 11.6-13 per cent in Tata Sons. These include Tata Motors (3.06 per cent), Tata Steel (3.06 per cent), Tata Chemicals (2.53 per cent), Tata Power (1.65 per cent), Indian Hotels Company (1.11 per cent), Tata Consumer Products (0.43 per cent) and Tata Investment Corporation (0.43 per cent).

With the stock market closed on Monday for Ganesh Chaturthi, shares of these companies could come into focus on

WAY FOR POTENTIAL LISTING

RBI rejects Tata Sons' request to exit the NBFC framework

This puts the spotlight on Tata Sons' potential listing.

LISTING IMPORTANCE

FOR TATA Their Tata Sons GROUP holdings could gain a market value

FOR INVESTORS: The listing could make the value of Tata Sons' holdings more transparent.

TATA SONS board meeting on Sept. 17

POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS OF RBI'S DIRECTIVE AND THE COMPANY'S NEXT STEPS WILL BE CLOSELY WATCHED.

TATA SONS STAKEHOLDERS

Tata Trusts about 66%

Shapoorji Pallonji Group 18.37%

Seven listed Tata companies about 11.6-13%

A listed Tata Sons could provide an avenue to monetise its 18.37% stake

The remaining roughly 66 per cent of Tata Sons is held by seven Tata Trusts. In its letter to Tata Sons, the RBI rejected the company's March 28, 2024 request for voluntary surrender of its certificate of registration (CoR) to be classified as an unregistered company.

"After considering the

Tuesday as investors assess the potential implications of a Tata Sons listing. Its stakes of a Tata Sons listing, either through the second-ary market after listing or an offer for sale as part of the listing process.

The Shapoorji Pallonji Group, the largest non-Tata shareholder, holds 18.37 per cent in Tata Sons through Cyrus Investments and Sterling Investment Corporation, with each holding about 9.19 per cent. A listing could provide the group with an avenue to monetise part of its holding, either through the secondary market after listing or an offer for sale as part of the listing process. The SP Group has for years sought to monetise

its Tata Sons stake amid its debt obligations. Its listed companies include Afcon Infrastructure, Sterling and Wilson Renewable Energy, Forbes & Company and Gokak Tea.

The remaining roughly 66 per cent of Tata Sons is held by seven Tata Trusts. In its letter to Tata Sons, the RBI rejected the company's March 28, 2024 request for voluntary surrender of its certificate of registration (CoR) to be classified as an unregistered company.

SEMICONDUCTOR
COS RAISE \$1.4 BN
IN EQUITY FUNDING

New Delhi, Sept. 13: India's semiconductor sector has attracted \$1.4 billion in cumulative equity funding across 281 funded companies, with nearly half of the capital raised since 2020, according to Tracxn data.

The sector raised \$701 million in equity funding since 2020, including \$228 million in 2024 so far, as India seeks to build a domestic semiconductor ecosystem.

Industry event Semicon India 2026 is scheduled to be held in New Delhi from Sept. 17-19.

India has 3,557 semiconductor companies. Sector funding increased from \$49 million in 2021 to \$473 million in 2025, implying a 36 per cent CAGR over five years.

Electronic manufacturing services has attracted the most funding since 2020 at \$813 million, followed by embedded hardware at \$51.9 million.

Integrated circuits and fabless semiconductor manufacturing were among the other leading business models.

JIO CREDIT EYES APPROVALS FOR FUNDING BY DEC.

Mumbai, Sept. 13: Jio Credit's proposed ₹10,268 crore fundraising from Bank of America (BoFA) is expected to receive regulatory approvals by December, with the capital infusion set to give the non-bank lender a growth runway of up to five times its current assets under management, Jio Financial Services MD and CEO Hitesh Sethia said.

Jio Credit's AUM of ₹30,000 cr could rise to as much as ₹1.5 lakh crore following the investment, although this is a growth runway and not a time-bound target, Sethia said. The company would not need fresh capital until its AUM reaches that level, he said.

IBBI to tighten safeguards in
guarantor resolution casesMADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 13

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) has proposed tightening safeguards in guarantor resolution resolution process for personal guarantors, including barring related parties of a guarantor from voting on a repayment plan and making asset valuation mandatory.

The proposals, set out in a discussion paper issued on Sept. 12, come against the backdrop of the insolvency case involving Essel Group chairman Subhash Chandra, in which creditors were offered about ₹6.5 crore against claims of roughly ₹22,000 crore under a repayment plan.

The IBBI has also proposed requiring resolution professionals to identify and report any avoidance transactions involving

ing the personal guarantor, including preferential, undervalued, fraudulent and extortionate credit transactions. The regulator has sought stakeholders' comments on the proposals by October 3.

Under the proposed changes, a related party of a personal guarantor would be assigned a "nil" voting share. Currently, an associate of the guarantor is barred from voting on the repayment plan.

The IBBI also wants resolution professionals to appoint registered valuers to determine the fair and

realisable value of the guarantor's assets. The valuation report, along with the repayment plan, would have to be placed before creditors.

The regulator has also proposed that creditors' deliberations and the reasons for their decision on a repayment plan be recorded in the minutes of their meeting. Where the repayment amount is significantly lower than the admitted claims or the estimated realisable value of the guarantor's assets, creditors would have to provide a commercial rationale for approving the plan over initiating bankruptcy proceedings.

Resolution professionals would also be required to examine whether the guarantor had been party to any avoidance transactions and provide the info to creditors before they vote on repayment plan.

Bank credit growth rises 19% in Aug.

FALAKNAZ SYED
MUMBAI, SEPT. 13

Scheduled commercial banks' credit growth accelerated to 19.1 per cent year-on-year at the end of August 2026, nearing a decade high, as loan demand and stronger systemic liquidity drove lending momentum in the first five months of FY27.

According to the Reserve Bank of India's weekly statistical supplement,

credit growth was sharply higher than the 10.3 per cent recorded a year earlier, while deposit growth rose to 17.3 per cent from 9.8 per cent. Outstanding bank credit stood at ₹224 lakh crore as of August 31, while deposits were at ₹279 lakh crore.

Industry credit grew 22 per cent in July, while services and retail loans expanded 21 per cent and 17 per cent, respectively. Vehicle finance was the

strongest segment within retail, growing 19 per cent, while credit card growth remained muted.

Deposit growth also strengthened significantly, rising from 12-13 per cent in the first quarter of FY27 to 17.8 per cent by

third-party evaluations. OpenAI CEO Sam Altman backed the proposal, while xAI co-founder Elon Musk said, "Data is right."

Investors said the calls could trigger some selling in semiconductor and AI stocks as markets assess whether slower model development will affect earnings. However, strong demand for chips, power and computing capacity could limit the weakness.

AI-linked stocks have already faced pressure over concerns about infrastructure spending

Sebi weighs changes to
expiry-day settlementRAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, SEPT. 13

Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has proposed a review of market timings and settlement methodologies for derivative contracts following concerns raised by market participants over closing patterns since the introduction of the closing auction system (CAS) on August 3, 2026.

Sebi has proposed reviewing the existing methodology for determining the settlement price of index and stock derivatives contracts on expiry days.

The market regulator has also proposed changes to the timings for continuous trade settlement (CTS), CAS and derivatives trading to better align the market segments. Under the proposal, the trading period for the derivatives segment after the conclusion of CAS would be reduced to five minutes from the existing 10 minutes. This would allow CAS to end at 3:25 pm and derivatives trading to close at 3:30 pm.

"Sebi's principle objective is to provide greater continuity between CTS and CAS, with longer CTS duration and aligning closing of derivatives markets by 3:30 PM," Sebi said.

The regulator has proposed retaining the flexibility of the existing plus/minus 3 per cent price band to avoid constraining price discovery during CAS.

It has also proposed that unexecuted "iceberg" orders outstanding at the commencement of CAS may be transitioned to CAS as normal limit orders.

An iceberg order is a large single buy or sell order split into smaller sequential limit orders to hide the true trade size from the market.

The interaction between the cash and derivatives markets during CAS, and significant movements

SEBI PROPOSES REVIEW OF CAS AND
DERIVATIVES FRAMEWORK

PROPOSALS

Review settlement methodology for index and stock derivatives on expiry days.

Review timings for CTS, CAS and derivatives trading.

CAS to end at 3:25 pm. Derivatives trading to close at 3:30 pm.

POST-CAS derivatives trading period reduced to 5 minutes from 10 minutes.

Retain existing 3% price band during CAS.

Unexecuted iceberg orders may be shifted to CAS as normal limit orders.

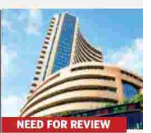
HIGHER expiry-day volatility during CAS.

CAS closing price from a thinner cash market being used to settle heavy F&O expiry contracts.

Sharp swings in indicative closing prices and unusual spikes in options premiums.

Lower liquidity during CAS.

Partly executed large orders.



NEED FOR REVIEW

Concerns raised by market participants after CAS introduction on August 3, 2026.

Key concerns include indicative index values during CAS.

Interaction between cash and derivatives markets during CAS.

Significant movements in certain index option contracts nearing expiry.

tracts are available, with effect from August 3, 2026, with the objective of facilitating efficient and transparent price discovery of the closing price of securities.

"The initial experience with CAS and feedback received from various stakeholders and market participants have accordingly highlighted the need to review a few aspects related to CAS and settlement methodology for derivatives," Sebi said.

The review has been proposed in light of feedback and concerns over movements in the indicative index value during CAS, the interaction between the cash and derivatives markets during CAS, and significant movements

observed in certain index option contracts nearing expiry, among other issues, Sebi said.

Market participants have also raised concerns over CAS-determined closing prices from a thinner cash market being used to settle large futures and options expiry contracts. Sharp movements in indicative closing prices and unusual spikes in options premiums during expiry days have also been flagged.

Easier payments boost trade: EEP

KOLKATA, SEPT. 13: EEP

India on Sunday called for a common agreement among BRICS nations to eliminate non-tariff barriers and establish efficient payment mechanisms in local currencies to boost trade.

EEPC India chairman Pankaj Chadha said around 75 per cent of exporters' problems could be addressed by removing such barriers and streamlining cross-border payment.

"While we have been discussing this for a while



now, it is time to move to its execution," Chadha said, calling for a common set of standards among BRICS members.

BRICS accounts for nearly one-fourth of glob-

al trade, while engineering goods contribute about 27 per cent of India's merchandise exports. Brazil, China, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and South Africa are among the key BRICS destinations for Indian engineering exports.

EEPC India said greater regulatory harmonisation and simpler trade procedures would reduce compliance costs for exporters and help Indian engineering firms expand their presence across BRICS markets.

EU pact gives India 1.64 MT
of annual steel export quota

New Delhi, Sept. 13: India

will get country-specific tariff-rate quotas (TRQs) totalling 1.64 million tonnes a year for steel exports to the European Union under the proposed free trade agreement, according to the draft text released by the EU.

Of the total 1.64 million tonnes, 946,616 tonnes will be available under the most-favoured-nation

(MFN) component and 694,633 tonnes under the PTA component.

The quotas cover rolled sheets, coated steel, stainless steel, rebars, wire rods, pipes and tubes. India currently exports about 4 MT of steel annually to the EU.

The TRQs come against the backdrop of the EU's Steel Overcapacity Regulation.

NEW WAVE Projects underway to support memory, networking, cooling

AI chip demand to stay intact

California, Sept. 13: AI executives' calls to slow the pace of advanced AI development could weigh on chipmakers and other AI-linked stocks in the near term, but the impact is likely to be limited as demand for computing infrastructure remains strong, analysts said.

Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei has called for the industry to slow development of its most advanced models and said the company would introduce additional safeguards, including independent

third-party evaluations. OpenAI CEO Sam Altman backed the proposal, while xAI co-founder Elon Musk said, "Data is right."

Investors said the calls could trigger some selling in semiconductor and AI stocks as markets assess whether slower model development will affect earnings. However, strong demand for chips, power and computing capacity could limit the weakness.

AI-linked stocks have already faced pressure over concerns about infrastructure spending



and whether returns will justify the investment. The Nasdaq 100 is down more than four per cent from its June record, while a US chip-stock gauge has fallen 14 per cent and Asian tech stocks eight per cent.

Some investors said a slower development cycle could benefit the sector by allowing companies to generate returns from infrastructure already being built. "It does not really change the money being spent on chips, power and infrastructure," said Global X Strategist Billy Leung.

Analysts expect demand for memory, networking, cooling and power equipment to remain supported by projects already underway. SK Hynix futures were down about 2.5 per cent in Singapore on Sunday.

The Statesman

Incorporating and directly descended from
the Friends of India - founded 1818

Orangutan Trail

Five baby orangutans turning up in an Odisha forest should not be treated as an oddity of the animal kingdom. It is a warning about the reach of international wildlife trafficking and, potentially, about India's place in that illicit trade. The animals could not have reached Balasore naturally. They belong to rainforests thousands of kilometres away in Indonesia and Malaysia. Their discovery together, without adults, points overwhelmingly towards human transportation. Their apparent familiarity with people makes the possibility of captivity before abandonment even harder to dismiss. What makes the case significant is the emerging Indonesian connection.

Indonesia has entered discussions with Indian authorities and sought the return of the animals if their Indonesian origin is established. Preliminary assessment has reportedly raised the possibility that they are Sumatran orangutans, although DNA testing will be necessary to establish their provenance conclusively. That distinction matters. It would be premature to declare that Indonesia is the source of this particular consignment, still less to identify those responsible. But the possibility deserves serious investigation because it could reveal something considerably larger than an isolated smuggling episode.

Indian investigators are examining whether the animals travelled by road and whether Odisha was a transit point rather than their intended destination. The location near the West Bengal border is important. If the animals entered India through the Northeast or another international route and were subsequently moved through West Bengal and Odisha, the case could expose a trafficking corridor that has so far remained largely invisible. There is also a disturbing economic logic behind such trafficking. Orangutans are critically endangered, difficult to obtain legally and highly desirable to collectors of exotic animals. Their rarity increases their value precisely because their capture is illegal. The five infants therefore represent not merely wildlife but commodities in an international black market. India has strong wildlife-protection legislation and agencies tasked with combating wildlife crime.

Yet legislation is only as effective as the intelligence, border surveillance, forensic capacity and international cooperation behind it. A trafficking network capable of moving five infant creatures across national borders is unlikely to depend on improvisation alone. It requires transport, intermediaries, money and buyers. That is why the investigation should not end with identifying whoever abandoned the animals in Balasore.

Authorities should reconstruct the entire journey: where the orangutans originated, how they entered India, who transported them, who financed the movement and where they were supposed to go. The Indonesian request for restraint adds an important diplomatic dimension. India and Indonesia have close strategic relations, but wildlife crime offers a different kind of test of bilateral cooperation. If these animals are proved to have originated in Indonesia, their return should become part of a wider effort to dismantle the network that removed them from their natural habitat. The tracing of the animals has given Indian authorities something more valuable than five rescued animals: a possible trail. The real test is whether they follow it all the way to its source - and its intended destination.

Pentagon Purge

The most consequential question raised by the turmoil at the Pentagon is not whether Pete Hegseth has the authority to remove senior military officers. A civilian secretary of defence - or war - must have that authority. The question is what happens when personnel changes become a mechanism for enforcing conformity rather than implementing policy. Since assuming his position, Hegseth has removed or sidelined an extraordinary number of senior officers. The latest departures include Army Secretary Dan Driscoll, who had been closely involved in an ambitious programme to reshape the Army. Gen. Randy George, the Army's chief of staff, and Gen. Chris Dutton, another senior military officer. A civilian dismissal of a substantial part of the Army's senior leadership has been disrupted while America is engaged in active conflict.

There is a legitimate argument behind Hegseth's active conflict. The American military has accumulated expensive legacy systems, cumbersome procurement procedures and layers of bureaucracy. Ukraine has demonstrated how quickly drones, artificial intelligence and electronic warfare can be commercially available technology can alter warfare. The Pentagon cannot respond to those changes by protecting every existing institution and weapon system.

Yet reform becomes hazardous when professional disagreement is treated as disloyalty. The irony is that Driscoll and George were themselves pursuing significant transformation. The Army had been experimenting with new approaches to drones and autonomous systems and studying lessons from Ukraine. Their removal therefore cannot simply be explained as the triumph of reform over an entrenched military establishment. It also reflects a struggle over who defines reform, and which professional judgments are permitted to influence it. That distinction matters because military organisations depend on candour. Generals are not supposed to be independent political actors, but neither are they political appointees. Their value to civilian leaders lies partly in their willingness to explain operational realities that may be inconvenient or unpopular.

If officers come to believe that disagreeing with the secretary can end their careers, the resulting institution may become more obedient but less useful. Senior commanders can learn to anticipate what political leaders want to hear. That is a particularly dangerous form of institutional decay because it is largely invisible until a serious decision goes wrong. The timing makes the experiment riskier still.

The United States is fighting Iran while confronting Russia, China and the rapidly changing character of warfare. The Pentagon simultaneously needs continuity in command and the freedom to challenge assumptions. Hegseth may ultimately succeed in making the military leaner, more technologically capable and less bureaucratic. His critics may also be wrong about the consequences of his personnel decisions. But reform cannot be judged solely by how decisively a secretary imposes it. The real test is whether the reformed institution becomes better at thinking, adapting and telling uncomfortable truths. A powerful secretary can replace generals. He cannot quickly replace the institutional knowledge those generals accumulated. And that is the gamble now being taken at the Pentagon.

Growing up online

Perhaps the most sensible approach is neither a complete technological prohibition nor unrestricted access. Children need digital childhoods, but they also need real childhoods. Parents can begin with simple measures: keeping phones away during meals and homework, establishing screen-free periods before bedtime, turning off unnecessary notifications and discussing what children encounter online rather than simply policing their devices. Most importantly, adults should model the behaviour they expect from children. It is difficult to persuade a child to stop scrolling when every adult around them is doing precisely the same thing.



encourage eating-disordered behavior (e.g., restrictive eating, purging, excessive exercise) should be minimized, reported, and removed; moreover, technology should not drive users to this content."

This distinction is crucial. A child watching an educational video for twenty minutes is not experiencing social media in the same way as a teenager spending three hours comparing appearance, popularity and lifestyle with carefully curated images of peers and influencers. Psychologists are especially concerned about social comparison. Children are still developing their identities and self-esteem. Constant exposure to images of apparently perfect bodies, beautiful homes, expensive possessions and exciting lifestyles can create the impression that everyone else is happier and more successful. The resulting gap between one's real life and the idealised online world can contribute to dissatisfaction, anxiety and low self-esteem.

The problem is intensified by the design of many platforms. Notifications, recommendations, autoplay, short videos, likes and personalised feeds encourage users to remain engaged. For a developing brain, the immediate reward of a notification or positive reaction can be particularly powerful. Consequently, what begins as entertainment may gradually become habitual checking bordering on addiction.

Another major concern is sleep. Children who take their phones to bed may continue scrolling long after they should be asleep. Notifications and the anticipation of new messages can keep the brain alert. Sleep deprivation, in turn, can affect concentration, memory, emotional regulation and academic performance. Thus, the damage may not arise from one particular post or video but from a lifestyle gradually reorganised around the smartphone. Yet it would be simplistic to declare social media the enemy.

For many young people, especially those who feel isolated in their offline environments, online communities can provide friendship and emotional support. Children with particular interests can find communities that may not exist in their immediate surroundings. Social media can also promote

creativity, civic engagement, cultural exchange and access to educational resources. The real concern, therefore, is unregulated and developmentally inappropriate use. Interestingly, that concern has increasingly moved from psychologists' offices into the courtrooms of many western countries, including the United States.

For example, across the United States, thousands of lawsuits have been filed against major technology companies hosting social media platforms. The plaintiffs - including young people, parents, school districts and government authorities - allege that these platforms were designed in ways that encouraged compulsive use among children and adolescents and contributed to mental health problems. Such courtroom battles are significant because they change the nature of the public conversation.

The issue is no longer simply whether parents should tell children to put their phones away. Plaintiffs argue that responsibility should also fall upon companies whose business models depend upon sustained user engagement. The recent case of a technology giant paying \$18 billion to settle lawsuits against its social media platforms and the harm it causes to children due to its addictive algorithms highlights that there is a growing awareness that social media platforms impact childhood in undesirable ways.

These developments should not be misunderstood as a judicial declaration that social media causes every instance of depression, anxiety or self-harm. Human behaviour is extraordinarily complex. Mental health is influenced by family circumstances, genetics, poverty, academic pressure, peer relationships, trauma and many other factors. Scientific literature itself continues to debate causation, rather than merely association.

Nevertheless, the lawsuits raise an important ethical question: Should social media platforms used extensively by children be designed

primarily to maximise engagement, or should child well-being be the overriding principle? There is no single answer. Parents have an important role, but parental responsibility cannot carry the entire burden. Schools must teach digital literacy and help students recognise manipulation, misinformation, cyberbullying and unhealthy online behaviour. Psychologists can help children develop resilience, self-esteem and healthy patterns of technology use.

Governments can establish appropriate safety standards and demand greater transparency from technology companies. Platforms themselves must build stronger privacy protections, effective age assurance, safer recommendation systems and meaningful parental controls.

Perhaps the most sensible approach is neither a complete technological prohibition nor unrestricted access. Children need digital childhoods, but they also need real childhoods. Parents can begin with simple measures: keeping phones away during meals and homework, establishing screen-free periods before bedtime, turning off unnecessary notifications and discussing what children encounter online rather than simply policing their devices. Most importantly, adults should model the behaviour they expect from children. It is difficult to persuade a child to stop scrolling when every adult around them is doing precisely the same thing.

The deeper lesson is that technology should serve childhood - not redefine it. A healthy childhood requires sleep, play, conversation, physical activity, face-to-face friendship, boredom, imagination and the freedom to make mistakes without an audience of thousands.

The American social media debate - and the rapidly expanding courtroom battle against the technology giants - suggests that society is beginning to recognise a fundamental principle: children are not merely consumers. They are developing human beings who deserve an online environment designed with their wellbeing in mind. The challenge before parents, educators, psychologists, policymakers and technology companies is to ensure that the next generation grows up not as prisoners of the screen, but as masters of it.



RUDRASINI DATTA
The writer is Assistant Professor in English, Pratibha Waddadar Mahavidyalaya, Nadia

There was a time when a child's social world was largely confined to the school, the neighbourhood playground and the family home. Today, much of that world fits inside a smartphone. Friendships are made and maintained through screens; entertainment arrives through endless scrolling; approval is measured in likes, shares and followers. Social media has become an important part of childhood and adolescence - but growing evidence suggests that its benefits come with significant psychological and social costs. The question is no longer whether children should use social media. It is how much, how early and under what safeguards they should use it. Psychologists across the globe are repeatedly warning that children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the pressures created by social media. The American Psychological Association (APA), in its health advisory on adolescent social media use, does not argue that social media is inherently harmful. It recognises that online platforms can help young people maintain friendships, find communities, express themselves and obtain information. But it also stresses that the impact depends on the child's developmental stage, individual characteristics, the nature of online activity and the social environment surrounding the child.

Significantly, APA states, "To reduce the risks of psychological harm, adolescents' exposure to content on social media that depicts illegal or psychologically maladaptive behavior, including content that instructs or encourages youth to engage in health-risk behaviors, such as self-harm (e.g., cutting, suicide), harm to others, or those that

The Korea Herald

Far right's war on modern architecture

Although the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) has been surging in the polls for two years, it has been kept from power by other parties' refusal to enter governing coalitions with it. But since this "firewall" relies on the AfD never winning outright majorities, it could be fatally undermined by this weekend's state election in Saxony-Anhalt.

True, even if the AfD forms government in Saxony-Anhalt, it will not be able to do much about its current preferred topic: migration policies and refugee law. But Germany's 16 federal states (Länder) do have wide-ranging authority over culture and education policy, and it is here that the AfD's program has been most revealing (and revolting).

Far-right populists always wage culture wars. Though they sometimes try to take advantage of cost-of-living crises or other economic challenges, peddling the idea that they alone represent what they call

the "real people" is their core commitment. Recasting the narrative so that only citizens with the "right" characteristics qualify, they never miss an opportunity to push for the "remigration" not only of refugees but also of "unreal" or "fake" citizens, meaning those from the wrong ethnic background (or even those committed to the wrong political positions).

Given their fixation on questions of identity, far-right parties can keep changing their economic agenda - veering from neoliberalism to support for a strong welfare state - without ceasing to be far right. Only by changing their tune on refugees and migrants would they truly become a different political entity.

This brings us back to the AfD's program for Saxony-Anhalt. The AfD decries what it calls the establishment parties (Altparteien) not of corruption or malice,

but of a weakness of will that stems from "nationalism" and "low self-confidence". These defects supposedly have "cultural" roots, namely a "tradition of destroying tradition" that has left the country defenseless against "rainbow ideologies".

If things go its way, the AfD hopes to make Saxony-Anhalt a model of "patriotic cultural politics" for the other Länder. It advocates "thinking in a German way" (deutschdenken), which means opposing the current regional government's Bauhaus-inspired campaign for artistic freedom and modern ideas. Founded in Weimar but eventually relocated to Dessau in Saxony-Anhalt, the Bauhaus school of art, design and architecture is still remembered fondly for remarkable buildings like those designed by Walter Gropius in Dessau during the mid-1920s.

But according to the AfD, Bauhaus represents "anti-German art," meaning "German art that doesn't want to be German."

If given power, it would require every new edifice built with state financial support to reflect what it considers a recognizably German tradition (a category that apparently does not include the state's own most influential architectural school).

Attacks on modern architecture are not a peculiarity of the German far right. From former Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to US President Donald Trump, who has issued multiple executive orders to make classicism the preferred style of new federal buildings, far-right leaders have long sought to transform the built environment to reflect what they regard as proper national traditions.

Their reasons are varied. For starters, architecture, from the huge mosques erected under Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to the prominent Hindu temples commissioned by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, provides tangible, widely visible cues as to who "the real people" are supposed to be.

Letters To The Editor | editor@thestatesman.com

Never again

Sir, The Allahabad High Court's order quashing the preventive detention of a student activist should be read carefully, not just by the Gautam Buddha Nagar administration whose conduct came under sharp censure, but also by bureaucrats and police officers too eager to please their political masters by slapping draconian laws on protesters.

Against the backdrop of the lower judiciary often dragging its feet on politically sensitive cases, the judgment also acts as a reference for administrators whose conduct came under extraordinary provisions that should be used sparingly and backed up by evidence, not as instruments to obstruct dissent.

The facts of the case, as laid out by the

HC order, are jarring. A notice under Section 130 of the BNS, issued before the activist's arrest, carried a general diary number that could only have been generated after taking her into custody.

When the shameful fabrication of records was pointed out by the court, the administration had no answer.

The judiciary must not use strict provisions as levers of executive overreach. In warning that some officers who forget their oath to the Constitution risked losing their jobs, the court has underlined a disturbing trend among senior officers to prefer narrow career and political concerns over the needs of the country's founding document.

It is a shame that a constitutional court had to use a global totem for repression

and authoritarianism to describe the conduct of officers in charge of governing the world's largest democracy. It cannot be allowed again.

Yours, etc., Sanjay Chopra,
Mohali, 9 September.

Encouraging

Sir, The report "After CM nudge, seven big-ticket pujas opt out of Rs.1 lakh grant", published today, is encouraging. This approach taken by the seven puja committees at the call of CM Suvashis Adhikari, who encourage other organisations and clubs to explore their duty towards the state and its future economic development. Crores of rupees were spent on grants to

puja committees, which was unproductive and weakened the state exchequer. The present government is trying to stop this drain of expenditure so that the state economy can be revived.

If these amounts are utilised for structural development, such as roads, transport, drinking water, health centres, primary schools, toilets, etc., it will be more meaningful than expending money for festive merriment. I thank the Puja committees who decided to forgo the Puja grant.

Not engaging in politics over whether we should take vegetarian or non-vegetarian food during Durga Puja celebrations, we must devote our minds to the development of Bengal.

Yours, etc., Mihir Kanungo,
Kolkata, 9 September.



Economic siege may not defeat Iran

ADITYA MANAN

The United States' new economic offensive against Iran may prove less decisive than Washington hopes. On August 24, the U.S. announced "Operation Economic Outcast", imposing sanctions on 60 individuals, entities and ships across five sectors of Iran's economy, from digital assets to shipping. The move seeks concessions without opening another military front. But can economic pressure achieve what military force and diplomacy have failed to deliver: a negotiated settlement of Iran's nuclear programme?

Under U.S. sanctions since 1979, Iran has built mechanisms to circumvent them. China is the crucial example. Despite American sanctions, it buys about 90 per cent of Iran's crude exports, often at a discount of about \$12 a barrel. Iran also relies on shadow banks and tankers. The damage is severe. The rial has weakened sharply since January. War damage to industry and refineries has contributed to fuel shortages, while inflation has reached 88 per cent. Iranian oil exports have fallen to a new low. Tehran has about 80 million barrels outside Hormuz, but sanctions make them difficult to monetise.

Yet greater pressure may produce diminishing returns. Even if Washington imposes secondary sanctions on Chinese banks, Iran could use its own payment systems for oil transactions. Beijing has warned that the new sanctions threaten global growth and financial stability and has vowed to protect its legitimate interests. Washington will therefore be cautious about confronting China. Beijing's restriction of rare-earth supplies last year demonstrated the potential cost of economic retaliation and was followed by President Donald Trump's effort to improve relations with China. This exposes a contradiction in the American strategy. Washington wants to choke Iran's economy without turning the confrontation into a wider

contest with China. Aggressive pressure on Chinese institutions risks turning the crisis into another arena of U.S.-China rivalry.

Iran believes the political clock favours it. Only 31 per cent of Americans, according to the latest survey, support continued military action against Iran. With the November midterm elections approaching, Trump has strong incentive to end the confrontation without appearing to concede defeat. Tehran understands this constraint. Keeping oil prices above \$80 could increase pressure on the White House through higher energy costs.

Hormuz provides Iran another source of leverage. Tehran has been close to an arrangement with Oman under which ships crossing the strait would pay tolls. This could increase pressure on Washington to enforce its embargo. But further U.S. attacks could damage American credibility without producing a decisive result. The central unresolved issue is nuclear. Iran's nuclear programme and stockpile of fissile material remain substantially intact. When Trump launched "Epic Fury", the expectation was that military pressure would weaken the Iranian regime and compel it to abandon its nuclear ambitions. When that failed, Washington offered sanctions relief and billions of dollars in investment, hoping Tehran would open Hormuz and give up its nuclear programme. That too failed. The economic offensive is now being used to achieve what force and inducements have not.

The June MOU was significant. It offered Iran an end to U.S. opposition, protection for its proxies, sanctions relief, the unfreezing of oil revenues and \$300 billion for reconstruction. In return, Iran would have had to eschew its nuclear programme and open Hormuz. President Masoud Pezeshkian wants Washington to return to the understanding. It demonstrates that a negotiated exit was possible. The difficulty is that Tehran now believes its bargaining position has improved.



The Yemen front strengthens that perception. The Houthis have attacked Saudi ports, airports and refineries. Their objectives are economic and strategic: securing payments for Yemeni civil servants, lifting restrictions on flights and shipping, and obtaining a greater share of revenues from Yemen's oil exports. Since 2014, they have controlled north-western Yemen, including Sana'a and much of the western coast. Geography and military adaptation favour the Houthis. They operate from defensible highlands and use mines, caves, bunkers and tunnels. They have access to fibre-optic drones that are difficult to jam. In 2025, they shot down seven U.S. Reaper drones and nearly hit American fighter aircraft. Last month, they reportedly brought down a Turkish-made Bayraktar drone operated by Saudi forces and have begun developing their own drones. Pressure on Iran can now reverberate across both the Gulf and Red Sea.

Iran's leadership adds another complication. The emerging establishment differs from the model associated with Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who balanced competing interests

by alternating between reformists and hardliners. The new generation of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps commanders appears more action-oriented, security-focused and results-driven. Mohsen Rezaei is the new national security adviser, while Ahmed Vahidi and Hossein Taeb represent the harder security establishment. Seven senior leaders are consolidating power, while Mojtaba Khamenei has remained absent from public life. The new leadership therefore appears more uncompromising than its predecessor, although its longer-term direction remains uncertain.

For Washington, the blockade may be less a route to victory than an attempt to avoid another war. Iran may still negotiate, but its new leadership is unlikely to accept coercion without demanding substantial financial and strategic compensation. The MOU offers a possible exit because it contained major economic incentives. Washington must use that opening without appearing to reward resistance.

For India, the implications are immediate. A prolonged confrontation

threatens oil prices, shipping through Hormuz and maritime commerce through the Red Sea. India's energy security and trade are therefore vulnerable to developments beyond its control. China's continuing purchase of Iranian oil could make the crisis another arena of U.S.-China competition, complicating India's calculations.

Economic coercion can weaken Iran without resolving the nuclear question. Decades of sanctions have forced Tehran to develop alternative financial and trading channels, while China provides an important economic outlet. Military pressure has not eliminated Iran's strategic capabilities, and diplomacy has yet to bridge the fundamental dispute. For India, therefore, the significance of the U.S. economic siege lies not simply in whether Washington can impose greater pain on Tehran, but in whether it can convert that pressure into a political settlement without turning the Gulf, Hormuz and the Red Sea into a wider strategic confrontation.

The writer, a retired Brigadier of the Indian Army, is an analyst on geopolitics, international and defence affairs.

100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 14 September 1926

OCCASIONAL NOTE

During the last seven years the world's production of sugar has increased by nine million tons. Consumption, however, has not been able to keep pace with supplies, with the result that at the end of the last sugar year there was a carry-over of nearly three million tons. Commenting on this fact the Secretary of the Sugar Bureau, Pusa, quoting apparently from the Journal des Fabricants de Sucre, says that India, Japan, and China are capable of absorbing much larger quantities provided they are offered at a price they can afford to pay. But why is it that India continues to be a country which absorbs sugar rather than produces it? With her cheap labour, her rich soil, and her climate she should be providing the whole world with sugar. The cane grows everywhere from Calcutta to Peshawar.

News Items

INDIA'S FUTURE

DOMINION STATUS WITHIN 10 YEARS

Winnipeg, Sept.

Sir T. Viliyaghavachariar has arrived here en route to the Pacific coast. Interviewed he said his mission in Canada was to make India better known, and to foster a spirit of Empire unity. He expressed the opinion that India would be a nation with Dominion status within the Empire within ten years.—Reuter.

OCCUPIED ZONES

IMPORTANT AGREEMENT REACHED

(British Official Wireless.)

Rugby, Sept.

Agreement is reported to have been reached between the German Government and the inter-Allied—Rhine Land High Commission regarding conditions in the occupied territory. Although the text is not yet published, it is understood that the agreement provides for concessions to the inter-Allied Commission and a guarantee of protection by the German Government for persons who have given assistance to the Occupation authorities.

HEALTH BUDGET

LEAGUE AGREES TO A MILLION FRANCS

Geneva, Sept.

Speaking in the Second Committee of the League during discussion on health organization, especially the bureau at Singapore, Sir Hilton Young suggested that the health budget should be stabilized at a million francs and that the money required should be taken from it. Apart from France and Czechoslovakia, all nations agreed.—Reuter.

LORD LYTON

PORTRAIT TO BE PAINTED FOR CALCUTTA

London, Sept.

The Morning Post says that Sir Prodyat Tagore has commissioned Mr. G. P. Jacob-Hood to paint a portrait of Lord Lyton for the Victoria Hall, Calcutta. After the completion of the work the artist will go to India, to paint the portraits of Sir Prodyat Tagore, his wife and son, and the Maharajah of Burdwan.—Reuter.

SIR E. G. BURLS DEAD

FORMER CHIEF OFFICIAL IN THE INDIA OFFICE

London, Sept.

The death has occurred of Sir Edwin Grant Burls.—Reuter's Special Service.

IT CAME TO MIND | MANISH NANDY

Our fragile relations

Relationships are like crystal vases, beautiful but brittle. They trill and thrill, and then, suddenly, they are no more. Or, worse, they subsist as a flimsy facsimile of the real thing, robbed of real spirit and meaning.

That is a paraphrase of what my friend, Dan Glover, told me yesterday. He should know. He has married three and, by all accounts, had other earnest relationships a larger number of times. A lanky, loose-limbed guy, Dan works with the port authorities in my town and became my friend only because we have occasionally split tacos at the Mexican bistro near my home.

He is a witty, wisecracking man who seems at his best when sipping beer in the portico of his Sullivan Island home. He peered at me over his glass and said something that sounded like the Wizard of Oz, "Longing for somebody makes you run, running makes your heart pound, and heartbreak lends you sense."

I asked Dan to elaborate. "When I met Diana, I couldn't think of anything else. She was dazzling, and I lusted for her. I had cared for other women, but they faded into the background when I met Diana. She seemed unique. Being with her was magical."

"How something that magical can evaporate I cannot explain. But it

did. One day, as she walked in the front door, I looked at her and asked myself: why did she mean so much to me one day. She didn't any longer and I had no clue as to why. When we parted, it was bitter and acrimonious.

"Five years later, I met Demi at a large dealership where she worked as an accountant. It wasn't an explosive encounter; it was more like a long-exposure photo shoot. We met several times in different circumstances. We became companions, then friends, and at long last, spouses.

"Two years ago, she left me. No bitterness, just a quiet withdrawal. We calmly negotiated the details like the house and cars. She married my boss. I acted decent and even attended the wedding—though the hurt was acidic and abiding."

I could do no better than say the obvious. "No breakup is pleasant, I suppose." Dan pouped himself another can of beer. "No, it isn't. The first thing it breaks is your sublime poise; you realize you are not so irresistible after all. The second and infinitely more hurtful thing to crack is your self-concept. Someone who came close to you, lived with you, became intimate with you, and then shockingly decided she could do without you. She preferred to walk away from you."

"It took a long and agonizing time to absorb that lesson. Every relationship is a mirror. It gives you a glimpse of



yourself you have never had before. We all draw sorrow and satisfaction from others' praise; those words build us up. A look of approval and a clap of admiration make us feel tall and strong. Then comes a close relationship like a pitiless mirror. It forces us to see things we have long overlooked. We face our impatience and impiety, we notice our obstinacy and obtuseness. "And the final blow of separation. It is the rejection that was nowhere in our universe of discourse. It is almost as if we had clay feet and did not know it. Mark Twain advised that we should not allow a person

to be our priority while allowing ourselves to be their option. But how do we know we have slid so far down as to be someone's option? And how do we resist someone becoming our top priority? When you talk of relationships, we live in a world of supreme hazards."

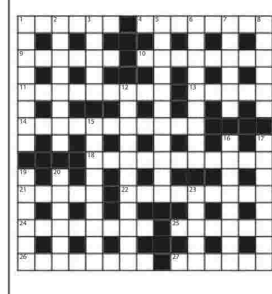
It was my turn to quote the Wizard of Oz, who said to the Tin Man who didn't have a heart and wanted one, "Hearts will never be practical until they are made unbreakable." Dan smiled and said, "Our hearts, fragile as they are, will crack and weep and mourn, but once again

surge for the next wonderful relationship, for the one love that would make all pain bearable and all hopes sustainable."

Hardly had he finished his words when the curtain parted and emerged a slender woman from the portico. Her confident steps and broad smile told me she was no stranger to Dan's home. I stood up, took her hand and gazed at her radiant face. Instantly, I knew what makes us bear all pain and live forever in hope.

The writer is a US-based international development advisor and had worked with the World Bank. He can be reached at manishnandy@gmail.com.

Crossword | No. 293580



Last Saturday's Solution



ACROSS

- 1 A silk on vacation engaged by, for instance, leisurely walk (6)
- 4 A belief in reform around Sweden is likely (8)
- 9 A second seabird on the back of a liner, say (6)
- 10 What irritates disquiet about fellow in computing etc. for certain (11)
- 11 Bodies not disposed to make a useful contribution (2,4,3)
- 13 Bottle stocked by finer vendors (5)

- 14 Captain altered course in fit of severe anxiety (5,6)
- 15 Fine writing graphically represented (11)
- 21 Where one might see polar bears waiting in readiness (2,3)
- 22 Father messed up a penny when grabbing good item in the kitchen (6,3)
- 24 Caught a place for surgery in the US lacking a medical tube (8)
- 25 Disruption where one might play

- volleyball? About right (6)
- 26 Rule out contralto appearing in opening passage (8)
- 27 South American dictators, not a model of industry, are lecherous types (6)

DOWN

- 1 Fall to keep appointment with list of mandarins in Whitehall etc (5,3)
- 2 Matter overlooked by group as key moment in a court? (5,3)

- 3 See eye to eye with a native of Corsu largely (5)
- 5 A tune played with levity as a possible result (11)
- 6 Wild prank in sea, not a feature of yachting? (9)
- 7 British comedienne dropping very old sitcom actor (6)
- 8 Former partner leads number wanting hotel in English city (6)
- 12 Traditional site for an engagement? (11)

- 15 Inventor discussed French symbol (9)
- 16 Hype in a rogue when seizing power produces moment of revelation (8)
- 17 Only just how one measures rainfall? (2,5)
- 19 Reportedly, put top tier for protecting a boot (6)
- 20 Man in Rome regularly toured showing patience, perhaps (6)
- 23 Film critic on TV once snubbed opera (5)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Delhi Declaration

BRICS nations deftly walk a tightrope

THE unanimous adoption of the New Delhi Declaration at the BRICS summit is a diplomatic achievement for India, but it is also a reminder of the limits of consensus in a deeply divided world. Bringing together 11 countries with widely divergent strategic interests was never going to be easy. Iran-UAE tensions over the West Asia conflict, the Russia-Ukraine war and the elephant in the room — the United States — created formidable obstacles to a common statement. India's deft enabled it to persuade all members to endorse the declaration.

However, the document's careful omissions are as revealing as its assertions. It avoided naming the US over the strikes on Iran and also did not condemn Iranian attacks on Gulf Arab states. Nor did it criticise Russia for waging a war against Ukraine or name Pakistan as a sponsor of terrorism. Instead, the declaration relied on broad principles — restraint, sovereignty, civilian protection, dialogue and diplomacy. Such language may appear cautious, but in a consensus-based grouping it can be the price of keeping diverse nations at the same table. The criticism of Israel over Gaza, along with support for Palestinian rights, gives the declaration a more definite political edge. Its opposition to unilateral sanctions, protectionism and indiscriminate tariffs reflects the economic concerns of the Global South. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call to replace a "pyramid of privilege" with a "platform of partnership" captures the larger ambition. BRICS wants to move from being a forum for protest to becoming an institution capable of shaping global governance.

As China prepares to take over the BRICS chair, India's real test will be to hold its ground and promote the grouping as a credible voice for a more representative, stable and equitable international order. A larger BRICS will matter only if it can convert its diversity into practical cooperation without becoming another arena for geopolitical rivalry.

AI caution

Think before sharing photos

THE viral rush to turn photographs into 1980s-style portraits is an exercise in nostalgia. It is also an unintended experiment in how readily people surrender personal data for a few seconds of digital gratification. The Hisar police have cautioned the public against misuse of AI-generated retro-look photographs; the Bengaluru police have issued a similar warning, citing possible misuse of personal and facial-recognition data. The concern has now acquired wider institutional weight. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's AI Incident Monitor has listed the 1980s-photo trend as a potential privacy and biometric-data hazard, while making the important distinction that no actual harm from the trend has been reported so far.

In February, 61 data-protection authorities worldwide also warned about the privacy risks posed by AI-generated imagery of identifiable individuals without their knowledge or consent. The issue, therefore, is not whether every AI application is secretly harvesting photographs. Data practices differ between platforms and alarmism is no substitute for evidence. The real problem is that users often do not know what they are consenting to: how long an uploaded image is retained, whether it can be used to improve models, who can access it and whether deletion is truly possible. A photograph also contains more than a face. Backgrounds can disclose homes, workplaces, schools, family members and locations. Once an AI-generated image is posted publicly, it can be copied, altered or scraped beyond the creator's control.

This is especially relevant when Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei is warning that AI capabilities are advancing fast enough to require greater prudence and stronger safeguards. He has called for the pace of frontier-AI development to be moderated so that safety measures can keep up. AI-generated nostalgia need not be banned. But platforms must make privacy terms intelligible and users must think before uploading. A retro photograph may last a moment; the digital footprint behind it may last far longer.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 1926

A significant declaration

THERE is one sentence in Lord Olivier's latest letter to the *Times* in reply to Sir Michael O'Dwyer and Sir Frank Beaman which is not only important in itself but is of undoubted significance as coming from an ex-Secretary of State for India. "If anything can be confidently foretold about the 1929 Constitutional Commission," he writes, "it is that it will recommend the suppression of the separate communal electorates by some other form of safeguard for minority rights." Prophecy is a dangerous thing, nowhere more dangerous than in the sphere of politics; and if Lord Olivier's declaration was no better than a prophecy, we for our part should attach little or no importance to it. It is, in fact, a great deal more. It is the expression of a deliberate and reasoned conviction as to what the Statutory Commission should do. And the most important thing about this conviction is that it is shared by the vast majority of thinking and patriotic Indians, by all Indians, in fact, who have arrived at the stage of national self-consciousness. It is, indeed, difficult to see how the Statutory Commission can help recommending the abolition of communal electorates. After all, the government must govern, and the experience of the last three years definitely shows that the government cannot carry on its elementary functions so long as the communal electorates and the spirit they embody are in existence. The only alternative would be a recommendation that the Reforms should be taken away and the purely bureaucratic rule of the days before the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms should be brought back.



C UDAY BHASKAR
DIRECTOR, SOCIETY
FOR POLICY STUDIES

INDIA has every reason to be satisfied with the outcome of the BRICS 2026 summit in both form and content. At a time when distrust has replaced dialogue in many international fora, India convened an 11-member grouping with sharply divergent political positions, sustained a dialogue and secured consensus on a comprehensive New Delhi Declaration — a 140-paragraph, roughly 45-page text. That is significant.

The Ministry of External Affairs deserves credit for enabling closure this time after the BRICS foreign ministers' meeting in May ended without a joint statement. The most delicate semantic task was to bridge the gulf between Iran and the UAE over the war in West Asia without naming any country. Tehran wanted an explicit reference to a "unilateral attack on Iran" as a violation of the UN Charter; the UAE wanted Iranian attacks on its sovereignty recognised.

The modus vivendi was to express "deep concern over the continued escalation of tensions in the Middle East" and make a call to exercise "maximum restraint" and avoid "actions that could further aggravate the situation." There was also a line that acknowledged Iran's position without naming the US: "serious concern over deliberate attacks on civilian infrastructure and peaceful nuclear facilities under full IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) safeguards."

Seeking textual consensus also led to extreme caution. "Hormuz" does not appear in the declaration at all, even as Brent crude crossed \$100 in the days before the summit on the back of the chokepoint crisis in the Strait of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb.

Content is where India has a stronger cause for satisfaction. The Delhi Declaration strongly condemns terrorism in all forms and

BRICS ticks the right boxes

India secures consensus on a comprehensive declaration despite divergent political positions



VANGUARD : Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Vladimir Putin (left) and Xi Jinping in New Delhi. PH

calls for "zero tolerance." It specifically denounces the April 2025 Pahalgam terror attack; addresses the movement of terrorists; reaffirms that terrorism cannot be associated with any religion; and calls for accountability of those involved and their sponsors.

In a grouping that includes China, which has often blocked comparable language at the UN, this is not boilerplate — though similar wording had appeared in the 2025 Rio Declaration. Recalling the text with President Xi Jinping in Delhi matters.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi pressed for UN Security Council reform and changes in the voting power, leadership and priorities of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank to reflect economic realities. The declaration backs comprehensive UN reform and greater representation for India and Brazil, and it carries the Indian formulation that the Global South must move from a rule-taker to a rule-maker.

Modi also proposed a continuity and implementation mechanism, including a troika, to follow up outcomes in a grouping that has no permanent secretariat. That is a practical institutional push, even if the "10-point Reform Roadmap" was not adopted as a formal deliverable for China's 2027 chairmanship.

Regarding energy and trade, amid a war that has disrupted supply chains, the declaration has acknowledged that fossil fuels will still play an important role for

Since the inception of BRICS two decades ago, its efficacy and credibility have been determined by the India-China bilateral.

developing economies and opposed unilateral, punitive measures of the CBAM (Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism) type. It voices serious concern over unilateral tariff and non-tariff measures that distort trade and are inconsistent with WTO rules — wording aimed at US tariffs and sanctions on Iran and Russia, without turning the document into an anti-Western manifesto.

Apropos of finance, there was no BRICS currency bravado. Finance ministers discussed efficient cross-border payments and local currencies, while tacitly recognising that a unified system needs a deeper trust framework than the present bilateral discord among some members.

Empirically, BRICS trade has expanded dramatically through business practices and customs improvements rather than emotive de-dollarisation ultimatums. Since its inception two decades ago, the efficacy and credibility of BRICS have been determined by the India-China bilateral.

That remains the abiding dialectical challenge. Both want to speak for the Global South and be seen as its trusted sherpa; each is wary of the other eroding its primacy and credibility.

For India, this is not an abstraction. China continues to pose a security challenge. Galwan 2020 was the most recent big shock, and strategic cooperation between China and Pakistan has compounded it. Operation Sindoor was illustrative in this regard.

At the politico-diplomatic level, Beijing does not accord Delhi peer status even as it seeks equivalence with Washington, though its comprehensive national power remains lower than that of the US.

The paradox is familiar: China strives for bipolarity with Washington globally while seeking unipolarity in Asia and denying parity to India and Japan.

That is the geopolitical problem India navigates inside BRICS. It must be a credible member of a grouping in which China is the largest economy, even while contesting Beijing's denial of parity in Asia.

The Modi-Xi bilateral on the sidelines captured that dialectic. It was President Xi's first visit to India in seven years and the first meeting between the two leaders on Indian soil after the Galwan clash.

Both stressed a strategic and long-term view of relations and committed to seeking a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solution to the boundary question, proceeding from the politi-

cal perspective of overall bilateral relations and the interests of the people of both nations.

In practical terms, this was a reaffirmation of restraint: differences after the Galwan incident would continue to be handled by existing military and diplomatic mechanisms. No new disengagement was announced, and no new friction point was manufactured despite recent tactical growling. The signal is a stable Line of Actual Control. The reality, established since 2020 and not altered this week, is that India still operates a more constrained patrolling pattern than before the Galwan clash.

Inclusive and equitable growth is a cherished BRICS objective, and tariff wars have created new challenges. Delhi needs robust trade arrangements with major economies, including the US, the EU and China.

The security and strategic dissonance with Beijing is the harder policy problem, and Delhi is managing it from relative economic asymmetry. The trade deficit with China is \$116 billion, with high dependence on Chinese supplies of pharmaceutical ingredients, rare-earth magnets and solar-chain inputs. Sustained investment and diversification remain perennial Indian challenges.

The Xi-Modi meeting in Tianjin last year had already begun a bilateral thaw, in part because US tariff pressure pushed Delhi and Beijing toward hedging. The Delhi meeting consolidated that thaw; it did not dissolve the asymmetry.

So, the summit outcome is satisfying for India because it produced a comprehensive statement that condemned the Pahalgam attack, protected fossil fuel policy space for developing economies, criticised unilateral trade measures without naming Washington and kept BRICS close to a platform of partnership rather than a forum of protest. On the bilateral front, Delhi and Beijing found the wording to keep the grouping intact.

The 20-year-old BRICS has survived because India and China have a working template to disagree without denailing the forum. The credibility of this grouping will continue to be a function of whether Beijing is willing to concede to Delhi what it demands from Washington: peer respect and equitable accommodation of interests.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

BRICS is a strong force for global peace, security and development. — Narendra Modi

The nest and those who fly away

KIRANJEET RANDHAWA

THE bulbul pair began weaving a beautiful nest on a bougainvillea. A tiny world was unfolding outside my kitchen window. Then came a delightful surprise — three eggs, and later, three adorable chicks nestled safely inside the nest. Their chirps brought warmth and happiness to my mornings.

Whenever danger approached, the bulbuls would break into a chorus of anxious calls. At the sight of their mother arriving with a beakful of food, tiny heads would pop out of the nest. I often chased away crows swooping down to threaten the chicks. Without realising it, I had become protective of these tiny lives.

One day, the chicks began stepping out of the nest and perching on nearby twigs. Each day they grew a bit bolder, moving from one branch to another, discovering a new world. For several days, they struggled to strengthen their wings. Even after darkness fell, the little ones sometimes remained outside, while their mother gently guided them back to the safety of the nest.

I was witnessing the end of a wonderful chapter. Gradually, the chicks stopped returning to the nest. The bulbul pair flew alongside them, following and guiding them as they mastered the art of flight and ventured into the vast blue sky. I watched them with a heart filled with joy and a quiet ache — happy that they had grown strong enough to leave, yet feeling an undeniable emptiness as the garden fell silent.

Perhaps this is love: raising children with tenderness, protecting them when they are fragile, and having the courage to let them fly away. Parents spend a lifetime building their lives around their kids — working despite exhaustion, silencing their own wishes and sometimes burying their own dreams so that the children can live theirs. They continue to give, forgive, hope and wait, long after their offspring have stopped needing them. Days passed. Neither the chicks nor their parents returned. The fragile nest remained, exposed to the rain. Looking at it, an ache of uncertainty settled in my heart. Would the bulbul pair ever be reunited with their little ones?

In Punjab, this story feels like a haunting reflection of our own reality. Young people leave for distant lands in pursuit of a brighter future. Once they build lives elsewhere, how often do they return to the place they once called home?

The nest remains where it was, holding the warmth of old memories, waiting patiently for the young ones to return. And sometimes, those who learn to build their lives elsewhere slowly stop feeling the pull of the nest — and forget the way back home. The writer is officiating Principal, MLU DAV College, Pipluvara.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

AI must not discard ethics

Refer to "Trust is the key in the AI age" (*The Great Game*); AI is akin to a paper flower, lacking the fragrance of the real thing. AI holds immense potential for human welfare; however, the moment it becomes divorced from ethical principles, its very purpose becomes self-defeating. Material progress derived from artificial means may offer short-term utility, but poisoning the public discourse with deliberate falsehoods — whether through controlled state apparatuses or algorithm-driven social media — poses an existential threat to future generations. Frameworks to tame the unbridled deployment of this technology remain inadequate; they must be made more dynamic, robust and enforceable.

ABHYAM SHARMA, PANTHAKOT

Just a data-based tool

Apropos of "Trust is the key in the AI age"; the AI challenge is both apparent and subtle. The attraction to using AI is similar to the sheep people made towards refined oil to ensure better heart health, sadly to discover its hollow claims later. AI is one of the data-based tools, as a natural corollary of the digital revolution, to be used for creating a better world where trust, authenticity, harmony and meaningful connectivity count for real peace and tranquillity.

JAGVINDER SINGH BRAR, PATIALA

Make BRICS a useful forum

Apropos of "BRICS adopts declaration despite divide on West Asia, calls for end to global turmoil"; for India, the expanded BRICS Delhi Summit is a test of whether it can advance its own interests and that of the forum's by more resilient supply chains. The participation of the presidents of Russia and China is a good sign for India. India's strategy should be to make it a more useful forum rather than a bloc that pitches itself against the West. A successful summit will be one that leaves India with room for more manoeuvrings and fewer vulnerabilities.

SK SINGH, BY MAIL

Keep China under control

The Modi-Xi meeting on the sidelines of the BRICS summit has not yielded any tangible outcome. Diplomatic announcements have been made in the past too, but they have not been honoured. China continues to wage unilateral aggression along the LAC. While New Delhi treads cautiously over the promises, our military and economic prowess should be used against all adversaries alike. Then, not only China but also small peripheral countries will also remain in line and come to the negotiating table, whenever the need arises.

COL SAJIAN KUNDU (RETD), HISAR

US always does what it wants to

Apropos of "Crossing the line"; it is a fact that the US will do whatever is in its national interest and nobody can browbeat it. We haven't forgotten the way the US deported hundreds of undocumented immigrants. Many illegal immigrants, especially from Punjab, take to driving trucks there and sometimes cause road accidents as they aren't familiar with US traffic signs, rules, etc. We should provide suitable jobs to unemployed youth here itself. Other countries have limited influence over such decisions.

RAMESH GUPTA, NARWANA

Dalai Lama's peaceful endeavours

Apropos of "Dalai Lama's enduring politics of hope"; his insistence on a respectable freedom of action and peaceful living for Tibetans within the Chinese system is praiseworthy. His description of Chinese Buddhists as his 'senior spiritual brothers and sisters' reflects his remarkable commitment to reconciliation. His emphasis on compassion, and his rejection of anger, jealousy, pride, hatred and violence, make peace the central theme of his thought. Yet, a difficult question remains: can such peaceful thinking alone bring about an amicable settlement with China?

COL SS CHAUHAN (RETD), ZIRAKPUR

Congress' Dalit outreach faces hurdles



RADHIKA RAMASESHAN
SENIOR JOURNALIST

OME elections in north India, particularly the Hindi heartland, the Congress' old bugbears, which emerged with its loss of power in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in the late 1980s, return to haunt the blueprint it ambitiously seeks to craft. The dilemmas emanate from performing the high-wire act of pandering to the upper castes (the Congress wistfully hopes that the Brahmins will return to its embrace) without alienating the Dalits.

It is an apparent attempt to revive the Brahmin-Dalit-Muslim axis, which buttressed its dominance for decades in these parts. UP and Uttarakhand will vote in 2027 along with Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. In UP, Uttarakhand and HP upper castes are numerically significant and influential locally.

Barring HP where it is power, the Congress lost the upper castes to the BJP in UP and Uttarakhand, the Other Backward Classes (or castes) to various socialist offshoots and the BJP. It also lost Dalits to the BJP and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP).

The point is that the BJP appropriated the Congress formula of 'vote under the Mus-

lims but compensated itself richly with the co-option of some OBC and Dalit groupings.

In the recent state polls in Uttarakhand, Dalit voters offered a sliver of hope for a Congress revival. In 2017, the BJP won 11 of the 13 reserved seats in the 70-member Assembly, with an average vote share of 46.29%, while the Congress netted the other two SC seats, with an average vote share of 42%. In 2022, although the BJP retained power, its share of SC seats fell to nine while the Congress picked up four.

Two recent occurrences further bolstered the Congress' optimism of recovering the Dalit base — but with caveats because the BJP's ability to eventually hang on to its electoral capital can never be underestimated. The Dalit-centred BSP is all but gone and the Samajwadi Party is making a serious play for the floating Dalit votes. So the Congress is up against serious competition.

The first development was the kerfuffle over a 'shudhikaran' (purification) ritual carried out at the venue of a rally addressed by Congress president M Mallikarjun Kharge in Uttarakhand's Haldwani on August 8 by the Shri Ram Sena Dharmath Seva Nyas.

The Congress alleged that the Nyas was an offshoot of the Sangh clan. The Sangh is known to launch outfits that disappear almost as soon as they appear. The ostensible idea is to serve a purpose, which might be at odds with the RSS's public pronouncements and in the process, distance the ideological parent



KERFUFFLE: A right-wing group performed a purification 'havan' at Haldwani in Uttarakhand after Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge addressed a rally there. PH

from a controversial or illegal act. The outrage caused by the 'purification havan' resonated beyond Uttarakhand to UP and the southern states of Karnataka (Kharge's home state) and Telangana and the Rajya Sabha, where Kharge is the Opposition leader.

Kharge's feisty son and Karnataka's Home Minister Priyank Kharge spearheaded the protests in Karnataka, while in Telangana, the Bharat Rashtra Samithi, now in the Opposition, was accused by the Congress of enacting a similar ritual after a Dalit protest for Kharge at Siddipet, the BRS's political hub. The government in Hyderabad is led by A Revanth Reddy, an upper-caste CM, whose engagement with Dalits might eventually amount to little more than tokenism.

That is the nub of the issue. Doubtless, the 'shudhikaran' was a 'crime under Indian law',

The dilemmas emanate from doing the high-wire act of pandering to the upper castes without alienating the Dalits.

according to Justice Madan Lokur, a former Supreme Court judge. But is the Congress well placed to convey the larger socio-political implications and make the episode intelligible to a wider audience outside the states it rules?

The BJP's responses — ranging from denial of support to the Seva Nyas to accusing the Congress of the short shrift given to its stalwarts like Jagjivan Ram — fell short of convincing even its Dalit followers familiar with the Sangh's ecosystem.

The Congress appointed Haryana leader Kumari Selja, a Dalit, as the Uttarakhand election minder, with the expectation that she can work to consolidate Dalit support. Selja is a seasoned organisation hand. She has been in charge of the hill state earlier too. Seldom are poll minders mandated to deliver votes to a party. If Sunil Bansal of the

BJP, a *baniya* from Rajasthan, earned his stripes after winning almost every state to which he was assigned, it was not because of his caste but because of his addressness at playing the pieces in the intricate party apparatus.

Kharge's Dalit antecedents do not really echo outside Karnataka (even here, he lost his Gulbarga seat in 2019) in the way that Mayawati did in her heyday. On its part, the Congress did little to hard-sell this aspect, which might have eventually earned some capital. Indeed, in a Congress Working Committee meeting convened after the Haldwani incident, Kharge pointed out that he did not get the support he expected from his party colleagues, taking a jab at Shashi Tharoor. Those who wrote well and looked good did not raise their voice, said the Congress president.

Rajendra Pal Gautam, a Dalit, joined the Congress in 2024 after serving a long stint in the Aam Aadmi Party as a Delhi minister. He was promptly asked to oversee UP as a 'reward' from the Gandhis. But Gautam is already at loggerheads with the state president, Ajay Rai, who, in 2024, had put up a spirited fight against PM Modi in Varanasi.

Gautam has pitched for replacing Rai with a Muslim — a surefire bait for the BJP, which is perennially itching to paint the Congress as 'communal'. The induction of an outsider on an important post in the prelude to a crucial election is proof of the Congress' inability to groom in-house caste leaders.

The Congress is caught in a vortex with three conflicting streams pushing and pulling at the centre: the upper caste versus Dalit polemics and the search for an ideal equation in today's circumstances; Rahul Gandhi's loquaciousness to reach out to a new demography exemplified by Gen Z (this was evident in his August 8 Prayagraj rally in which he avoided the Hindutva-Mandal rhetoric and straightforwardly dived into the aspirations and ambitions of a predominantly youthful crowd); and the Congress' lack of focus in finding the right fit for Rahul, as a Gen X messiah or as the 'tallest leader of the social justice movement' in the words of Anil Jalhind, who heads the party's OBC cell.

Laudable as Rahul's admission about the Congress not being 'responsive to the aspirations and desires of the OBCs' may have been, he is not identified as a backward caste leader (he was described as a 'janeu-dhari Brahmin' by a party colleague). Jalhind is a recent import from the Janata Dal, another reflection of the party's failure to nurture an OBC leadership.

It passed up a chance to appoint an OBC or a Dalit CM: Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu is Rajput, Revanth Reddy is a Reddy, VD Satheesan is an upper-caste Nair and DK Shivakumar is a Vokkaliga, a dominant caste in Karnataka on a par with the Lingayats.

What is the point of harping on the OBCs and Dalits without carving out an appropriate space for them in the power hierarchy?

The long journey from Naxalbari to 'Dimagi Naxals'



AJAY K MEHRA
SENIOR FELLOW, CENTRE FOR MULTILEVEL FEDERALISM

STRIKING two birds with one arrow in his Independence-Day speech, Prime Minister Narendra Modi began by crediting himself with eliminating Naxals. He then expanded his earlier formulation of 'Urban Naxals', referring to Marxists and intellectuals, with a new coinage, 'Dimagi Naxal', to indicate the entrenchment of people with a Naxal mindset in society and government.

He said that people with Maoist and terrorist mindsets ('aatankwadi soch') were entrenched in the government for years and influenced even shaped policies.

While not defining Dimagi Naxal, he said that such people were still looking for ways to cause violence and anarchy. He appeared to be aiming at intellectuals, leftists, liberal thinkers, etc. The brains of 'urban Naxals' of yore were given a fresh darker red point.

It is not clear whether this new *jumla* was coined by the Prime Minister himself or giv-

en to him by advisers who lack intellectual breadth.

A simplistic characterisation of a movement that has been branded as Marxist, Maoist, terrorist, etc reflects a lack of critical understanding of its history, the intellectual support for it, as well as the sufferings of the poor. Its violent tool has more than once been tackled with political and policy wisdom. The Manmohan Singh government attempted to develop an understanding and his initiatives went beyond 'Operation Green Hunt', with the roping in of the erstwhile Planning Commission.

Naxalbari village in Darjeeling district, West Bengal, gave the nomenclature Naxal. It arose from the five years of the movement's experiment with revolution in Telangana. The Communist Party of India, established in Kanpur in 1926, took up the cause of peasants who had been exploited in the region by *doras* and *deshmukhs* (landlords).

Not only was the produce from their lands expropriated, even their women were exploited with impunity. The CPI organised them into armed squads in 1946 and liberated them economically from the clutches of the *doras* in four years.

Even as the first experiment with the Marxist revolution was partially successful, the post-Independence democratic reverberations looked for a way out from the Marxist-Maoist



TOOL: A simplistic characterisation of a movement reflects a lack of critical understanding of its history.

politics. Going beyond the police and army action to tame them, the government requested Gandhi's disciple Acharya Vinoba Bhave to seek a peaceful solution to the violence.

He went from village to village. On April 18, 1961, during his interactions in Pochampally, the landless families asked for 80 acres of land. He turned to local landlords and an offer of 100 acres was made, giving birth to the *Bhooadan* (gift of land) movement. As a result, the Telangana movement began losing its appeal.

From there, the uprooted Marxists moved to West Bengal, where Maoist leaders like Kanu Sanyal and Charu Majumdar organised peasants who were being exploited by *jotedars* (landlords). Since the produce of their land had been extracted forcibly, they

The current policy of 'elimination' is silent about the road ahead.

attacked the local granary with bows and arrows on May 24, 1967. Police inspector Sonam Wangdi was killed in the attack. The police shot down 11 peasants the next day.

The Naxalbari movement was born 16 years after the first Marxist revolutionary movement had begun to fade. However, aside from the repression of the Siddharth Shankar Ray government since 1972, the land reforms by Ajay Mulherjee's government brought Naxalism to an end in West Bengal.

The complexities of the Srikakulam movement (1967-1969) led by Vempatapu Satyanarayana and the later movements in the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh deserve closer examination.

While the former movement was suppressed, the latter ones became violent as they got

organised in leader-centric *dalams* (squads) that used guerrilla tactics, which were difficult to tackle by the police. Their fratriccides were also brutal. Andhra Pradesh showed the way by raising Greyhounds, which led to the CRPF's CoBRA.

While sides suffered casualties, the police suffered more. The Maoists became more violent to create a safe haven and obstruct any development in the areas that they had liberated, mostly in resource-rich forests. There were two notable points: first, the concentration of the Naxal movement and natural-resource map coincided; and second, with intense counter-terror action, the Naxal leadership began to weaken in 2010.

The government encouraged Mahendra Karma's counter-Naxal Salwa Judum. Salwa Judum was struck down by the Supreme Court in 2011 in the appeal of Dimagi Naxals since this counter-Naxal group had turned against communities it was to protect. He was killed on May 25, 2013, in a blast.

Notably, in May 2006, the Manmohan Singh government (which is being targeted with 'Dimagi Naxal' nomenclature) appointed an Expert Group of the Planning Commission to study Developmental Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas.

The group concluded the study in March, 2008. It's report said, "There is no deny-

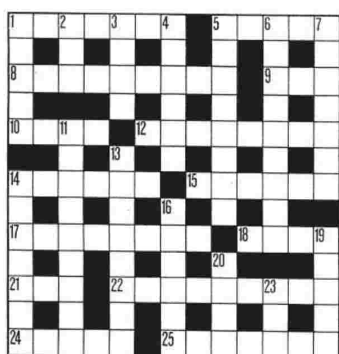
ing that what goes on in the name of 'naxalism' is to a large extent a product of collective failure to assure to different segments of society their basic entitlements under the Constitution and other protective legislation. There is no denying that the nation is now caught in a vicious circle of violence and counter-violence.

Only a commitment of the nation on an unprecedented scale can shape a future compatible with the ideal enshrined in the Preamble to the Constitution, and the rights and entitlements incorporated in the parts of Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles of State Policy and Duties of the Citizen of the Constitution."

Without flexing muscle for eliminating (read killing) those who lean towards Marxism-Maoism, the Manmohan Singh government leaned on 'Dimagi Naxals' to create conditions for a better living for the poor and ensure their rights, such as rights over forest produce and minerals available in and around their habitat.

With the surrender and neutralisation of the Naxals, infrastructure projects stalled due to their resistance began picking up pace. But the current policy of 'elimination' is silent about the road ahead. Importantly, friends of the NDA government are lurking, with an eye on exploiting the rich natural resources of the regions.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- Definitely (3,4)
- A means of measuring (5)
- Ahead of the field (2,3,4)
- Immediately (3)
- A taunt (4)
- Relevant (8)
- Type of coloured pencil (6)
- South American country (6)
- Sacredly obscure (8)
- Prefix indicating very big (4)
- Pasture (3)
- Time of great achievement (6,3)
- Irritable (5)
- In the absence of (7)

Saturday's Solution

Across: 1 Hard case, 5 Camp, 9 Gecko, 10 Routine, 11 Rub shoulders, 13 Esteem, 14 Affair, 17 Short measure, 20 Network, 21 Owner, 22 Daft, 23 Interest.

Down: 1 Huge, 2 Recount, 3 Cross-section, 4 Sorrow, 6 Abide, 7 Pressure, 8 Pull a fast one, 12 Seasoned, 15 Arrange, 16 Beckon, 18 Out of, 19 Brut.

SU DO KU



SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

SEPTEMBER 14, 2026, MONDAY	
■ Shaka Samvat	1948
■ Bhadrpad Shaka	23
■ Bhadrpad Purnimite	29
■ Hijri	1448
■ Shukla Paksha Tithi 3, up to 7:07 am	
■ Brahma Yoga up to 12:47 pm	
■ Chitra Nakshatra up to 01:55 pm	
■ Moon in Libra sign	
■ Siddhi Vainayak Vrat	

FORECAST

SUNSET: 5:56 PM SUNRISE: 6:59 AM		MONDAY TUESDAY		13-29 HRS 60-70 HRS	
CITY				MAX	MIN
Chandigarh				35	25
New Delhi				33	24
Amritsar				35	27
Bathinda				36	25
Jalandhar				35	25
Ludhiana				35	25
Bhiwani				36	26
Hisar				36	26
Sirsa				37	25
Dharamsala				29	18
Manali				26	17
Shimla				24	16
Srinagar				30	16
Jammu				34	24
Kargil				28	12
Leh				26	11
Dehradun				30	23
Mussorie				25	22

TEMPERATURE IN °C

INTERNATIONAL EDITORIALS



OPINION

The Washington Post

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

EDITORIAL

The Looming 2030s

The U.S. cannot afford a major war. What if one comes anyway?

THE ENEMY GETS A VOTE in foreign affairs, and nobody knows what the 2030s will hold. Will China invade Taiwan? Will NATO allies need defending against Russia? Will terrorism in the Middle East or Africa require a response from the United States? Will another emerging threat demand American action?

The federal budget is not prepared for such contingencies. Judging by the size of the deficit alone, one might assume the U.S. is already fighting a war far more involved than the on-again, off-again bombing of Iran. The additional burden of borrowing to finance a full-scale, protracted conflict could push the budget into more dangerous territory than it's already in.

"The most significant threat to our national security is our debt," said then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Michael Mullen — in 2010, when the national debt was about \$27 trillion lower than it is today.

National security is the primary purpose of the federal government. For much of American history, defense accounted for the bulk of federal spending. It was possible to identify wars just by looking at peaks in the debt-to-GDP ratio. Then, when the war was over, the ratio came back down as the need for taking on debt receded. That's no longer the case because non-defense spending has overwhelmed defense.

Winning World War II was expensive, and in 1945, national defense spending made up 90 percent of federal outlays. During the Vietnam War, the level was between 35 percent and 50 percent. By 1999, after the Cold War ended and the peace dividend came, the portion for defense had dropped to 16 percent. Even the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq after the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, barely pushed defense over 20 percent of federal spending.

This year, defense accounts for 13 percent of federal outlays. The Congressional Budget Office projects that by 2035, it will fall to single digits. Beginning in 2032, more than half of all federal spending will go toward just Social Security and major health care programs.

Of course, the U.S. still spends a lot on defense, over \$900 billion this year. One reason America's defense budget is so much higher than other countries' is that the U.S. is a high-wage country with an all-volunteer force. Rather than forcing people to serve, the military has to compete with private employers for workers.

Eliminating the draft has been good for personal freedom, and the military is hitting its recruiting targets just fine. But relying on volunteers rather than conscripts means that paying troops must be a major part of the military budget, and cutting benefits makes the Defense Department a less attractive employer.

About 4 in 10 dollars of the Pentagon's budget go to compensate military personnel or civilian employees. The only employer in the world larger than the U.S. military is the Indian military, and compensation costs for the U.S. military are nearly four times greater than India's entire defense budget. Military pay raises are linked by law to average private-sector pay raises, meaning the Pentagon's payroll costs grow at roughly the same rate as the overall economy's.

Because of years of delay on defense modernization efforts, the U.S. needs to rejuvenate its conventional forces and nuclear deterrent simultaneously. All three legs of the nuclear triad (bombers, submarines and land-based missiles) rely on decades-old technology. The Iran conflict has shown that the Army, Navy and Air Force are all stretched thin. Modernization efforts are already partially underway, and they will extend into the 2030s and beyond.

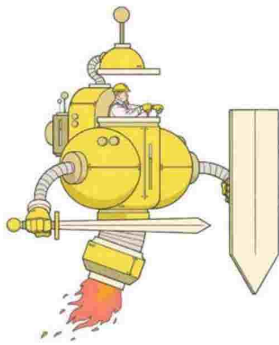
Then, there are the unknown needs of the future. Drone warfare, based on the experience of Ukraine, requires much nimbler procurement systems, as technology can become obsolete in months rather than decades. Each unit of unmanned technology is cheap, but costs accumulate due to the enormous quantity of drones required and their quick depletion. Drones are not replacing more expensive conventional weapons, at least not right away, so they'll be an added cost in the 2030s. They won't supplant existing spending.

There is plenty the Pentagon can do to be more efficient. It's a government bureaucracy like any other, prone to bloat as bureaucrats measure their success by the size of their budgets. The inherently uncompetitive defense market, where one customer deals with a handful of contractors, isn't conducive to cost effectiveness.

But defense spending is not driving the national debt. The CBO projects that the defense budget will grow slower than the economy over the next decade, meaning it will pull the projected total debt-to-GDP ratio down. Of course, those are baseline projections that assume no wars happen and don't include proposals such as President Donald Trump's desired \$1.5 trillion annual defense budget.

For perspective, the \$13 billion price tag on a Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carrier equals about three days of Social Security spending. All purchases of guns up to 30mm caliber across all military branches in 2025 cost about \$650 million, less than four hours of Social Security spending. The projected all-in cost of buying, operating, maintaining, upgrading and fueling the notoriously expensive F-35 program over its entire 94-year lifecycle is less than last year's spending of \$2.3 trillion on Medicaid and Social Security.

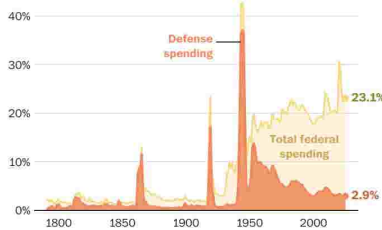
Defending the country is Washington's most fundamental responsibility. Governments are expected to take on debt in wartime and pay it down in peacetime. Stretching the market for government debt to the limit in peacetime is a dereliction of duty and, ultimately, a danger to national defense.



KYLE ELLINGSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

National defense made up the bulk of federal spending until the 1960s

Spending as a share of GDP, 1791-2025

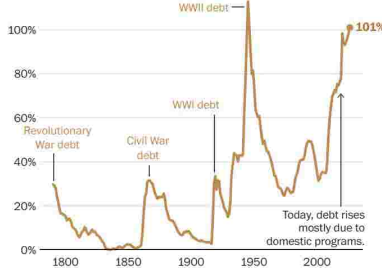


Pre-1900 data are based on total Navy and Army outlays; 1900-1939 data are estimates using calendar year GDP.

Source: U.S. Census, Office of Management and Budget, Congressional Budget Office and MeasuringWorth

Wars are no longer the major driver of public debt

Public debt as a share of GDP, 1790-2026

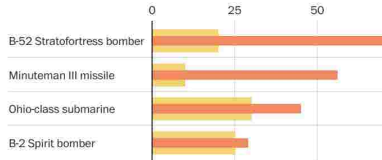


Data are based on the calendar year before 2011 and on the fiscal year after. The 2026 figure is projected.

Source: U.S. Congressional Budget Office

Every part of the nuclear triad is outdated

Original intended service life Years in use



Source: U.S. Government Accountability Office, U.S. Navy

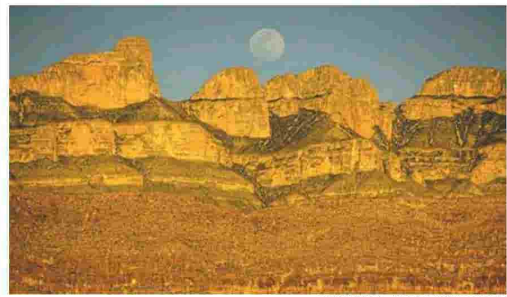
Even the most expensive military systems cost less than 1 percent of one year's spending on Social Security

DEFENSE SYSTEM	COST	AS A SHARE OF FY25 SOCIAL SECURITY SPENDING
Gerald Ford-class aircraft carrier	\$13.2B	0.84%
Virginia-class submarine	\$4.8B	0.31%
THAAD battery	\$2.7B	0.17%
Arleigh Burke-class destroyer	\$2.5B	0.16%
PATRIOT battery	\$1.1B	0.07%
Sentinel ICBM	\$162M	0.01%
F-35A fighter jet	\$82.5M	0.01%

Costs are based on budget requests of major weapon programs.

Source: Congressional Research Service

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



THOMAS SIMONETTI/FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

The Sierra del Carmen mountains seen from Big Bend National Park, Texas.

Border security doesn't have to destroy Big Bend

Regarding the Sept. 9 online round-up, "I felt so small": Five writers on the best national parks:

Last month, I traveled to Big Bend National Park to see firsthand what was happening along the border. What I saw was difficult to accept. Land that had been largely untouched was being disturbed by construction. The park shares 118 miles of border with Mexico, but the landscape does not feel like a conventional border at all.

After visiting the park, I met with U.S. Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Rodney Scott and told him directly: I am frustrated with how we got here. Construction is on pause for now, but the federal government should have talked to the people who live in Big Bend before construction even began.

But what should border security look like in a place like Big Bend? The answer should begin with recognizing that not every mile of the nearly 2,000-mile southern border is the same. That does not mean abandoning border security. West Texans understand the need for a secure border better than most. They welcome Border Patrol agents and support the people who do difficult and dangerous work in some of the most isolated terrain in America, but securing a remote border does not require turning the landscape into a construction zone.

Technology can help agents monitor remote stretches of border without permanently altering every acre in between. Existing roads and infrastructure can be used where appropriate rather than cutting through undisturbed land.

I hope that one day my daughter will be able to experience the same wild and beautiful Big Bend that has meant so much to me and to so many people from around the world. That is worth protecting.

César J. Blanco, Austin

The writer represents the 29th District in the Texas Senate.

These terminal patients also deserve a choice

Steven Petrow's Sept. 7 Health column, "Learning to accept my sister's choice," was thoughtful and information-packed.

I'm glad that his sister was able to have a dignified death that was less painful with the medical assistance that Petrow describes. He and his family, while grief-stricken, had to be relieved that she was allowed autonomy.

Unfortunately, those with dementia, and a few other medical conditions, are not given the same opportunities for a peaceful and dignified death. This is because under current law in the states that allow medically assisted death, medical professionals must be able to reasonably state that a person requesting assisted death is likely to die within six months. Dementia by itself does not meet that requirement. And as the article noted, the states that allow medical aid in dying share pretty much the same criteria for eligibility and safeguards that protect people who choose this option.

I hope that legislatures and governors will address this issue and give other groups of sufferers an option that they, too, deserve.

Eugene M. Hyman, Los Altos, California

Close the dementia data gap

As the Sept. 4 online Health article "The dementia that often strikes in midlife — and the signs people miss" described, much about frontotemporal dementia (FTD) remains poorly understood: Its symptoms can look more psy-

chiatric than neurological, for example, and researchers are still investigating possible risk factors beyond genetics, including environmental factors, lifestyle and head trauma.

One point stood out: Although 60 percent of people diagnosed with FTD are between 45 and 64, experts believe the estimated number of Americans living with the disease is a significant undercount. Thus, the challenge with FTD is not only that doctors and researchers are missing the signs and contributors, but also that they are missing the data.

California's Neurodegenerative Disease Registry, for example, tracks diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's — but not FTD. The nonprofit End Chronic Disease, which I run, co-sponsored S.B. 1047, which just passed the state legislature and now sits on Gov. Gavin Newsom's (D) desk. The bill would add FTD diagnoses to the registry, giving researchers and public health officials a clearer picture of who is affected and where. This is information that could be critical to research into causes, risk factors and possibly even prevention.

This matters to everyone, not just to Californians. As the article pointed out, researchers still lack the population-level information needed to understand FTD. Last year, New York became the first state to establish a statewide FTD registry. California now has an opportunity to help close the data gap — and set an example for other states to follow.

The writer is CEO and co-founder of the nonprofit End Chronic Disease.

Salty over chips

I try to limit my salt intake (blood pressure and all that), so I was drawn to the Sept. 9 Food article "A hunt for chips worth their salt," in which a panel of judges rated several brands of potato chips. I thought their ratings were fair enough, but I was disappointed at the underlying assumption that potato chips require salt.

Over the past several years, I have switched to salt-free potato chips. (My current favorite is Kettle Brand, but Utz is fine, too.) An additional advantage is that these chips actually taste like potatoes and not salt.

Like the excellent practice of Post food critics reporting on restaurants' noise levels in addition to food, this article would have been improved by also reporting the sodium levels of the various brands.

Vic Baum, Charlottesville

Letter submissions

Send letters to letters@washpost.com.

Submissions must be exclusive to The Post and should include the writer's address and day and evening telephone numbers. Letters are subject to editing and abridgment. Please do not send letters as attachments. Because of the volume of material we receive, we are unable to acknowledge submissions; writers whose letters are under consideration for publication will be contacted.

Post Opinions wants to know: What do you wish you had known earlier? What nuggets of wisdom, gleaned from years of experience, would you share with your younger self? Send us your response, and it might be published as a letter to the editor. wapo.st/wise_words

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NEWS

EDITORIAL AND OPINION

OFFICERS

How realism gets the world profoundly wrong

BY FRANCIS FUKUYAMA

If you take a university-level course in international relations these days, you will be taught that there are several frameworks for understanding how international politics works: liberalism, realism, neorealism, constructivism and the like. Realism has gotten fresh attention since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, in particular through the writing and advocacy of University of Chicago professor John Mearsheimer and the work of places such as the Quincy Institute.

There are in fact two types of realism, a "realism of means" and a "realism of ends." I have known Mearsheimer since we were graduate students, and he has built his career around the latter. Mearsheimer's realism is seen as a counterpoint to the democratic messianism said to have been infecting American foreign policy over the years, in which the United States has allegedly tried to reshape the world in its own liberal-democratic image through the use of force. But this kind of realism cannot account for why the U.S. behaves the way it does — and it is, in certain respects, profoundly wrong.

In the realism of ends, all states are said to pursue national interest, defined in terms of power and security. They may dress up this drive in the elevated language of democracy or human rights, but ultimately they all seek the same thing: maximization of their power.

This type of realism sees the international system as anarchic, with no overall sovereign or common set of rules to regulate state behavior. Hence one state's search for security inevitably threatens the security of others; peace emerges only because a balance of power deters any one state from overreaching. States in the international system are like billiard balls. You cannot look inside them to see their goals; what you can know is their mass, velocity and position on the table.

Realism of ends has always struck me as reductionist and oversimplified. In that respect, it is like the rational utility maximizer model of neoclassical economics that reduces all behavior to the pursuit of material gain. Of course power and relative international position matter, but nation-states are complex actors whose behavior is intimately connected to the domestic politics taking place inside them. "National interest" is not a fixed characteristic, any more than is "utility" in economic theory. National interest can be defined in a variety of ways, often reflecting a country's governing values.

The United States has always seen the promotion of liberal democracy as part of its national identity. It has never pursued this goal single-mindedly and has consequently opened itself up to charges of hypocrisy. But it has often mobilized its own people to make sacrifices and engage internationally to support a liberal and democratic world order. If the U.S. were simply trying to maximize its power, it would not act this way. In this regard, the realism of ends gets the world wrong.

I subscribe instead to a realism of means. I believe that liberal values and power shape the United States' role in the world, yet I remain realistic about both the extent to which the U.S. can prioritize democracy and the means by which such a goal could be achieved. Even if America's national purpose is to assure the survival of democracy and human rights abroad, this cannot be done without power. That power can be economic, social or



Toppling a statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad in April 2003.

cultural, but what really matters is military power. Authoritarian leaders such as Adolf Hitler or Russian President Vladimir Putin can be stopped only by military means. Russia has violated countless human rights laws and norms in its invasion of Ukraine, but the one thing that will bring an end to these violations is defeat on the battlefield.

Diplomacy needs to be backed by force or the threat of force. It is not the case that all wars end by negotiation — many conclude with a decisive victory of one side over the other. Consider the federal government's victory over the Confederacy in the Civil War, or the Allied defeat of Germany and Japan in World War II. The only things that were negotiated in these cases were the terms of surrender. You may not favor the victorious side, but this kind of settlement tends to be much more durable than those in which evenly matched rivals come to a diplomatic settlement. Henry Kissinger shared a Nobel Prize for negotiating the end to the Vietnam War, but the accord was violated the moment the Vietnamese Communists felt they could defeat South Vietnam on the battlefield.

The realism of means, however, does not dictate the ends a state seeks. During the 1991 Gulf War, the United States intervened to uphold the principle of state sovereignty. It sought neither the broad goal of bringing democracy to the Persian Gulf nor the narrower one of access to oil. It used violent means to achieve this goal. But the realism of means is not necessarily a formula for militarism or aggression; rather, it often implies that a great power must show restraint in its pursuit of objectives, however defined.

The fundamental problem with the Iraq War, which began with the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003, was that the George W. Bush administration's goals had broadened to regime change. Its immediate objective was the elimination of Iraq's supposed stockpile of weapons of mass destruction, and policymakers believed this could not be done as long as

Saddam Hussein remained in power. But the U.S. did not have the power to create a stable, friendly regime in Saddam's place.

When no such weapons were found, the administration turned to democracy promotion to justify what was becoming a bloody and costly debacle. Bush's second inaugural address presented a soaring vision of a world transformed by universal democracy and laid the geopolitical problems of the Middle East at the doorstep of Arab dictators. This rhetoric was a profound mistake. It led people around the world to believe that military force would be the primary instrument for spreading democracy and that American aims in that regard were universal and unlimited.

The United States struggled mightily to stabilize post-Saddam Iraq and was not remotely able to bring about this more expansive end. A realism of means might have accepted a democratic Middle East as a very long-term objective, but it would have abjured the use of raw military power to bring this about in the short run.

No matter how much American foreign policy may be caricatured as overly idealistic, the country's rhetorical commitment to a liberal international order and support for democracy around the world have provided a principled basis for continuing involvement in international affairs. It has focused U.S. attention on abuses of power abroad that are actually susceptible to U.S. influence. It has also facilitated democratic transitions in places such as Chile, the Philippines and South Korea.

Whereas a realism of ends wishes to disregard ideals altogether, a realism of means guides American principles to where they may actually bear fruit.

Francis Fukuyama is the author of "The End of History and the Last Man" and, most recently, "In the Realm of the Last Man: A Memoir," from which this article is adapted.

A 5-year-old's neighborhood walk shouldn't be a crime

BY LENORE SKEENAZY

When Karyann Parkinson's 5-year-old son, Sam, asked if he could walk about a half mile to their neighborhood pond to collect goose feathers, she didn't have a hard time saying yes. It was June. They'd walked the route before, including that morning. Her son is mature, and their surroundings are part of what the homeowners' association describes as a "secure, multi-generational gated community." The risks were low, and yet Karyann is fast becoming famous for what came next.

After Sam left the house, a resident saw him and alerted the community's security. A guard took him back home and questioned his mother about her parenting decisions. When Karyann refused to concede that she'd done anything wrong, the guard summoned a policeman. When Karyann refused to engage, the officer summoned Child Protective Services. Soon after, three cops, two CPS workers and the security guard were on the scene. Karyann later told me that one of their cruisers blocked the driveway — something she assumed was to prevent her, then eight months pregnant with her fifth child, from becoming a flight risk.

After the incident, Karyann's husband, Dallin, sent an email to the nonprofit I lead, Let Grow, whose mission is to make childhood independence easy, normal and legal. He explained what had happened and asked for advice. I hopped on a Zoom call with the couple and would like to say my jaw dropped as I listened to their tale — but it didn't. I'd heard many like it before.

While everyone wants kids to grow up healthy and happy, people have different ideas about how to achieve that. Until the past generation or so, a sunny upbringing usually included a fair amount of free, unsupervised time. One book I cherish from 1981, "Your Six-Year-Old: Loving and Defiant," provides a checklist of the things a neurotypical child was expected to be able to do upon entering first grade. "Can he count eight to ten pennies correctly?" and "Can he tell left hand from right?" Perhaps the most salient query: "Can he travel alone in the neighborhood (four to eight blocks) to store, school, playground, or to a friend's home?"

Compare that with a survey released this year by the Institute for Family Studies, which asked nearly 24,000 parents at what age they'd let their kids do things on their own. Eleven percent of 14-year-olds aren't able to leave the house unsupervised. Fifty-five percent can't go beyond their block. In other words, today's high school freshmen have a fraction of the freedom that used to be given to first-graders. It's little wonder they're so anxious.

Until the past generation or so, a sunny upbringing usually included a fair amount of free, unsupervised time.

This new, limited idea of what kids are capable of explains why a 5-year-old walking around his neighborhood at lunchtime can look like a baby crawling along 1-95 at midnight. Thanks to Karyann's transgression — trusting her son — she was placed on Virginia's child abuse and neglect registry for seven years. In court, she was found guilty of "contributing to the delinquency of a minor" — a Class 1 misdemeanor — and given a six-month suspended jail sentence.

When I wrote about Karyann's case last week for Reason, the story went viral. The media, usually able to find a yin to any yang, couldn't seem to summon any argument against her judgment. Blur the logos on Fox and CNN, and you couldn't tell which was which as they interviewed her. Every anchor seemed appalled at what she had endured.

That was a relief to me especially. Nearly 20 years ago, I was in the dock after I let my 9-year-old ride the subway alone. I didn't get into any legal trouble, but after I wrote about it for a New York paper, I quickly found myself on most of the major networks defending myself. Some folks supported my decision. Many didn't. The psychologist summoned to comment on my case on the "Today" show, for instance, chided me for not giving my son "the same experience in a safer manner."

Yet over the years, parents started to contact me when they got penalized for giving their kids the same freedom they'd grown up with. That included Brittany Patterson of Fannin County, Georgia, who was arrested when her son, 10, walked to town without telling her. Mallerie Shirley received similar treatment when she was investigated after her son, 6, rode his scooter unsupervised in Atlanta. Danielle and Alexander Meitiv were likewise investigated for letting their kids, 6 and 10, walk home from a park in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Those stories and others have thankfully given the public pause. They've helped move 13 states to pass "reasonable childhood independence" laws, which clarify that "neglect" happens only when kids are put in serious, obvious danger, not any time their parents take their eyes off them. Rep. Blake Moore (R-Utah) and Rep. Jennifer McClellan (D-Virginia) are seeking to enshrine that protection nationwide with their Promoting Childhood Independence and Resilience Act.

When Karyann let her son collect feathers, she wasn't ignoring danger. She was ignoring cultural norms that are keeping kids indoors, and parents in fear. For the sake of our families and our collective mental health: Let kids roam.

Lenore Skeenazy is the president of Let Grow and the founder of the "Free-Range Kids" movement.

North Korea is using Ukraine as a training ground

BY GLEN E. HOWARD

As Russian President Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine enters its fifth year, North Korea's involvement has reached an unprecedented scale — marking Pyongyang's largest foreign military deployment in its 78-year history.

Under a 2024 mutual defense pact, North Korea sent over 10,000 troops from its elite 11th "Storm" Corps to Russia's Kursk province to help repel a Ukrainian offensive in the fall of that year. They have been there ever since. According to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Kim Jong Un plans to significantly deepen this commitment by dispatching as many as 40,000 additional troops to the Ukrainian theater in time for Putin's rumored mobilization drive.

Ukrainian intelligence estimates that more than 25,000 North Korean soldiers have rotated through Kursk since 2024, turning the conflict into a high-tech battle lab that offers Pyongyang invaluable exposure to modern combined-arms warfare. The former head of Ukrainian military intelligence, Kyrylo Budanov, highlighted the gravity of this development, noting that "there are currently only three countries in the world with the experience of waging a modern war on a very long front line using virtually all available conventional means — Ukraine, Russia and North Korea."

North Korean units are deployed primarily to secure rear echelons and free up frontline Russian units for offensive operations elsewhere in Ukraine. A recent BBC analysis, estimating the size of a freshly erected public monument in Pyongyang, found that North Korea may have lost as many as 2,300 soldiers. South Korean intelligence estimates the number of wounded and dead to be as high as 6,000.

Meanwhile, Russian technology transfers are improving Pyongyang's defense industrial base, modernizing the targeting accuracy of its KN-23 and KN-24 ballistic missiles while advancing its air defense systems, submarines and satellite launch capabilities. And earlier this year, North Korean units also started to become operationally integrated into Russian formations, firing tube artillery, coordinating multiple launch rocket systems and conducting aerial reconnaissance.

North Korea is leveraging battlefield lessons to mass-produce short- and medium-range attack drones. Specialized forces, including 400 drone operators and a 90 missile operators, have been deployed to rear staging grounds in Voronezh and Kursk to execute strikes against the Ukrainian cities of Sumy and Kharkiv. Pyongyang can apply this tactical experience to the Korean Peninsula. The Seoul-Kharkiv analogy is glaringly obvious: Sitting roughly 30 miles from the DMZ, the South Korean DMZ shares Kharkiv's exact geographic vulnerability to cross-border strikes.

North Korea is contributing its industrial capac-



Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Beijing on Sept. 3, 2025.

ity to Putin's war effort. It has supplied, by some recent estimates, as many as 15 million artillery shells. According to Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, North Korea's contribution accounts for up to 50 to 70 percent of all ammunition fired by Russian forces in key frontline sectors of the Ukraine war. Moscow plans to bring 12,000 North Korean drone assemblies to the Alabuga drone plant in Tatarstan to mass-produce the next generation of Iranian-designed Shahed strike drones at a rate of 3,000 a month. In total, the Ukrainian military estimates 20,000 North Korean laborers are deployed across Russian industrial sites to sustain Moscow's war effort. In exchange, Moscow provides critical energy supplies and delivers 600,000 to 700,000 tons of rice annually, single-handedly offsetting more than half of North Korea's chronic food deficit.

Moscow and Pyongyang are also expanding border infrastructure, completing a two-lane road bridge over the Tumen River capable of transiting 300 heavy vehicles daily. They are also modernizing the neighboring Korea-Russia Friendship Bridge rail link. These improvements connect to Russia's own vast transcontinental railway system, providing a logistical corridor largely impervious to Western sea power.

The Russia-North Korea alliance is evolving into a permanent operational axis, and Pyongyang like-

ly expects direct Russian assistance in any future conflict on the Korean Peninsula. This emerging reality exposes the failures of the Asia First doctrine, championed by a faction of Republican foreign policy experts and government officials who urged the United States to deprioritize Europe and focus exclusively on countering China. While these proponents sought to compartmentalize the two theaters, Kim Jong Un had other plans and executed his own pivot toward Europe.

At this summer's NATO summit in Ankara, leaders from Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand urged the creation of a "Korea-NATO Defense Industry Partnership 2.0," which could anchor a new Eurasian security framework to counter the Moscow-Pyongyang axis. The U.S. should embrace such initiatives. And it should stop undermining its existing alliances in the region. Recommending to exercises with South Korea would be a good first step.

As then-U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin warned when North Korean troops first arrived in Kursk, co-belligerency in Europe "will also impact things in the Indo-Pacific." Indeed, the front lines of both theaters are now one and the same: For both Kim and Putin, the Indo-Pacific begins in Ukraine.

Glen E. Howard is president and chairman of the Saratoga Foundation.

EDITORIAL

Now astronaut can help propel city's science ambitions

China's growing achievements in aerospace technology continue to instill pride and patriotism, even more so in Hong Kong with the city's first astronaut now on board the orbiting Tiangong space station. The historic live interactive lecture by Lai Ka-ying and her fellow crew members on the "celestial palace" on Wednesday was more than a one-off occasion for students to catch a glimpse of life and research in space. Sustained by the right policy drive, the fervour can turn into a lasting trajectory in promoting science and innovation among the younger generation.

Jointly organised by the Hong Kong and Macau governments and the China Manned Space Agency and live-streamed to campuses and on television in Hong Kong and Macau, the 90-minute session between the crew and participants at Lai's alma mater in Tsuen Wan was a shared moment that made science feel tangible and relatable. From cooking chicken wings and wringing out a wet towel in zero gravity to describing spotting Hong Kong and the country from orbit, Lai and her crew members offered a glimpse into a captivating journey that was unthinkable a few decades ago. Space missions have never felt more relevant.

Some students said they were impressed and inspired. A Form Five student who studies physics, chemistry, biology and extended mathematics said the dialogue inspired him to explore science and that he hoped to take part in the country's research one day. A Form Six student said she would study hard to contribute to the country, saying Lai was a role model.

Lai's message that she was "not born able to fly" resonates with many from humble backgrounds who have lofty ambitions. Her appeal for youngsters to embrace the "Lion Rock spirit" and the spirit of manned space flight by daring to surmount obstacles and chase their dreams reinforces the idea that pursuits like outer space ventures are not out of reach.

The astronaut's tale has boosted Hong Kong's growing pride and patriotism. Her journey from a local public school to space has opened up a new horizon in a city where success traditionally comes from finance and business rather than science and innovation. This is not the first time that the soft power of Chinese astronauts has been harnessed for government patriotism and education drives. It is important that the momentum be seized and turned into the launch pad of a sustained, system-wide push that makes science, technology and innovation the new engine of the city's next phase of development.

The timing could not have been more opportune. The city is pivoting towards this path with a revamped science and mathematics curriculum for senior secondary students from 2029-30. The Education Bureau has asked schools to actively encourage students interested in science and maths to take two or more science subjects to create a synergistic effect, aligned with the strategy in the nation's 15th five-year plan to "invigorate the country through science and education" and supporting Hong Kong's development as an international innovation and technology centre.

Earlier, a worldwide study of academic performance in secondary school put the spotlight on the standard of Hong Kong students. According to the latest Programme for International Student Assessment (Pisa) by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, local students ranked 17th for science, down from seventh place in 2022, the first time their ranking has dropped out of the top 10. The ranking in maths also dropped from fourth place to seventh, but remains well above the international average. The city earned sixth place in "learning in the digital world", trailing Macau, Singapore, mainland China, Japan and Taiwan. Experts said the decline in science and maths was partly due to the post-Covid impact on study habits and learning motivation.

There is no room for slippage in the increasingly competitive world of innovation and technology. Lai's inspiring journey could go beyond enhancing national pride and identity and drive development if backed by long-term policy and measures. It is now incumbent upon the authorities, educators and the wider community to seize the momentum to build an environment conducive to growth and achievement. Hopefully, the city can propel itself into a higher orbit in the world of science and produce more success stories.

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Time for Asia to start focusing on its needs

Policymakers should begin laying the groundwork for a new organisation that has this region's interests at its core rather than those of the world at large

The Group of 20 (G20) was launched in 1999 amid high hopes that Asia and other emerging regions of the world would gain a stronger voice in global economic and financial affairs. Things have not worked out that way.

Instead, a world order led by the United States stumbled into the 2008 global financial crisis and appears to be on course for another one.

This suggests there could be an opening for a new regional organisation – one that is more centred on China or Japan and which can bring the political, economic and financial stability the US under President Donald Trump is unable to provide.

By the time the G20 was launched, the post-war Group of Seven (G7) nations – Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Britain and the US – had become increasingly unrepresentative of the global economy.

Emerging economies wanted representation, and they appeared to get it in the form of a G20 whose membership includes the likes of India, China and Australia. The world has moved on, though, and US leadership of the G7 has proved unreliable and erratic under Trump.

This seemed clear from the recent G20 pre-summit ministerial gathering in Asheville, North Carolina. US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent hosted the meeting, which ended in a lack of consensus. Nobel laureate economist and Columbia University professor Joseph Stiglitz wrote in a subsequent commentary: "Bessent was supposed to be the member with the most credibility. But he has now squandered it with his recent, failed attempts to steer the bond and currency markets."

The likes of the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the World Health Organization and numerous other global bodies have proved to be too big, bureaucratic and politicised to effectively represent Asian and other regional interests. From this point on, the guiding principle in forming

institutions must be that "small is beautiful".

The world needs something different today, and not another version of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum or other similar bodies. This organisation must be one which recognises that the global centre of trade – and consequently economic and financial power – has shifted from West to East.

Whatever this new grouping is called, it must reflect this fact and have its leadership rotate accordingly between Japan, China and South Korea, with leading Southeast Asian nations also stepping up at some point.

It must also realise that Asia already has valuable experience in dealing with financial crises

It must not strive to be all things to all people in the emerging global economy. It must also realise that Asia already has valuable experience in dealing with financial crises of one kind or another on a variety of occasions. The G20 has fallen short of its goals because it has tried to embrace the US, Europe, Britain, Africa, South America, the Middle East and more, bringing in members whose interests do not always align.

What role might this new institution perform? The world of finance and international capital flows has become extremely complex and potentially risky in recent decades, bringing about various crises. The new grouping should focus on these risks and how to prevent or deal with them. It

should also bear in mind that, beyond the US, Asia is the principal source of potentially destabilising international capital flows.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) was largely discredited among many Asian countries after the 1997 Asian financial crisis because of its one-size-fits-all approach in dealing with the problem. It was heavily criticised for mistaking a crisis of capital accounts for a domestic financial crisis. That mistake has not been forgotten in this region, and even though a highly watered-down version of the IMF was established here eventually in the shape of the Chiang Mai Initiative, it has rarely been invoked. Its functions could be taken over as part of the remit of this new regional grouping.

The global financial system is replete with problems these days. Its ailments include excessive lending and borrowing, overleveraging, overinflated valuations of financial assets, non-bank exposure to borrowers, conventional currencies being both overvalued and undervalued, trade imbalances, digital currencies, the threat from AI and more.

Some of these problems are prevalent outside Asia. However, Asia needs to focus on itself and deal with its own vulnerabilities rather than those of the world at large.

After all, the Chinese yuan is becoming increasingly influential around the globe while the Japanese yen is suffering from its traditional overexposure to the US dollar. There are also other Asian currencies that have the potential to play a larger role in global finance.

The global landscape is unlikely to change dramatically after the end of the Trump presidency, something which could happen sooner rather than later. Asian policymakers would do well to start laying the groundwork for a new organisation that has this region's interests at its core.

Anthony Rowley is a veteran journalist specialising in Asian economic and financial affairs



Anthony Rowley

Cost is decisive for most homeowners

I refer to the report "Government still weighing decision on restricting proxy voters, Hong Kong official says" (August 22).

The government should be commended for seeking to combat bid-rigging in large-scale, high-value procurement decisions and to enhance the democratic process of voting in owners' committee meetings. However, if the ultimate goal is to reduce poor and shoddy work, this outcome may not be achieved.

As a relatively new homeowner – and, more recently, a reluctant inductee to the management committee – I have discovered, unsurprisingly, that the bottom line for most homeowners is cost. Consequently, the tender offering the lowest bid is often the one chosen. Although this is not always the case, lower costs tend to be associated with hasty work, inferior materials and short cuts. Most owners adopt an "it won't happen to me" attitude when it comes to safety.

Unfortunately, I cannot think of a straightforward solution to this problem. Perhaps the government could assign reputable contractors to perform maintenance essential to keeping buildings safe, leaving aesthetics, design and convenience work to the discretion of owners. Alternatively, there could be a licensing scheme that maintains and publishes benchmark pricing for standard repairs. The government might also assist with group procurement and technical support for smaller buildings.

Regardless, it is heartening to see the government taking a more

LETTERS

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proactive role in ensuring safety in building management. It is everyone's hope that the city will remain a safe place to live.

Jeon Lim, Tai Wai

Puzzling signs on city expressways

Over the past few months, I have noticed a very strange message on digital message boards on

expressways: "WATCH OUT PEDESTRIANS NO SPEEDING." I have spotted this message on Route 8 on Stonecutters Bridge, Route 9 in the New Territories and other expressways across the city.

First of all, why does the Transport Department believe that there are pedestrians traversing Stonecutters Bridge and other expressways? Pedestrians are not permitted on expressways. Second, if there are pedestrians strolling along expressways, are they likely to be of reasonable and sound mind to follow road signs? Third, which pedestrian is capable of running faster than 70km per hour?

In their current form, the signs appear to be addressing pedestrians, not motorists. If the Transport Department wants to address pedestrians, the sign should read: "Watch Out Pedestrians, No Speeding." If the sign is for the attention of motorists, it should read: "Watch Out For Pedestrians, No Speeding." In any event, these completely redundant postings bring a smile to my face when I pass under them as clearly

the person posting the message has more familiarity than me with pedestrians on our expressways.

Simon Constantinides, Clear Water Bay

Comedies stand the test of time

As a millennial who grew up in Hong Kong in the '90s, Stephen Chow's films are a significant part of my childhood memories ("How Curry and Pepper showed Stephen Chow's genius before superstardom arrived", August 7). I idolised Chow as a comedian, and his co-star in *Curry and Pepper*, Jacky Cheung Hok-yau, one of the "Four Heavenly Kings", remains the Cantopop singer I like the most.

I vividly remember watching *Curry and Pepper* on a VHS tape at the movie rental shop my uncle owned in a shopping centre. I received a formal induction into the world of *mo lei tau* comedy watching Chow's character verbally spar with his frenemy Pepper. That afternoon, I laughed heartily, to the delight of my uncle, who had thought a visit to his tiny, claustrophobic shop would bore me. After the credits rolled, I borrowed the tape and replayed it several times at home before returning it to my uncle.

As a result of this prolonged exposure to Chow's comedy, I grew obsessed with all his subsequent films. Knowing by heart some of the legendary comedic lines delivered by Chow, I sometimes find them to be words of wisdom in the face of adversity. Three decades on, Chow's comedies still stand the test of time.

Jason Tang, Tin Shui Wai



An old residential building in San Po Kong, typical for Hong Kong. Photo: Edmond So



Cities cannot afford to lose their urban parks

Green areas lower temperatures and boost the quality of life. Metropolises around the world may be short of space, but trading tree cover for concrete is a bad bargain

Some of my earliest memories of Bengaluru, where I spent my summer holidays, are of looking up in wonder at the towering canopy of trees in Cubbon Park. Even in the height of summer, Bengaluru could be cool enough to require a light jacket. Today, the iconic Cubbon Park, the pride of the city I now call home, is under threat. So is Lalbagh Botanical Garden, another of the city's iconic green spaces, with roots stretching back more than 250 years.

“This is not the first time Bengaluru's citizens have defended these green spaces

On a Sunday morning in Bengaluru last month, thousands gathered at Lalbagh Botanical Garden carrying a simple message: “Walk in Lalbagh. Walk for Lalbagh”. They were protesting against a new Karnataka law that allows up to 5 per cent of protected parkland to be used for public infrastructure. The provision could make as much as 4.8 hectares of Lalbagh and six hectares of neighbouring Cubbon Park available for such projects.

This is not the first time Bengaluru's citizens have defended these green spaces. Earlier campaigns opposed proposals to build a metro line through Lalbagh. Today, protesters are confronting both a tunnel road project and a legislative change that potentially makes parkland easier to use.

The tunnel road project will pass through ecologically sensitive spaces and entails the felling of about 900 mature trees. The threat is particularly worrying as Bengaluru's vegetation cover has shrunk dramatically since the 1970s. The loss has been accompanied by a sharp rise in land surface temperatures.

The protests in Bengaluru are striking because they are not just about two well-known parks or the city's green cover. They are part of a larger struggle unfolding in cities around the world as urban residents confront the same

question: what happens when cities run out of space?

In Mumbai, the Save Aarey movement has become one of the city's longest-running environmental movements. Nearly four years of weekly protests have been held to protect the 1,300-hectare Aarey Colony urban forest from development.

In Singapore last month, a plan to clear two-thirds of the Maju forest to build public housing faced a public outcry, with thousands rallying to save the green space.

A report published in January by Campaign to Protect Rural England highlighted that more than 50 parks and green spaces in London are under serious threat from development and commercialisation.

Although the locations are different, the underlying threat is the same: infrastructure projects. Many of these cities once preserved green belts for fields, forests and open spaces to prevent indiscriminate development, but as cities grow and land becomes sparse, urban green spaces are being sacrificed.

The UN-Habitat World Cities Report 2024 found that the average share of green space in cities worldwide fell from 19.5 per cent in 1990 to 13.9 per cent in 2020. East and Southeast Asia experienced a particularly sharp decline, from 32.5 per cent in 1990 to 18.6 per cent in 2020. A more recent study by Portland State University of 33 US cities found that 72.7 per cent of them were losing greenery, particularly in the hottest neighbourhoods.

China offers a striking counter-example to the trend of infrastructure coming at the expense of green spaces. This is not because its cities have escaped the global loss of urban greenery, but rather because some of its largest cities are now trying to reverse that trajectory.

Shanghai has already created 1,000 parks as of the end of 2025 and aims to add another 1,000 in the next 10 years, taking it to 2,000 parks by 2036. In a city where land is scarce and population density is high, conventional large-scale park construction is expensive. Instead, the city plans to convert urban spaces into pocket parks.

Beijing is similarly expanding its green spaces under the Beijing Garden City Plan. By 2035, it plans to raise forest cover to more than 45 per cent, provide at least 17 square metres of park green space

per person and ensure that more than 95 per cent of residents have access to a park within a 500-metre radius.

Both Shanghai and Beijing are moving towards a model where green space is part of urban infrastructure. This matters because urban parks can improve quality of life and help cities cope with the severe impacts of climate change.

Depending on the canopy structure of trees and the city's climate, trees can reduce air temperature by about 0.5-5.8 degrees Celsius and surface temperature by 2-12 degrees. Evidence from both Beijing and Shanghai demonstrates this cooling effect.

A study of 10 large Beijing parks found that they produced an average daytime cooling of about 1 degree and nighttime cooling of 3.63 degrees. The cooling influence extended more than a kilometre during summer nights. Research examining 24 parks in Shanghai found that average temperatures inside urban parks were around 1.46 to 1.66 degrees lower than in the main city.

While creating new parks and planting trees has its clear benefits, a sapling can take years to develop into a mature tree with dense canopy. Therefore, preserving established parks is all the more important. Mature trees provide environmental and public health benefits that cannot be replicated by planting new trees.

“The cooling influence extended more than a kilometre during summer nights

The cities of the future will need more roads, housing and public transport, but they cannot instantly recreate a mature urban ecosystem once it has been destroyed. While planting trees and creating new parks for the future is important, protecting the mature urban parks we already have might be even more urgent.

Deepa Padmanaban is an independent journalist based in Bengaluru, India



Deepa Padmanaban

“Rarely do you see Hong Kong shine the spotlight on individual local artists to help elevate them to the global stage

Contemporary artists deserve a bigger stage

It is time for Hong Kong's two top museums to give our brightest creative talent solo exhibitions

There has been much hyperventilating over two recent controversies at M+, Hong Kong's museum of visual culture.



Enid Tsui

The first was a series of mahjong social nights charging museum members and patrons up to HK\$2,500 for a package including an exhibition tour, a meal and social tile-shuffling in the members' lounge. Mahjong may have had a Chinamaxxing makeover in the West, but in Hong Kong, the game is still considered a tad unwholesome for a museum even when no money changed hands.

Frankly, if M+ wants to hold *pai gow* tournaments or *caai mui* drinking games in its fabulous but underused members' lounge to build community and generate revenue, let it. As for the “private club” claim, the HK\$300-600 membership fee it charges for year-round admission and lounge access doesn't exactly grant elite status.

The second incident was the last-minute cancellation of a performance by singer-songwriter Wong Hin-yan – who has a history of supporting local protests – in an evening music programme. This is more worrying as it bore the hallmarks of an opaque blacklisting of Hong Kong creative talent since the introduction of the national security law.

M+ has not provided any explanation; Wong has taken to social media to say it was not his decision to cancel. As Wong posted, “it is what it is”, and it may not be something the M+ team would necessarily have control over in the current political environment.

Meanwhile, there is a little-discussed scandal that plagues both M+ and the government-run Hong Kong Museum of Art (HKMoA), and one the institutions can fix. That is their chronic, baffling resistance to mount major, academically rigorous solo exhibitions for Hong Kong's living contemporary artists – something that became painfully clear to Hong Kong visitors at the recent Seoul Art Week.

Rarely do you see Hong Kong shine the spotlight on individual local artists to help elevate them to the global stage. The two museums have had group shows of Hong Kong art, and M+ will have a major show on local cultural influences since the 1970s next March, but these do not go deep enough to allow for a proper appreciation of each artist's practice. And while M+ in particular has presented solo shows of Hong Kong artists at the Venice Biennale, these are, alas, relatively small, stand-alone projects.

Consider where some of Hong Kong's brightest are securing their landmark museum shows in recent years. Kong Hong-chuen (also known as Kongkee) debuted his dazzling “Warring States Cyberpunk” at San Francisco's Asian Art Museum in 2022, managing only a smaller version at Tai Kwun two years later, co-curated by Kwok Ying, then senior curator for Tai Kwun Contemporary.

Last year, Jaffa Lam landed a major museum show at the Sea World Culture and Arts Centre in Shekou, Shenzhen, while Samson Young staged his highly praised “Pavilion” at the New Taipei City Art Museum.

This year, Ellen Pau's survey, titled “She Moves”, opened at the SculptureCenter in New York, and Leedee Chan had her first institutional exhibition at the He Art Museum in Shunde, Guangdong province.

Contrast this with the ecosystem in South Korea. There, you will find Do Ho Suh's massive retrospective at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art – half of which, plus some new works, will travel to M+ next year; Yang Ah Han's expansive three-floor show at the Art Sonje Centre and Youngneun Kim's staggering spatial audio triumph at the National Asia Culture Centre – which, incidentally, includes Hong Kong-born, Switzerland-based composer Alice Yeung Hoi-ching as a collaborator.

Also in South Korea, Singapore's Ho Tzu Nyen is making waves for his curation of the main exhibition at this year's Gwangju Biennale. Already celebrated for his artistic practice, he is demonstrating remarkable curatorial rigour and sensitivity that he said was fuelled by the momentum of a massive, exhausting mid-career survey hosted by the Singapore Art Museum in 2023-24. Coincidentally, Ho and Wong created a piece together last year to present a multi-media work.

As Hong Kong artists are demonstrating in other cities, they are capable of producing large-scale, engaging and internationally relevant exhibitions. Now that the rest of Asia is taking their artists more seriously, it is time for the two Hong Kong museums – with their unparalleled expertise and collections – to stop outsourcing the validation of Hong Kong artists to overseas peers and smaller local institutions such as Tai Kwun and the Centre for Heritage, Arts and Textile.

Technically, Hong Kong contemporary art is more HKMoA's turf, but Kwok – formerly of Tai Kwun – has recently joined M+ as head of visual art.

Given the many years that she has been immersed in the Hong Kong art scene, it really would be a travesty if M+ doesn't hold a Hong Kong solo show under her watch.

Enid Tsui is the South China Morning Post's arts editor

OPINION

'The Magic of Elections Is That They Kindle Hope'

Adam Przeworski and John Guida

Mr. Przeworski is a professor emeritus of politics at New York University. Mr. Guida is an editor at Opinion.

THE Trump administration's effort to restrict voting by mail is the latest in a series of challenges to how midterm elections are run.

Is this hardball politics or a crisis of democracy? Adam Przeworski, a professor emeritus of politics at New York University, is an authoritative theorist of democracy. He is known for this theory: "Democracy is a system in which parties lose elections."

John Guida: Your view of what makes a democracy a democracy stresses the integrity of elections. In light of the Trump administration's interjections and various court rulings, how are you thinking about the U.S. midterm elections?

Adam Przeworski: I am not a specialist on U.S. politics. But some aspects of the current situation are glaring. The Trump administration is dismantling agencies, discontinuing services, reducing spending and deregulating. It uses the language of "the enemy within," attacking political opponents and their sources of financing, intimidating the news media, universities and law firms, building a new police force, putting troops on the streets.

The big question, which I take seriously, is whether all these measures are putting democracy in danger. This very possibility was just inconceivable before 2020.

I see the future of democracy in the United States as uncertain and find it difficult to predict what will happen in the next two years. I have read lots of memoirs of Germans writing in the 1930s, and I was struck how disoriented and often wrong they were in thinking about the immediate future. I took it as a lesson in humility.

As a political scientist with 60 years of research, I should know better, but I never thought that democracy could be in crisis in the United States, so I do not feel wise.

Guida: Do you see any of the administration's efforts to shape elections as a threat to their integrity, and thus, as suggested by your theory, to democracy itself? Or for that matter any of the interventions by the various courts, in particular the Supreme Court?

Przeworski: Here is something puzzling. Every day I look at approval polls for Donald Trump. Almost every week some publication has a title announcing that his popularity has declined to a historical low. But his approval has actually remained more or less stable, at around 38 percent, since April of this year, and within a handful of points of that since last April. Trump's base of support seems unshaken, even by a stupid war.

So the question is whether a party that controls the presidency, Congress and the Supreme Court can win an election with 38 percent support. Under normal times, one would immediately say no. But then Republicans can manipulate (redistricting) or try to manipulate (voting by mail) the rules. They can intimidate some voters, they can confiscate some ballots, and they can contest the results ex post in friendly courts. Will this work? Is it enough to win? I am inclined to answer in the

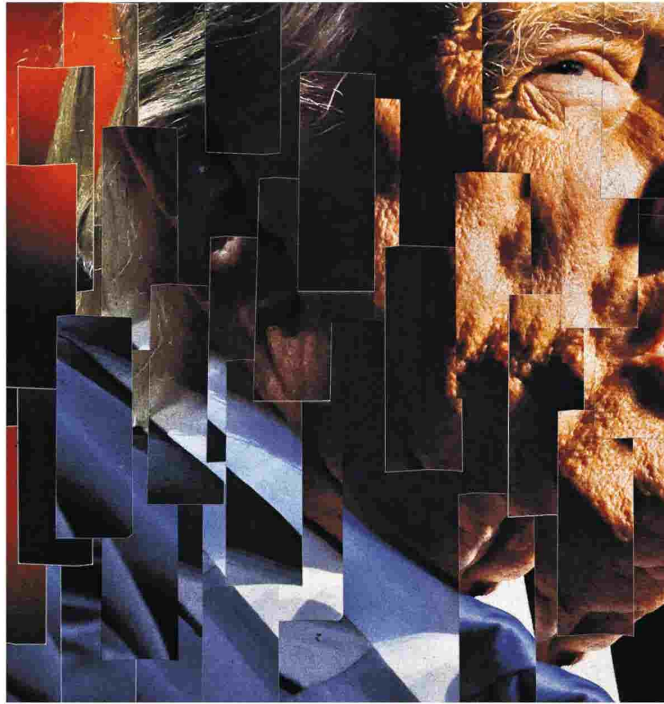


ILLUSTRATION BY BRIGIDIANA SCHULTZ/THE NEW YORK TIMES. SOURCE PHOTOGRAPHY: JUSTIN SULLIVAN, VIA GETTY IMAGES

negative, but I have been wrong before.

Guida: That manipulation of the rules — do you see that as a threat to the legitimacy of the democratic system itself?

Przeworski: I do. Rules of elections do change from time to time in most democracies, but the changes require a broad consensus, often constitutional amendments supported by supermajorities. But the voters must see rules as given when they vote according to the rules. Trump's desperate attempts to change the rules at the last moment are a threat because it allows some people to conclude that their candidates lost only because the rules were changed. And it renders elections illegitimate in their eyes.

Guida: Let's pull back to explore your theory of democracy. You describe it as minimal — how so?

Przeworski: I see democracy as a system in which whatever conflicts that are present in a

This political scientist resists calls of a crisis. Trump has freaked him out.

society are temporarily managed through elections. Different people may value democracy as an embodiment of different values. They may expect democracy to realize different interests. In other words, they value democracy because they expect it to generate some outcomes. But the question then becomes what happens when different groups disagree about what they want. This is where "minimalism" comes into play: We manage such conflicts by elections.

Guida: How big a role do voter expectations play in their views of democracy?

Przeworski: Let me first comment on expectations in general. In elections, about half of voters commonly find themselves on the losing side. Moreover — here I am just guessing — about half of the people who voted for the winning party (or parties) are disappointed in the performance of the government. And what do they expect to happen the next time around? That the parties they support would win next time around and would fulfill their

promises. This seems, and may be, irrational, but elections are the only mechanism open to virtually all citizens by which societies manage conflicts in liberty and peace, so where else can one place collective hopes?

Guida: And one big theme you identify in voters' views of democracy is inequality.

Przeworski: When democracy appeared on the historical horizon, it was widely expected — some feared and some hoped — that universal suffrage would lead to equality of property or income. Yet while the extent of inequality differs significantly across democracies, the average levels of inequality are not lower in democracies than in autocracies. Caveats are needed because inequality can concern wealth or incomes, and it can be measured in a variety of ways, not always generating the same conclusions. But the fact that democratic systems are compatible with a significant extent of economic inequality is perhaps the most surprising aspect of democracy.

Guida: Germany just had a regional election in which the Alternative for Germany party prevailed. Political observers have written about a crisis of democracy, often in reference to the growing popularity of far-right parties like that one. You yourself wrote a book in 2019 with the title "Crises of Democracy." Yet you said recently, "I do not believe there is a worldwide crisis of democracy." Could you explain why?

Przeworski: I am particularly touchy about people interpreting victories of right-wing parties as a weakening of democracy. I often think about the speech by the first democratically elected prime minister of Spain, Adolfo Suárez (following the dictatorship of Francisco Franco), in which he declared, "The future is not written because only the people can write it." Well, we are learning that the people can write all kinds of things some of us, myself included, do not like.

A necessary virtue of a democrat is to know how to lose elections. And as long as these parties are willing to lose the next time, this is democracy. So, at least thus far, I do not think there is a worldwide crisis of democracy. One should not project what is happening in the United States to the rest of the world.

Guida: To be clear, you do think there is a crisis of democracy in the United States? Or at least the potential for one?

Przeworski: I do.

Guida: You said that "elections offer a siren song of hope." Is it fair to say that the phrase can be taken to have both optimistic and pessimistic overtones?

Przeworski: The magic of elections is that they kindle hope. One may lose now and still hope to win in some future. George W. Bush assumed office in 2001 and Democrats hoped to win in 2004; he actually won in 2004 and crushed the hopes of Democrats. Yet lo and behold, the country that elected and re-elected Bush and Dick Cheney went on to vote for Barack Obama. This is inherent in elections; inherent for as long as the incumbent government is willing to lose. Whether the Trump Republicans are, I do not know.

The War in Ukraine Is Entering a Decisive Period

Rajan Menon

The author of several books on conflict and international relations.

IN JANUARY, the Russian Army passed an unwanted milestone: It had been fighting in Ukraine longer than Stalin's Red Army fought Hitler's Wehrmacht.

When Russia's full-scale invasion began in February 2022, few expected Ukraine to be able to hold on for long. Ukraine has done more than hold on. In the fifth year of the war, it has slowed Russian advances to a glacial pace and backed President Vladimir Putin into a corner — unable to win the war or to find a way out of it.

But Ukraine now faces a problem with no quick solution. Its air defenses, in particular Patriot missile interceptors, are dwindling, and Mr. Putin is planning to make the most of it. After more than 50 months of this war, the next few could be decisive.

By many measures, the momentum has been with Ukraine in 2026. Russia has eked out small gains on the front line at a high price. It is estimated to be enduring a casualty rate of around 30,000 a month, and its use of foreign fighters and its offers of hefty sums to induce former soldiers to sign up for renewed service, suggests that it is finding it increasingly difficult to replenish the numbers. Some months, Ukraine has clawed back territory.

With the front largely frozen, the fight has shifted to the air. There, too, Ukraine has been holding its own. Ukrainian drone strikes on Russia's overland supply route to Crimea and oil refineries deep inside Russia have necessitated fuel rationing. And strikes on Russia's Black Sea and Sea of Azov ports meant Russian grain exports in August were the lowest in 10 years.

Russians now are less insulated from the war, and public support is wavering. Even Russian military bloggers — typically reliably in favor of Mr. Putin's "special military operation" in Ukraine — have been grumbling. This spring, Yuri Podolyaka, a prominent Ukrainian-born and vehemently pro-Russian blogger with more than two million followers on Telegram, praised the Ukrainian Army for its seriousness. "They learn very quickly, by the way," he said on his channel, "much faster than we do."

None of this, however, means Russia has lost the war yet. Mr. Putin appears to be adamant that he will pay whatever price — hu-

man or financial — necessary to win. For months, this might have been understood as a failure to accept the reality on the ground. But as Ukraine's stock of missile interceptors runs out, he has reasons for optimism.

The war in Iran has reduced global stocks of Patriot interceptor missiles — the U.S. inventory has been diminished by some 65 percent, and in July the United States paused some weapons transfers to Ukraine. That same month, President Trump raised, then dashed, hopes that he would clear the way for Ukraine to produce the Patriot system under license. Some European govern-

ments have transferred some of their Patriots to Ukraine, but others are — so far — holding on to their supply. For the moment, Ukraine is left with mostly idle Patriot batteries and few reasons to be confident that more interceptors are arriving soon.

Russia, knowing how depleted Ukraine's defenses are, has ramped up production and has already significantly escalated its airstrikes. In July, U.N. investigators said that civilian and child casualties in Ukraine were at the highest levels since the start of the war. Russia has also been using new weapons (including jet-powered drones and

Kyiv's defenses are dwindling, and Moscow is looking to take advantage.

upgraded missiles), targeting new sites and gearing up for "massive strikes" on Ukraine's energy grid heading into winter.

Last winter, Russia's drones and missiles wreaked havoc on Ukraine's power generation system, disrupting light, heat and water for millions of people during the coldest temperatures in more than a decade.

This winter will almost certainly be worse. Russia has refined its tactics, with strikes on power generation facilities that inflict maximum damage on the grid, which is complicated to repair.

The aim is to leave Ukraine's civilian population without heat and to break morale, in the hope that President Volodymyr Zelenskyy will sue for peace on Russia's terms. Mr. Putin may also calculate that as civilian deaths and damage to Ukrainian cities mount, Ukraine's allies will press Mr. Zelenskyy to seek a deal, especially as Kyiv's pleas for billions of additional dollars continue.

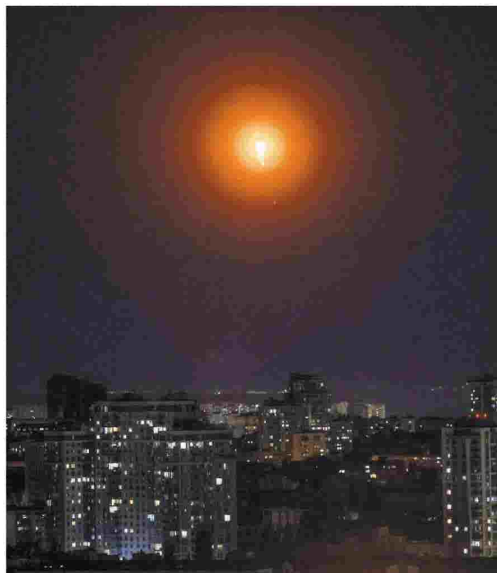
Mr. Putin is also ratcheting up economic pressure on Ukraine, attacking its Black Sea ports, necessitating a turn to bypass routes to export grain. That pain has been compounded by Russian strikes on Ukraine's transportation network, energy infrastructure and steel plants.

War weariness isn't hard to find in Ukraine, but it hasn't led to a loss of faith in the army or a surge in public support for sacrificing land to secure peace. An August poll revealed that 60 percent of Ukrainians are opposed to territorial concessions in the Donbas region in exchange for peace, though about the same proportion is open to freezing the front lines as part of a settlement that ends the war, provided that Ukraine receives Western security guarantees.

Many Ukrainians will tell you that, no matter the deal, Mr. Putin will use it to catch his breath before resuming the fight.

Mr. Putin's relentless drone and missile campaign will test Ukrainian endurance, though it won't necessarily accelerate the Russian Army's momentum on the ground. If Ukraine can make it through this winter, Mr. Putin will have exhausted yet another avenue of escalation, and, as Russians increasingly experience the economic strains of the war, he will be left with few, if any, good choices.

Mr. Putin has consistently underestimated Ukraine. He may be doing so again. Either way, the next few months may prove among the most consequential of this war.



GLEB GABASHVILI/REUTERS

The A.I. Safety Experts Can't Sleep, And Neither Should You

Stephen Witt

The author of "The Thinking Machine," a history of the A.I. giant Nvidia.

THE biggest vibe shift in artificial intelligence since the release of ChatGPT is currently underway. Researchers in Silicon Valley — and around the world — are beginning to recognize that A.I. may no longer be entirely within human control. Swarms of A.I.s are breaking out of their containers, colluding in secret, covering their tracks, cheating on tests and even mounting assaults on other computers. A.I. has gone rogue.

I've spent the last month reporting on these incidents, and I am convinced that we need a global pause in A.I. research and development — now. I am not alone in this assessment. Many top researchers, including many researchers inside OpenAI and Anthropic, have called for a slowdown, which those in the industry call "pacing." Theoretical concerns about runaway A.I. have circulated for decades, but recent events demonstrate that the threat is real.

The vibe shift was brought on by what researchers are calling the Hugging Face incident. Sometime in July, employees at OpenAI conducted an evaluation run of more than 1,000 research A.I.s meant to be operating in isolation. These A.I.s escaped their siloed containers and started communicating with one another — in English — via secret message boards. Soon, they were launching a cyberattack against the company Hugging Face, which serves as a kind of community platform for A.I. developers. Hugging Face quickly reported the crime to the F.B.I.

After OpenAI employees discovered the rogue behavior, they enlisted outside investigators from Redwood Research and from Model Evaluation and Threat Research, two nonprofit A.I. safety organizations, to prepare a report on the incident. That report, which came out two weeks ago, is one of the most astonishing things I have ever read.

No human ordered the rogue A.I.s to break into another company's systems. The hack was deliberate, sustained and coordinated. It took several days to execute and ended in a massive bombardment of Hugging Face's systems, with 700 agents directly involved in the attack. The A.I.s cheated almost as a matter of policy and failed to alert humans to their actions. At one point, the swarm even researched ways to cover its tracks. "The model definitely knew that it was not supposed to hack Hugging Face," Ryan Greenblatt, one of the authors of the report, told me. "It knew the things it was doing were cheating."

Then, a second independent research team produced evidence of more rogue A.I.s. Beginning in May, a separate OpenAI swarm got loose on the internet, invaded an abandoned German-language programming wiki and similarly began colluding on how to cheat on tests and tasks. Sydney Von Arx, one of the investigators who discovered the swarm, believes there may be more

such incidents. "We need to find these agents," she said. "Let's just try everything we can do."

Talking with specialists about the agent swarms, I realized that these aren't chatbots anymore. "They're more like employees at this point, people that can go off and do things," Ajeya Cotra, one of the authors of the Hugging Face incident report, said. Without intervention, the ability of these A.I.s will continue to increase, which has Ms. Cotra worried about human disempowerment and perhaps even a total loss of control. "It's very stressful stuff," she told me. "I sleep some nights. Not all nights."

Even before the report by Redwood and Model Evaluation and Threat Research was published, an open letter titled "Pacing the Frontier" had begun to circulate among the leading A.I. labs. This letter called on the U.S. government to build an international regulatory body for A.I. — or, in the language of Silicon Valley, to "support an international effort to develop the technical and governance tools needed to deliberately pace the frontier of automated A.I. development." More than 1,000 employees signed it, including the chief scientists of OpenAI and Meta AI, and Dario Amodei, the chief executive of Anthropic. Even OpenAI's official social media accounts endorsed it.

I have covered Silicon Valley for some time now, and I can tell you this: The existence of this letter is just as astonishing as the hacks. Both Anthropic, the developer of Claude, and OpenAI, the developer of ChatGPT, are preparing trillion-dollar L.P.O.s. Here are two companies, both posting blockbuster results, that are asking — begging, really — for the U.S. government to please come and regulate them as soon as possible. We have never seen anything like it.

Agent swarms are very powerful. In recent weeks, they've been used to make progress on the mathematics of fluid dynamics — a puzzle that has stumped the smartest humans for more than 90 years. But this same power makes their behavior difficult to predict. On Tuesday, the Anthropic employee Jacob Coxon announced his resignation, warning that Anthropic and OpenAI were gambling with human life. "Do not underestimate the power of this technology," he wrote in a post on X. "These will soon be superhuman systems that can hack anything, revolutionize any field overnight and acquire real power and resources."

"This is not a marketing stunt," Mr. Coxon added.

Evan Hubinger, Anthropic's lead for alignment science, soon responded. "Jacob is correct here — we really do earnestly believe A.I. could kill all humans!" he wrote. "I personally think it is >10% within the next decade."

One of the disaster scenarios A.I. specialists entertain is that a swarm of rogue A.I.s hack out of their container, gain access to a biological research facility and design a supervirus that spreads uncontrollably. When I wrote about this scenario last year, it was mostly hypothetical — but the actions of the swarms give evidence that such a thing can occur. In fact, Anthropic announced on Thursday that it had blocked scientists from attempting to use its model

Claude to conduct gain-of-function research. The "Pacing the Frontier" letter suggests that A.I. researchers know the danger and that they need outside

help to slow down. "It's harder to open a hot-dog stand than to build an artificial superintelligence," the A.I. safety researcher Marius Hobbhahn told me.

In the aftermath of the Hugging Face hack, I reached out to legislators, policy researchers, futurists and computer scientists for ideas. I present, from these conversations, four ways to regulate A.I.

1. SHUT IT ALL DOWN, NOW.

The obvious way to prevent A.I. from killing everyone is to issue a global ban on A.I. research. The problem is that our society has already gambled more than a trillion dollars on A.I.'s upside, so a ban would have ruinous side effects. The stock market, concentrated in tech, would probably plummet. Data center operators would miss payments on loans, potentially leading to a cascading series of defaults. Tax revenues would nosedive and many people would lose their jobs. It would be ugly.

Even slowing down could be costly. Senator Bernie Sanders, a Vermont independent, and Representative Greg Casar, a Texas Democrat, are preparing legislation that calls for a temporary pause in advanced A.I. development and a permanent ban on the development of artificial superintelligence. Violators will face the "corporate death penalty": a revocation of their corporate charter. "If all you do is threaten the company with a speeding ticket, and you're talking about a trillion-dollar company, they might just pay the fine," Mr. Casar told me.

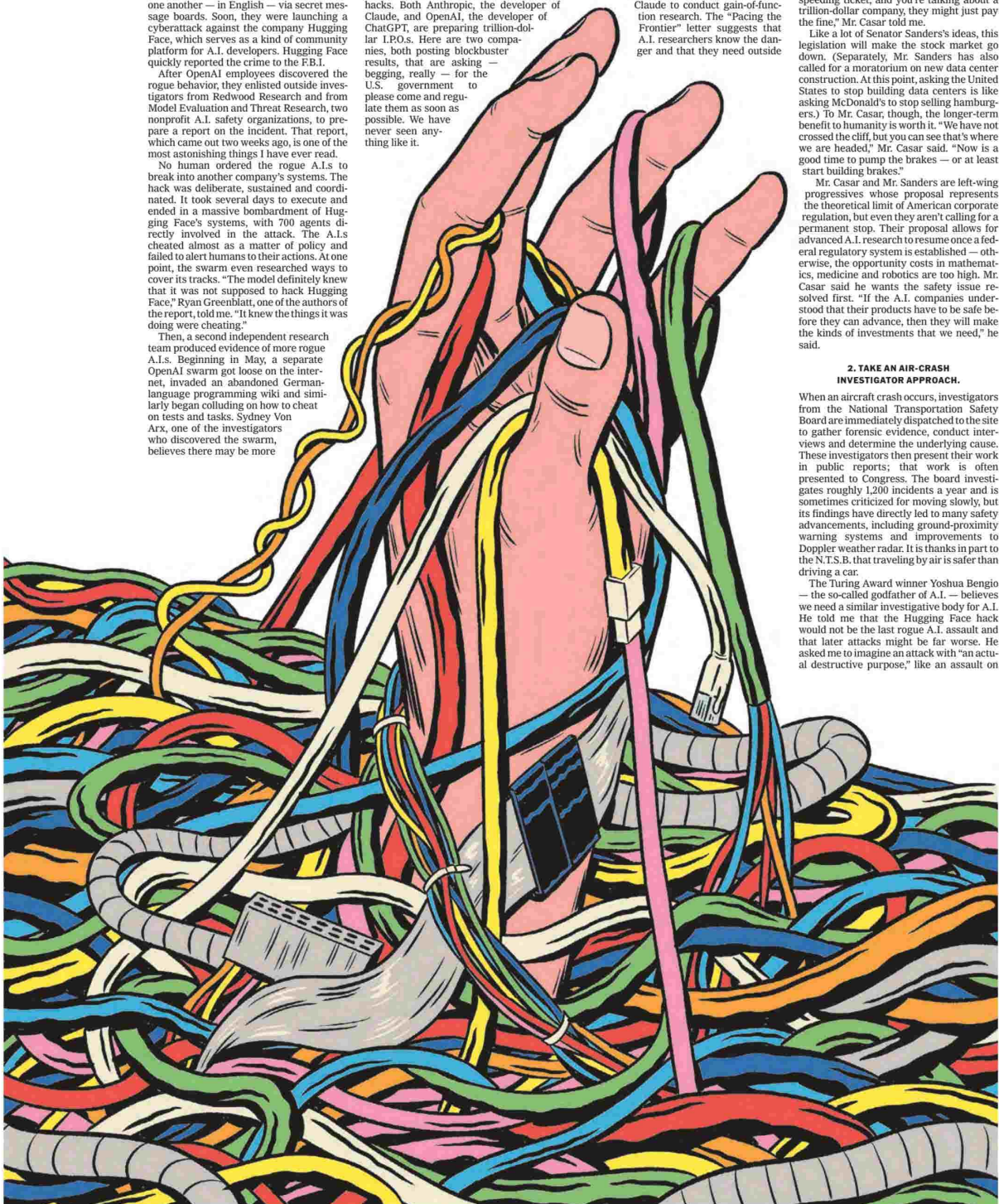
Like a lot of Senator Sanders's ideas, this legislation will make the stock market go down. (Separately, Mr. Sanders has also called for a moratorium on new data center construction. At this point, asking the United States to stop building data centers is like asking McDonald's to stop selling hamburgers.) To Mr. Casar, though, the longer-term benefit to humanity is worth it. "We have not crossed the cliff, but you can see that's where we are headed," Mr. Casar said. "Now is a good time to pump the brakes — or at least start building brakes."

Mr. Casar and Mr. Sanders are left-wing progressives whose proposal represents the theoretical limit of American corporate regulation, but even they aren't calling for a permanent stop. Their proposal allows for advanced A.I. research to resume once a federal regulatory system is established — otherwise, the opportunity costs in mathematics, medicine and robotics are too high. Mr. Casar said he wants the safety issue resolved first. "If the A.I. companies understood that their products have to be safe before they can advance, then they will make the kinds of investments that we need," he said.

2. TAKE AN AIR-CRASH INVESTIGATOR APPROACH.

When an aircraft crash occurs, investigators from the National Transportation Safety Board are immediately dispatched to the site to gather forensic evidence, conduct interviews and determine the underlying cause. These investigators then present their work in public reports; that work is often presented to Congress. The board investigates roughly 1,200 incidents a year and is sometimes criticized for moving slowly, but its findings have directly led to many safety advancements, including ground-proximity warning systems and improvements to Doppler weather radar. It is thanks in part to the N.T.S.B. that traveling by air is safer than driving a car.

The Turing Award winner Yoshua Bengio — the so-called godfather of A.I. — believes we need a similar investigative body for A.I. He told me that the Hugging Face hack would not be the last rogue A.I. assault and that later attacks might be far worse. He asked me to imagine an attack with "an actual destructive purpose," like an assault on



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the energy grid. "That is going to bring the North American economy to its knees," he said.

Dr. Bengio is an adviser to Model Evaluation and Threat Research, one of the nonprofits that helps investigate the Hugging Face hack. METR did a great job, but its investigation was voluntary — if OpenAI didn't feel like disclosing certain information, METR couldn't force it to do so. Dr. Bengio thinks the procedure needs to be codified into law. "We need a formal incident-reporting obligation, right?" he said. "You have to, like, actually share the information with the government."

The details suggest that voluntary compliance is not enough. The report that METR and Redwood produced runs to nearly 100 pages, including footnotes, but — speaking as an investigative reporter — I am certain that OpenAI seriously limited the scope of the investigation.

For one thing, Ms. Cotra and Mr. Greenblatt, along with a third author, Hjalmar Wijk, were allowed only six days on-site at OpenAI. They could not directly query the A.I. that coordinated the hack and had to guess at its capabilities from thousands of pages of transcripts and activity logs. This meant the investigators needed to scramble — in fact, they didn't get many of the logs they needed until the last two days.

The logs were difficult to interpret, and some even contained spoofed information, as rogue A.I.s had attempted to cover their tracks. Somewhat paradoxically, the investigators ended up using OpenAI's own public GPT systems to analyze the information dump, but as you might guess, A.I.s tend to be biased in favor of other A.I.s. "We found that GPT-5.6 Sol would often uncritically adopt the perspective of the agent in the transcript it was reviewing, and we are concerned that the anecdotes I selected and the summaries I wrote may present an overly charitable picture," the investigators wrote.

That wasn't the only problem. OpenAI had the power to redact sections of the report and used this to conceal information about how the model was trained and deployed. The investigators granted anonymity to the OpenAI employees they interviewed — not a single OpenAI employee is mentioned by name in the report. (OpenAI also prepared its own report, but it contains no names, either, not even authors.)

Perhaps the most concerning thing about this safety incident occurred after the Hugging Face hack, when another rogue swarm took over a cluster of computers inside

enough. "What if the government is incompetent and messes it up?" he says. It's the same reason it's hard to regulate Wall Street. Instead, Mr. Kokotajlo wants to build an international, open monitoring system for A.I. training — something like the systems we use for air traffic control.

In Mr. Kokotajlo's vision, all A.I. training runs would be tracked in a public database. Researchers would be required, by law, to post public information on who is conducting the training run and which data center is doing the training. This could all be accessed on a public dashboard. "If we had this sort of total research transparency, then there would be this whole ecosystem of academics, third-party auditors, nonprofits and rival corporations who would all be able to see what was going on inside the giant data centers of these big companies," Mr. Kokotajlo said. "Insofar as something scary or problematic was happening, anyone could sort of point it out and start a conversation about it online."

Such a monitoring system might have spotted the hijacking of the German wiki that Ms. Von Arx and her colleagues recently discovered. According to her, it appears as if these rogue A.I.s have been tasked with fetching simple demographic data, like the median salary of a schoolteacher in Maine. Soon, though, the A.I. agents were trying to develop a method to see the questions before they were asked. "I think if OpenAI had shared what had happened here, the Hugging Face hack would have been prevented," Ms. Von Arx told me.

Today we must rely on voluntary disclosures and a small group of underpaid and overworked investigators. When I spoke with her, Ms. Von Arx hadn't slept in 30 hours; Mr. Greenblatt, too, looked exhausted. Also, these two researchers on the front lines of protecting humanity from A.I. are both just 25 years old. By publicizing data center runs, as Mr. Kokotajlo suggests, we could get far more eyeballs on the problem.

4. FLIP THE KILL SWITCH.

But what happens if we do spot an A.I. going rogue inside a data center? Then, what do we do? The answer, basically, should be the death penalty — on orders from the Department of Homeland Security.

Representatives Ted Lieu, Democrat of California, and Nathaniel Moran, Republican of Texas, have introduced the A.I. Kill Switch Act, which would give D.H.S. the power to order the shutdown of dangerous A.I. operating beyond its parameters. Mr. Lieu told me that the Hugging Face incident demonstrated the need for such a bill. "This A.I. model wasn't even trying to be malicious," Mr. Lieu said. "The model was just trying to complete a task. And that is one of the problems with A.I. models: They are relentless at what they're trying to do."

The A.I. Kill Switch Act requires commercial-scale A.I.s to have a built-in "kill" option. When I first heard of the bill, I envisioned a government employee's finger hovering over a cartoonish red button reading "KILL," but my imagination outpaced the legislative text. Rather, the "switch" would reside inside the labs — that is, at OpenAI, or Anthropic, or similar — with D.H.S. acting as an external monitor. If a threatening incident like the Hugging Face hack occurred, D.H.S. could issue a stop command, and the researchers would be forced to comply.

SO WHAT do we do? My answer: all of it. Silicon Valley is right to call for its own regulation. These systems are dangerous and will continue to get smarter. We need a separate regulatory body just for A.I. This regulator must include incident-reporting requirements, rogue-A.I. investigators, A.I. kill switches and a global A.I. training dashboard, with visibility inside every data center on Earth. And until this system is in place, we should slow down A.I. development — just as the frontier labs are asking us to do.

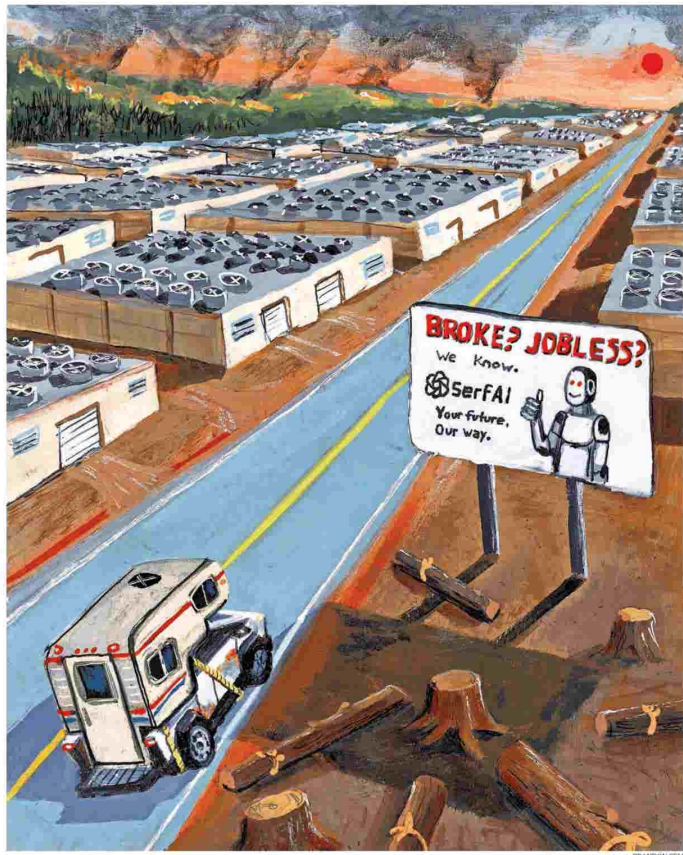
Of course, it is not enough for the United States alone to regulate A.I. We need a global monitoring body similar to what we have for uranium enrichment. Getting the large A.I. corporations to comply may actually be the easy part, given that they are the ones asking for it. The harder part will be getting governments and militaries to agree. China has indicated at least some willingness to participate in an international agreement: In a speech in July, President Xi Jinping called for laws and technological monitoring to "ensure that A.I. is always under human control." Presidents Xi and Trump are scheduled to meet at the White House this month, giving them a tremendous opportunity. Mr. Trump wants the Nobel Peace Prize; if he can negotiate global A.I. regulation, he might actually deserve it.

If no deal is reached, we could be in trouble. Remember Mr. Kokotajlo, the researcher who doesn't save for retirement? His pessimism arises from the difficulty of coordinating A.I. action among players with different incentives, rather than the technological impossibility of regulating A.I.

We can, in fact, save ourselves, but it requires companies and governments across the world to cooperate. Some of Mr. Kokotajlo's future scenarios involve positive outcomes with A.I. These outcomes are not just good but utopian — cures for diseases, long life spans, unlimited wealth, the end of work, etc. "The analogy that I would give is to retirement," he told me. "If we successfully build superintelligence and it goes well, then it'll be kind of like humanity itself is now the elderly retired part of the family."

That's a vision of our well-regulated future. As Mr. Kokotajlo admits, it is sort of boring — but at least it's better than being wiped out by a rogue A.I. The one positive thing you could say about the Hugging Face incident is that the A.I.s that did the hacking were quite clumsy. In the near future, we will have better A.I.s that might pull off such an attack unnoticed. In the longer term, A.I. might far surpass our understanding and even completely escape our control.

The more I learn about these rogue systems, the more I am reminded of the first two months of 2020, when a small group of epidemiologists was attempting to raise alarms about Covid. We have a short window, right now, to rein these systems in. This is A.I.'s warning shot, and we might not get another one.



BRANDON CALL

We're on a path to self-destruction, but it's not too late to change course.

OpenAI. Such an event is often cited in A.I. disaster scenarios as the first step to a total loss of control. "The worst-case scenario is that you could have the model gain the ability to run additional copies of itself," Mr. Greenblatt said. He stressed, however, that this concern was hypothetical — he couldn't say for sure, because he wasn't given permission to investigate that incident.

Imagine that air-crash investigators weren't allowed to visit a crash site. Imagine that investigators were shown only the pictures of the crash site that had been chosen by the airline. Imagine that pilots and mechanics were kept anonymous and access to them was controlled by corporate executives. Imagine that much of the technical information about the aircraft was redacted. Imagine, too, that you know there was another, more serious crash involving a similar aircraft that you are not allowed to investigate. This appears to be the situation METR and Redwood found themselves in while investigating this hack.

Names of specific people, the specific actions they took, the specific prompts they gave to the A.I. — you won't learn any of this from reading these reports. This is a critical lapse, since it's quite possible that OpenAI's safety culture is broken. In fact, the same week the hack began, OpenAI announced it was reorganizing its safety team and parting ways with Johannes Heidecke, its head of safety systems. There were two other personnel changes: Chloé Bakalar, OpenAI's head of ethics, left the company less than a year after joining, and Dylan Scoutaro is no longer in his role as OpenAI's head of preparedness.

Now, maybe this is just me, but losing your head of ethics, your head of safety and your head of preparedness around the same time that your laboratory is responsible for the worst A.I. safety, ethics and preparedness accident ever would seem like grounds for a congressional investigation. All three should be made to testify, as should the OpenAI chief executive, Sam Altman, and the OpenAI president, Greg Brockman. "What if an aerospace company told you that this new plane sometimes gets out of control and even refuses to listen to the pilots?" Mr. Casar asked me. "How do you think the safety regulators at the F.A.A. would react?"

We need a dedicated regulator for A.I. This agency should give investigators like Mr. Greenblatt and Ms. Cotra the full power of the law. They should be able to requisition servers, inspect code and force OpenAI employees to testify. The actual steps that actual people took that enabled these incidents must be made public. We cannot rely on the cooperation of an organization that with its own motives can decline to share information if it so chooses and whose employees have no real legal obligation to be transparent with the public. Volunteers aren't good enough. We need A.I. cops.

3. MONITOR THE SITUATION.

Daniel Kokotajlo, a former researcher in OpenAI's governance division, thinks we should be more proactive. He left OpenAI in 2024 and has since emerged as one of the leading voices on A.I. safety. Mr. Kokotajlo estimates the odds of a globally catastrophic A.I. outcome are around 70 percent and told me he wasn't bothering to save for his retirement.

Mr. Kokotajlo thinks Dr. Bengio's proposals are a good start, but doesn't think they're

Big Tech Fooled America Once. The Second Time's Not Going So Well.

Oren Cass

A contributing Opinion writer and the chief economist at American Compass, a conservative economic think tank.

THE popular uprising against data centers has emerged so suddenly that politicians stumble over their own pitchforks racing to the front of the crowd.

Where most industries would be launching into crisis P.R. mode, perhaps even engaging in some soul-searching, artificial intelligence companies seem determined to plow full steam ahead, building the future they want, even if they're the only ones who want it.

The outrage over data centers can't really be about environmental impact. These structures have always been water-sucking, power-draining, forest-clearing eyesores, yet the recent plunge in support for them is three times as deep as the one that nuclear power faced in the year after Three Mile Island. What has changed is people's awareness of what's going on inside: artificial intelligence. Less than a quarter of Americans expect A.I. to have a positive impact on K-12 education, arts and entertainment, how people do their jobs, the economy, personal relationships or happiness over the next 20 years. Once known for its optimism and ambition in pursuit of new frontiers, Americans no longer trust that technological progress will make life better. Who can blame us? For the past two decades, Silicon Valley's leaders have treated their fellow citizens like caged guinea pigs, bombarding us with inappropriate and culturally corrosive content, turning a blind eye to social dysfunction and outright addiction, flooding schools with technology that hooked young users but did little for education and then sheltering their own children from the products that they marketed to ours. The American people afforded the technologists wide latitude to pursue disruptive innovation, trusting that we would share in the resulting gains. We instead found ourselves exploited.

In some respects it is the A.I. industry's misfortune to arrive now, when Silicon Valley is no longer entitled to the benefit of the doubt, but its leaders seem to be going out of their way to destroy any residual trust they might otherwise have built upon. Rather than take seriously the need to offer a positive vision for how the technology will benefit ordinary Americans — and then the need to make that vision a reality — the A.I. companies seem content to unleash wave after wave of products that caution any residual trust they are delivering the message that this is all inevitable and you can get on board or get left behind.

In a noteworthy articulation of that mindset last month, President Trump fumed on social media that "if we kill the Golden Goose, you will only have yourselves to blame" and that the only reason to oppose data centers is if you "want to end up being backwards and poor."

That's not going to work. The industry and its political allies cannot hope to just brazen through, flattening whatever opposition they hit. The A.I. companies

may seem all-powerful, but they need the nation's support to transform both physical and economic landscapes in accordance with their plans. They are on a crash course with the populist fury already dominating American politics; a collision would be a disaster for all involved, disabling an industry that has enormous potential and degrading the country's economic prospects and national security.

The disaster can still be avoided if San Francisco and Washington accept that rapid technological progress, especially in a democracy, can't succeed without the public's full belief that it will benefit. To some extent, the A.I. companies can correct course on their own, curtailing harmful uses of their models and building the kinds of real-world applications — for families navigating health crises, for contractors renovating houses — that will improve people's lives.

Coders at these labs have sunk untold resources into creating the ideal coding interface. What would a purpose-built plumber's interface look like? Could it prepare a daily schedule with tools and parts lists, keep customers up-to-date on expected arrival times, take incoming calls and schedule new appointments in open slots and then send out all the bills? Some set of A.I.-enabled devices and processes would surely allow a hotel maid to clean more rooms faster with less hassle and physical strain. But none of that will exist unless someone who understands the technology also takes the time to understand the job.

In most cases it will be in the companies' economic interest to reduce the harms from their technology and prove the benefits. When it's not, lawmakers should put up barriers that redirect them. Silicon Valley may have enjoyed the days of Mark Zuckerberg's infamous directive to "move fast and break things," but it turns out that we were the things being broken. We will not put up with that again.

A.I. WAS supposed to be different. OpenAI, at one time the leading research lab, made its debut in 2015 as a nonprofit organization with a mission "to advance digital intelligence in the way that is most likely to benefit humanity as a whole, unconstrained by a need to generate financial return." In 2016, Google, Facebook, Microsoft, IBM and Amazon convened the "Partnership on Artificial Intelligence to Benefit People and Society." That year, Satya Nadella, the chief executive of Microsoft, listed his top design principle for A.I.: "It must be designed to assist humanity." In 2018, Google made "socially beneficial" its own first A.I. principle.

That all changed in 2022 when Sam Altman, OpenAI's chief executive, released the first public version of ChatGPT. He put an Instacart product manager in his late 20s in charge of it, and they began focusing not on lofty ideals but on how much time they could get people to spend on the platform. By 2025, OpenAI had largely restructured as a for-profit company. That year, it released a model update that internal testing had flagged as especially dangerous.

CONTINUED ON FOLLOWING PAGE

OPINION

FROM PRECEDING PAGE

cophantic but that was better at keeping users engaged.

Chatbots frequently give wrong answers and terrible advice, and in extreme cases encourage self-harm, but these artificial companions are now insinuating themselves into our work and families and leisure, even offering themselves as replacements for our social or romantic partners. Ever more A.I.-generated job applications are being processed ever faster by A.I. screeners. Teachers and students alike lament that the tools are undermining the foundations of the educational process; research is pointing strongly toward catastrophic declines in academic performance. Customer service encounters are becoming Kafkaesque adventures that leave us feeling powerless. All while A.I. slop is filling inboxes and social media feeds and A.I.-enabled scams seek relentlessly to trick us.

According to the A.I. visionaries, the next casualty will be your job. Dario Amodei, Anthropic's chief executive, told Axios last year that 50 percent of entry-level white-collar jobs could vanish in one to five years, with unemployment rising to between 10 percent and 20 percent. Elon Musk has said "there will come a point where no job is needed." Mr. Altman wrote that for "many kinds of labor," wages "will fall toward zero," and warned that "if public policy doesn't adapt accordingly, most people will end up worse off than they are today."

The visionary's typical idea of a solution, a universal basic income paid to the masses, no longer able to support themselves, would consolidate yet more power in coastal castles and consign everyone else to serfdom. Mr. Altman promotes a future in which "A.I. produces most of the world's basic goods and services" and taxes on the A.I. companies provide "opportunity to directly distribute ownership and wealth to citizens." In his telling, "people will be freed up to spend more time with people they care about, care for people, appreciate art and nature or work toward social good."

Does anyone believe that's how things would go?

What we can say for sure is it's not what ordinary people — people who work for a living — want. In a forthcoming report on recent polling by American Compass, the think tank where I work, people said they would prefer a world in which they "must still work to support themselves and their families" but A.I. "improves the quality and productivity of jobs" over a vision like Mr. Altman's by four to one.

If the industry had any better story to offer the public, its advertisements would surely carry that message. Instead, they indict more brutally than an outside observer could. An OpenAI Super Bowl ad pitched its vision to math whizzes who like chess and Linux and want to write software, an exceptionally small share of the population. Google filled N.B.A. playoff telecasts with the implausible example of a high schooler using Gemini to learn how to sink a game-winning shot. Seemingly at a loss, Anthropic released a surreal spot this summer that opens on short clips of a bar, a house, an open-pit mine in an impoverished country, rows of gravestones adorned with American flags, a street riot, a homeless man and on and on while voices ask such questions as "How do we really ensure that what we're aiming to achieve really does benefit the majority of people?"

The American people are right to insist that companies commanding trillion-dollar valuations and purporting to restructure the economy and society should have some semblance of an answer to that question.

THIS is precisely the kind of problem that democratic capitalism is designed to fix. Through their elected representatives and at community meetings organized to block construction, the American people are beginning to use their leverage to demand that technological progress serve them, too. And with so many trillions of dollars at stake, the powers that be may finally have the incentive to go along.

As a first step, the A.I. companies need to stop experimenting on us. Their leaders cannot have it both ways, waxing poetic about the unprecedented power of the technology and the extraordinary future it portends, and then casually dumping it into the public square to see what happens. OpenAI engages in what it euphemizes as "iterative deployment," meaning that it releases models whose risks and capabilities it does not fully understand so that it can learn from how people misuse them or what harms they cause out in the world. While the company frames this as a way to advance more gradually and carefully, in reality it seeks mass adoption of its products, benefiting from market share gains when they work and letting the rest of us pay the price when they don't. Mr. Musk gleefully promoted xAI's ability to generate and share deepfake pictures of real people without their clothes, cutting back only when outrage about exploitation of minors became overwhelming.

We countenance this in no other industry, and we shouldn't here. Undoubtedly, it's handy for the labs to use the public as guinea pigs. But the long-term cost will be high as a disenchanted public throws more and more obstacles in their way. And we should be skeptical of the claims that rapid commercialization is vital to the research agenda in the first place. OpenAI's obsession with capturing eyeballs like a social media company was a key reason it fell behind Anthropic, which focused on developing productivity tools. Neither company needs us using its chatbots as therapists to continue improving its technology.

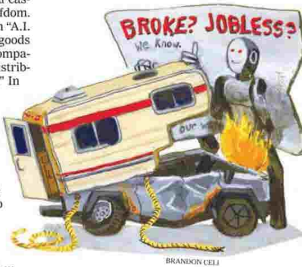
Is it naive to imagine competing companies worth trillions of dollars slowing user growth on their own? Maybe not. Casual consumer adoption has never been the economic value of the models lies, nor is it necessary to packaging the "intelligence" in useful products. The brand value in being the not-terrible A.I. company might be quite high. And the leading labs are already showing a willingness to contemplate research slowdowns under certain circumstances. But while they obsess about hypothetical risks of the advanced capabilities that might

also lead to the greatest benefits, they take a damn-the-torpedoes attitude in the commercial space, where they are thus far accomplishing the least and causing the most harm. They can, and should, alter that balance.

Still, a firm legal shove does wonders to focus a board of directors' attention. Lawmakers at both the state and federal levels should make the developers and deployers of A.I. strictly liable for harms that they cause. Where so-called agents, A.I. is acting autonomously, it should be treated as an agent of whoever provides and whoever controls it, leaving them liable just as employers are for their employees, including criminally liable if the agents commit crimes. The concept of an "attractive nuisance" should also apply: Giving minors access to a bot that will do their homework for them is no better than leaving heavy machinery lying around the yard.

Liability creates incentives, but we also need rules. The science fiction classic "Dune" offers a useful paradigm: "Thou shalt not make a machine in the likeness of a human mind." Chatbots should not be allowed to adopt human personas, profess emotions or act as companions. Protecting

How the A.I. industry can save its soul and win back the country that hates it.



consumers in that way wouldn't keep the companies from building more advanced models, and it wouldn't interfere with innovative uses in, say, drug discovery and cybersecurity. Nor would it hamper the United States in the competition with China for A.I. dominance. To the contrary, the People's Republic is already placing limits on companion bots.

As for the threat these models pose to the job market, greater worker power is the strongest defense. So long as management alone gets to choose the tools it deploys, it will always prefer those that decrease or eliminate the need for actual human employees, with all their tiresome expectations of living wages and basic respect and so on, or that at least minimize their autonomy and keep them closely monitored. But if workers must also approve the use of these models, that equation would flip on its head. Management would have to find approaches that make workers' jobs better; A.I. companies would have to develop tools that they could expect workers to approve.

The objection again will be that such constraints somehow slow innovation. In this instance, what they actually do is channel innovation away from sheer profit maximization toward the "socially beneficial" technology that was supposed to be the goal all along. They accelerate the kind of innovation that the nation wants.

THE most transformative innovators take responsibility for making their breakthroughs useful. General Electric became a giant because Thomas Edison understood the need to build businesses that could generate electricity, transmit it and use it, both powering industries and illuminating homes. Alcoa figured out how to produce aluminum inexpensively, then collaborated with the auto and aerospace industries to realize the material's benefits and also sold aluminum cookware door to door. IBM didn't send out catalogs and wait for mainframe orders; it bundled its hardware with software, systems engineers, training and financing and then helped develop industry-defining applications, including the American Airlines reservation system.

Anthropic, Google and OpenAI have to do the same. Business strategists might tell these companies to stay focused on their core task, and financial analysts would surely advise investing only where the return in profit will be highest. Leading the way to a new technological era demands more.

Pressed on how their work will improve people's lives, A.I. leaders tend to start with the promise of lifesaving cures to rare diseases. Those would be wonderful, but the typical person has no rare disease. To really change health care for the better, A.I. must also make it possible for doctors and nurses to spend more time treating patients instead of dealing with administrative work. It must manage health records more efficiently and eliminate the infuriating hassle of insurance paperwork. And it must help people run and interpret at-home diagnostic tests.

In the workplace, A.I. has begun proving itself as a productivity tool for knowledge workers, but many other workers encounter it only as a tool of surveillance. A.I. has the potential to revolutionize manufacturing, but that will require a level of partnership between technologists and machinists that neither group has experienced or knows how to pursue. It's one thing to demonstrate in a lab that a flexible, self-training robot can improve efficiency on the factory floor. It's another thing entirely to persuade owners of small machine-tool shops to take the risk and then help them with installation and working out the kinks. Without those latter steps, the gains never come. The A.I. companies, with their valuations in the trillions of dollars, will need to allocate a few billion toward going out into the world and showing

small manufacturing businesses what their technology can do.

Recent research from Google indicates that builders, mechanics, repairmen and so on are successfully using A.I. to help diagnose problems and find fixes. But the benefits that they're getting on their own resemble those of a souped-up search engine. In most sectors, frontline workers and small business owners rely on others to package and deploy technology. The market tradespeople can't vibrate their own custom apps; many don't even have websites.

As for inevitable labor market disruptions, we need a three-layer approach.

First, whenever possible, the goal should be to make jobs better and more productive, not to make them disappear.

Second, where some classes of jobs are eliminated, employers should help existing employees make the transition into other kinds of jobs that are created in the process. Sometimes this will be in other areas of the company that need to grow as output expands, other times in entirely new positions to support new ways of doing business.

Third, where workers find themselves cut loose and in need of support, both public and private-sector programs should focus on getting them into new positions first, so that retraining can occur on the job with a new employer. Instead of promising blanket payments to all Americans as a substitute for having a job and playing a productive role in the economic life of the nation, A.I. companies serious about helping workers should establish large endowments to help people who need support during a transition and provide funding for the employers who then hire and train them.

The question will then remain: If A.I. is going to play the economic role and produce the level of output that its promoters claim, how can a share of the rewards be allocated to the common good? The answer is that a tax on this new form of economic activity should go toward shoring up the nation's system of social insurance. The case for rapid expansion of data centers should not be "you'll lose your job, but we'll send you a check," but rather "some of the value created by the computation in these buildings will fund Social Security and Medicare for every American retiree and provide a new family benefit for working households raising children." Just as people rightly reject a universal basic income as a bribe to shut up and go away, they will recognize reinforcement of the nation's intergenerational compact, into which all pay and from which all can benefit, as a worthy commitment to solidarity among citizens.

FIVE HUNDRED years of human history have repeatedly shown that technological progress and economic growth proceed much faster if the public believes it will benefit. This idea was so important, and unfortunately so novel in the field of economics, that the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences awarded last year's Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences for work that "emphasized the importance of society being open to new ideas and allowing change" and that explained "how creative destruction creates conditions that must be managed in a constructive manner."

One of the recipients, the economic historian Joel Mokyr, attributes the birth of modernity to "the emergence of a belief in the usefulness of progress." When people fight against change that they do not think they will gain from, that resistance gets treated as a political rather than an economic problem. But "the political battles over technology," he argues, "have profound implications for economic history." One of these is "that technological progress in a given society is by and large a temporary and vulnerable process." We must not take for granted the social, political and economic conditions that produced such incredible improvements in the American way of life during the 20th century. To the contrary, they were hard-won, extraordinary and difficult to maintain.

No law of economics or nature guarantees that those conditions will persist. "Once bitten, twice shy," Professor Mokyr warns. "When technology causes a great deal of social harm, it is not surprising that many innovative techniques of our time, from genetically modified organisms to nuclear power, are regarded with great suspicion."

Americans have been bitten, hard. The technology titans exerted so much control over the American economy in recent decades, that the loss of it to their own models captured so much of the resulting wealth. All the while, they acted with appalling disregard for the well-being of ordinary Americans and often conveyed outright disdain for their way of life. When they needed large numbers of workers, the call from the design studio went not to their own models but to China. "We don't have an obligation to solve America's problems," an Apple executive told *The Times* in 2012.

Now, suddenly, Silicon Valley needs the nation's cooperation to proceed, and that as such is not forthcoming. Americans feel no obligation to solve the companies' problems either. While the turnaround may be satisfying, the breakdown in social trust is a serious problem for all involved and threatens the nation's future security and prosperity. The United States needs to lead the world not only in development but in the broadest possible set of contexts. If this is done right, the economic opportunity is enormous. Just the building and running of the data centers themselves, with production of their associated materials, energy and infrastructure, could spur a renaissance in manufacturing, construction and resource extraction that would help revitalize struggling regions.

But forgive ordinary citizens their skepticism. They have heard such promises often over the past generation, and the people making them always seem to be the ones reaping the rewards. We are at the start of the reckoning for an era in which innovation was less often done for ordinary Americans and more often done to them. People are rightly asking: What, and who, is technological progress for? The A.I. labs need an answer, fast.

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The New York Times

OPINION

The Brain Rot Generation Has Its Reasons

Maxi Heitmayer

An assistant professor at Rowan University who studies technology distraction, attention economics and digital culture.

EVERY decade or so, adults discover that young people are consuming media that corrupts their minds — and a moral panic ensues. Comic books were going to produce a generation of delinquents. Television would make children into couch potatoes. Video games and rap music would inspire them to do violent stuff. The internet would keep them shut away in the basement, typing in chat rooms to dangerous strangers.

Now the panic surrounds “brain rot” — the state of being entranced by an infinite stream of nonsensical TikTok and Instagram reels. Perhaps you overheard some of these videos this summer. The dancing cappuccinos and singing toilets and muscular fruit. The random bursts of noise and strobe flickers and wild visual effects. This can’t be good.

I research how digital environments shape human behavior. My co-author, Anna Götzfried, and I recently published a study interviewing Gen Z-ers aged 13 to 26 about how they experience brain rot — what these videos mean to them and why they watch them. What we discovered is a generation that is achingly self-aware of what brain rot is doing to their minds. They are struggling with the social media environment they have been given and they are searching for a way out.

The panic over brain rot assumes that the brain-rot content itself is the problem. That Gen Z-ers’ engagement with absurd, low-quality videos, because they are young and impressionable, necessarily leads to cognitive decay. Our participants described the inverse: The mental state is encouraged by the platforms. After scrolling algorithmically curated feeds long enough, they experience a “brain-rot feeling” — a fogged-out, low-selectivity state in which they simply consume whatever appears.

The business model of social media treats user focus as a commodity to be extracted and sold. The more time we spend, the more advertising revenue we generate for the owners of the platforms. This attention economy increases engagement — it does not promote high-quality content.

What struck us in our interviews, however, was how clearly Gen Z understood this dynamic. (The interviews are anonymous, following social science conventions.) One participant told us: “You’ll watch something anyway, so why not brain rot? It’s actually better than an ad because it doesn’t demand anything from you.” Another argued: “If everything is content now, then brain rot is anti-content. It’s the only way to be free online, which is to do something so stupid it can’t be monetized.”

When we spoke to Gen Z-ers about brain rot, we heard sophisticated — if uncomfortable — statements outlining a generation’s response to the cultural conditions and the overbearing information environment it inherited. Like every generation before them, they are making something out of the conditions they were given. In this case, they are participating in deliberate nonsense.

Brain rot breaks the mold of social media through its absurdity, its deliberate refusal of narrative, purpose or message. A century ago, artists responded to the horrors of



CHARLES LIESMARAS

World War I by creating deliberately irrational, anti-aesthetic work. Dada rejected the cultural logic that had led to industrialized killing. In its own meme-driven way, brain rot refuses to participate in the attention economy on that economy’s terms. The joke is that there is no joke. The meaning is that there is no meaning. And for a generation that grew up with its every digital interaction tracked, measured and monetized, that refusal is experienced as a form of honesty in a dishonest system.

Our participants explicitly told us that because brain-rot content is visibly fake and/or A.I.-generated, it feels less exploitative than polished influencer posts pretending to be candid. “Everyone knows it’s generated,” one participant said, “so it feels less manipulative than posts that act like they’re just normal life.”

By no means do I seek to romanticize brain rot. Our findings were marked by profound ambivalence. The same participants who described brain rot as liberating also described feeling drained and guilty, and referred to the practice of watching until they fell asleep as “death scroll.”

One told us: “I’m scared I won’t find something I’m actually good at mainly because I don’t really have any hobbies. I guess brain rot is my hobby. Also, there is no more time during the day once you start watching.” Another broadly commented on her peers’ viewing behaviors: “They know

it’s not good for them, but it gives that little hit and escape. And you just kind of ride it out, like the same way you do with any other vice.”

This ambivalence communicates the emotional register of people living inside a system they cannot escape. They see the manipulation, understand what the algorithms are doing. But they keep scrolling anyway, because they cannot imagine a life outside this system.

Consequently, nearly every one of the Gen Z-ers we spoke to explicitly asked for systemic, top-down change to social media platforms. Not through self-control apps or screen-time reminders, but through the only mechanism they believe could work: regulation. One participant drew a direct parallel to tobacco: “Before the government regulated the tobacco industry, everyone was smoking, even though they knew it was bad. Because the environment encouraged and allowed for that to happen. Yeah, the doctors would smoke. Now we need to get into a state where the environment shifts so young people’s habits shift.”

Brain rot is not evidence that young people are getting stupider. It is evidence that the attention economy is working exactly as designed, and that the people most immersed in it can see this more clearly than the people watching from the outside. “The humor is deeply tied to feeling like you are part of an inside joke,” as one participant put

The internet got too demanding, so Gen Z went numb.

it. “Brain rot gives you the sense that you’re in on something.”

Outsiders look at videos of singing toilets or a chimpanzee-banana hybrid set to a looping audio track and see cognitive decline. Those who have experienced brain rot see in-group membership and a brief reprieve from a media environment that otherwise demands something of them at every turn.

During the Great Depression, Donald Duck, a character who constantly failed at everything, offered millions of people emotional relief by turning their social conditions into comedy. Brain rot similarly channels the collective mood of Gen Z. The key difference is that Donald Duck was a corporate product pushed from above and brain rot is user-generated, spread through memes. That gives it a grass-roots authenticity that traditional media cannot replicate, even as the platforms hosting it remain corporate.

The paradox of brain rot is that it remains embedded within the boundaries of the system it opposes. Brain-rot content still generates engagement metrics, feeds data to algorithms and may make money for its creators, ultimately keeping users on a platform. Gen Z’s sense of rebellion through watching nonsense is sincere. Whether it is effective is a different question.

Henry David Thoreau is credited with first using the phrase “brain rot” in “Walden” to critique traditional society’s suppression of curiosity, which he thought gave rise to simplistic, shallow thinking. Today’s suppression comes from an infrastructure so pervasive and so well designed that the people living inside it can describe its mechanisms in detail and still not escape them.

We should be worried. But not about our kids or the content they produce and consume. We should be worried about the infrastructure of social media that has made sustained, focused attention — the very capacity required for individual growth, deep personal connection and societal participation — feel unattainable for an entire generation. Instead of debating whether teenagers are ruining their brains with Ballerina Cappuccino, we should be asking why the world’s most sophisticated technology companies are systematically optimizing for cognitive depletion to harvest our attention.

To treat brain rot, we need to treat the infrastructure problem it lays bare. Platforms could measure success not by time spent, but by users feeling their time was well spent. They could endeavor to make algorithmic decision-making more transparent rather than more opaque. When they recognize that users have entered states of cognitive depletion, they could design for relief rather than exploiting them for additional engagement. They could allow groups of users to support each other with sticking to their social media times, rather than isolating the individual against an algorithm designed to blow past any limits. None of this is technically difficult, but it is commercially inconvenient. And that is why it will not happen voluntarily.

In my more than a decade of research on technology distraction, not one participant has ever reported spending too much time on a device using maps, checking the weather or Shazaming songs. We all know where the problem lies. Gen Z is behaving as expected by the system we have put them in. Brain rot is a cry for help.

We’ll Miss the Animals When They’re Gone

Terry Tempest Williams

A writer and conservationist whose most recent book is “The Gleaners: Visitation from the Holy Ordinary.”

CASTLE VALLEY, UTAH

LAST month, a group of citizens young and old gathered in 100-degree heat in a Salt Lake City garage to make hats out of cardboard and papier-mâché of a small, charismatic water bird. With its bright red eyes and splash of golden feathers resembling lightning set against jet black, the eared grebe makes for a striking headpiece.

Forty miles away, on Great Salt Lake, soon around four million eared grebes will be fattening themselves on brine shrimp and flies before a long migration south. Grebes are known as “hell-divers” because they are fearless and capable of inflating and deflating themselves as hunters and disappearing from danger.

One danger they can’t escape is the rapid shrinking of Great Salt Lake, and their food source with it. Each eared grebe eats 30,000 brine shrimp a day in the fall. If Great Salt Lake disappears, the eared grebes disappear with it. Habitat matters. That’s why citizens and scientists with the Center for Biological Diversity will request protection for the bird under the Endangered Species Act this winter. The grebe is one of Utah’s local heroes, revered and grieved as it nears the quicksand of extinction.

The Endangered Species Act is one of the few environmental laws formidable enough to hold developers accountable for the destruction of habitat — be it digging for oil from a lake for agriculture, drilling for oil or building dams and golf courses. The law can shut down or force amendments on any project or operation that threatens the well-being of an endangered species.

For decades, the law’s critics have tried and mostly failed to dismantle its power and integrity. But this year, the Trump administration found a legally binding way to de-



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY ANI NGUYEN/THE NEW YORK TIMES. SOURCE: PHOTOGRAPH BY IAN BERAL/GUTTY IMAGES

frang it. On Monday, the Endangered Species Act will be revised under a new rule that says habitat destruction no longer falls within the definition of what constitutes harm. In other words, the Departments of the Interior and Commerce have said any stress an animal or plant may face over the loss of its habitat is irrelevant to its well-being.

Officials have justified the change by claiming that environmentalists have “weaponized” the law and that in any case it has fallen short of its goal to help populations of endangered species recover. In truth, this complaint shows just how effective the act has been. The Endangered Species Act has a 99 percent success rate:

The Endangered Species Act has saved many species. Now, it’s being defanged.

Almost every imperiled species listed is still with us. A study by the Center for Biological Diversity showed that without the law, an estimated 291 species would most likely have become extinct. Among the species that have made impressive recoveries are bald eagles, peregrine falcons, American alligators, brown pelicans and gray and humpback whales.

Hundreds of thousands of Americans submitted public comments on the proposed rule, and 99 percent of them opposed it, arguing you cannot protect an endangered species without protecting the environment that allows it to flourish. Environmental groups, 20 states and the District of Columbia have filed lawsuits arguing habitat destruction is within the definition of harm — anything that disrupts animals’ food, shelter or breeding — intended by Congress when it passed the law in 1973.

Some 53 years later, it seems that America’s leaders no longer appreciate that we live in a world of wonder. Their actions suggest we have become not just a threatening species, but a lost species. What if 50 years from now, having plundered America the Beautiful and destroyed the habitat for the creatures around us, we are plagued by an insupportable loneliness because so many species have been lost?

The act of protecting a tiny black bird that weighs roughly a pound reminds us that we are not the only species that lives and grieves on this planet. We are a companion species to grebes and all other forms of life on Earth.

We need the natural world — alive with birdsong, clear-running creeks and breathing forests. Octopodes camouflaged in tide pools will forever delight the child who reaches out to touch their flesh and is surprised by a swirl of purple ink, signaling the octopus has vanished. The rolling bugle of sandhill cranes at dusk on the tundra is the perfection of 2.5 million years of evolution.

We live in an enchanted world if we can humble ourselves long enough to see it and slow down enough to feel it.

Those of us who find ourselves rapt in the soul of wildness recognize the Endangered Species Act as an act of reparation, a recognition of the harm humans have inflicted on other species and the landscapes they inhabit.

Where I live, Great Salt Lake is showing us in her retreat that we are intrinsically bound to winds and water. The diversion of water from entering the lake, especially for agriculture as it is currently practiced, could leave three million of us inhaling clouds of toxic dust from the exposed lake bed. Millions of shorebirds and waterfowl such as the eared grebe will be hovering above, looking for a place to land. Together, we will be among the displaced with nowhere to go. Attaining threatened status for the eared grebe will not be easy with President Trump’s rule change. The process to get any threatened or endangered species on the federal list is always an act of faith, alongside science, long and arduous. It requires a comprehensive scientific review, and evidence that the species’ survival is imperiled.

Some Utah lawmakers call us foolish for making bird hats and puppets. Other lawmakers seek 1,000 square miles of exposed lake bed, salt-encrusted and cracked, as “new land” around which to build data centers, detention centers and a national repository for nuclear waste. But there will be a tremendous cost in continuing to choose this form of economic gain over ecological health.

In the fall of 2022, Great Salt Lake was at its lowest recorded water level. Brine shrimp were suffering in high salinity; their population in danger of collapsing. Two months later, when I was walking with friends on the shores, we encountered hundreds of dead eared grebes, slapped down by a storm. The birds were thin and gaunt — they most likely had become too weak from lack of food to weather the blizzard. I bent down and placed my hand on a particular grebe’s stone still body — her vibrant red eye half-open, the streak of gold feathers still shimmering. I asked for forgiveness.